

# PATRICK LAWRENCE: Why the Dust Won't Settle After Mueller's Report

It won't be "full and thorough" and Democrats will continue to look for political payoff from Russia-gate, writes Patrick Lawrence.

By **Patrick Lawrence**

*Special to Consortium News*



Last week gave us mounting indications that Robert Mueller has finished his two-year probe into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 elections and is about to issue his long-awaited report.

But those who hope to read the results of the "full and thorough investigation" promised when Mueller was appointed special counsel should adjust their expectations. After spending upward of \$12 million, Mueller is almost certain to hand Attorney General William Barr a light-on-evidence document that dodges many more questions than it resolves. Neither is it clear whether the AG will make all, part, or none of the Mueller report public.

There are two certainties we can rely upon as we await Mueller's final word, none a cause for relief.

- The special counsel's office did not undertake a credible investigation of the two core charges related to the 2016 elections—that Russian intelligence hacked Democratic National Committee email servers while colluding with Donald Trump as he sought the presidency. Mueller failed to call numerous key witnesses, and

failed to pursue alternative theories, a duty of any investigator in Mueller's position. These omissions are more or less fatal to the legitimacy of Mueller's work.

- Among the mainstream Democrats who have incessantly hyped the "Russia-wrecked-our-elections" story, there is no remorse for the damage it has done to our governing institutions, our foreign policy, and our national security. Russia-gate has consolidated Cold War II. The chance to rebuild mutually beneficial relations with Moscow has been damaged.

### **Sequence of Events**

There is a sequence of events leading up to the completed Mueller report that is important to follow. Earlier this month the House Judiciary Committee announced that it has requested documents from 81—yes, 81—government agencies, entities such as *Wikileaks*, and (mostly) individuals. These last include the president's two sons, Eric and Donald Trump Jr.; Jared Kushner, his son-in-law; Allen Weisselberg, the Trump Organization's chief financial officer; former AG Jeff Sessions, and former White House Counsel Douglas McGahn.

The committee purports to be looking for obstructions of justice, collusion with Russia, and other possible transgressions—this after Mueller spent two years investigating the same things. It is not hard to read this for what it is: the first indication that the Democrat-controlled House wants enough grist to keep the post-Mueller Russia-gate mill running for its political advantage.

"Russia-gate," in short, is not about to pass into history. It looks now as if this political spectacle will be

sustained as long as President Trump remains in office.

Numerous other signs that Mueller is folding his tent have followed. Various members of his investigative team have either left or will do so soon. Last week Mueller relieved Michael Flynn, once and briefly Trump's national security adviser, of further questioning. A federal judge then gave Paul Manafort, Trump's one-time campaign manager, his final sentence: He gets seven and a half years in prison on financial fraud charges. This now looks like the biggest fish Mueller has caught—and never mind that Manafort's crimes had nothing to do with either the Trump campaign or allegations of Russian interference.

Last Thursday the House voted 420–0 (with four abstentions) to back a resolution calling for Justice to make the full Mueller report public once it goes to Barr's office. “Mission accomplished” is the only way to read all this. Now what?

It is not yet clear what Justice will do with Mueller's report. In the Republican-controlled Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is not saying whether he will back a make-it-public vote. He blocked a bipartisan resolution similar to the House's earlier this year. Barr is obliged only to show some of what is in the Mueller report to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees.

For his part, Trump has been all over the place as to what Barr should do. Last Friday he insisted Mueller “should never have been appointed and there should be no Mueller report.” A day later the president claimed he told House Republicans to back the make-it-public resolution, as they

did. "Makes us all look good and it doesn't matter," the president said in a Twitter message Saturday.

The Mueller report is in for endless spin no matter what is in it. In a weekend opinion item carried in *The Guardian*, the usually sensible Robert Reich, a former U.S. Labor secretary, suggested the impending report leaves the president trapped and desperate. "So what does a cornered president do?" Reich asked. "For starters, he raises the specter of violence against his political opponents."

Setting aside such paranoiac hyperbole, Trump's second thought—publish it all—is the wiser. It is next to impossible that Mueller found hard evidence to support either of the two primary allegations that have driven the special counsel's investigations.

First and very conspicuously, Mueller's investigators never consulted those who could have shed light on these assertions. These include Julian Assange, the *WikiLeaks* founder; Christopher Steele, who wrote the now-infamous dossier purporting to establish evidence of Russian collusion, and prominent technical and forensic scientists who have done extensive work on the digital trail left by those responsible for the theft of email from Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman and the Democratic National Committee.

Second and yet more persuasively, the just-noted technical and forensic experts have demonstrated that the mail operations in mid-2016 were not hacks — by Russians or anyone else — but leaks executed by someone with access to the Podesta and DNC emails who used a storage device such as

a memory key. Mueller's office has never examined this work in pursuit of alternative evidence in the email case. There is no legitimate justification for this dereliction.

Last week **Consortium News** published the latest report from Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which does its own forensic work while also coordinating with various independent forensic investigators. There are now three layers of evidence indicating that the 2016 mail compromises were an inside job: the speed of the downloads, the manipulation of files to implant Russian "fingerprints," and – this most recently – the numerical codes on the stolen files, which demonstrate that the probability of a remote hack via the internet is 1-in-2 to the 500<sup>th</sup> power.

None of those working on the stolen mail's metadata, including Bill Binney, formerly a technical director at the National Security Agency and the lead scientist at VIPS, has ever been contacted by the special counsel's investigators. "Nobody wants to talk about evidence," Binney said by telephone over the weekend. "What Mueller's doing now is clearing the report of anything that conflicts with the forensics already produced. Given this work has been done, he can't afford to allege collusion or Russian involvement, so there'll be nothing substantive in the report about either."

If Binney is right, the Mueller report will resemble the "Intelligence Community Assessment" published in January 2017. Virtually devoid of evidence, the ICA was more or less fraudulent in its reliance on loosely reasoned inferences and innuendo.

If this proves the outcome after Mueller's two-year effort, we may never know who was responsible for the 2016 email thefts or the role of U.S. law-enforcement and intelligence agencies since then; countless other questions will go unanswered. "The sole objective is to perpetuate 'Russia-gate,'" Binney said last weekend. That will come at a high price when measured by the distortions of our political institutions, our judiciary and our foreign policy priorities.

Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the *International Herald Tribune*, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is "Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century" (Yale). Follow him @thefloutist. His web site is [www.patricklawrence.us](http://www.patricklawrence.us). Support his work via [www.patreon.com/thefloutist](http://www.patreon.com/thefloutist).

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## JOHN KIRIAKOU: Another Whistleblower in Solitary Confinement

Marty Gottesfeld is a reminder of the Justice Department's determination to silence truth-tellers, writes John Kiriakou.

By **John Kiriakou**

*Special to Consortium News*



Last year I wrote about a whistleblower from New England who took direct action to save a child's life and who paid for it with his freedom. Marty Gottesfeld is now serving 10 years in prison for trying to save Justina Pelletier from abuse at the hands of her doctors at Children's Hospital in Boston.

At the age of 14, Justine developed searing stomach pain and inexplicable digestive problems. Her parents took her to a series of doctors until a metabolic geneticist at Tufts Medical Center diagnosed her with mitochondrial disease, a genetic malady that can lead to weakened muscles, neurological problems and dementia.

Her symptoms worsened over the course of the next 18 months until the pain was too much to bear. She began slurring her speech and was unable to stand. Finally, her parents took her to Boston Children's Hospital, a leading institution affiliated with Harvard University. It was there that doctors said Justina didn't have mitochondrial disease at all. They said she had mental illness and her symptoms were psychosomatic. They took her off her medications, but her parents refused to comply. When they went to take Justina home, they were blocked by hospital guards. The hospital took Justina into "state custody" and reported her parents to state officials for "medical child abuse." It was then that the case went off the rails.

### **Transferred to a Psychiatric Ward**

Justina was transferred to the hospital's child psychiatric

ward, where her condition worsened even more. She could no longer stand or walk and her hair fell out. Her toenails were actually ripped out when hospital staff dragged her, accusing her of refusing to walk. Justina was allowed one 20-minute call per week with her parents, but that call was monitored by staff, and they were forbidden from discussing her care. She resorted to making crafts out of paper in which she embedded messages and sent them to her parents. One said simply, "I'm being tortured."

Justina's parents sued Children's Hospital with the full support of the original doctor from Tufts. But the doctors at Children's argued that the only danger to Justina's health was her parents. They said that Justina had been overmedicated and that her parents had ignored her mental illness. A judge agreed, at least for the time being. That was until an investigation by [The Boston Globe](#) found that Children's Hospital had done this before, to other parents. Indeed, in the previous 18 months, the hospital had removed at least five other children from their parents for "medical child abuse," something that hospital staffers called a "parentectomy."

The story drew the attention of Marty Gottesfeld, a computer-security expert. He was appalled at the treatment to which Justina and her family were being subjected and he decided to act. He initiated a denial of service attack against the Children's Hospital computer system and against the Wayside Youth and Family Support Network, where Justina was later moved. Children's complained that the attack cost the institution \$300,000 to mitigate and \$300,000 in lost donations because it took place during the annual pledge



drive. But that attack also served to raise public awareness of Justina's plight and may have been the reason she was finally moved to a facility nearer her family in Connecticut.

Justina's parents kept up the pressure on the hospital, the state, and the judge overseeing the case. Justina and her sister were able to smuggle out a 45-second video in which she implored the judge to let her go home to her family. It was clear that after 16 months in a psychiatric ward her problems were not "in her head." They were in her genes. The original Tufts doctor was right. Justina had mitochondrial disease. The judge finally reversed his decision and sent her home.

Prosecutors, however, focused on Gottesfeld and he was soon arrested. His case was assigned to Judge Nathaniel Gorton, the same judge who oversaw the harsh case against privacy pioneer Aaron Schwartz, who eventually committed suicide under the weight of his spurious federal charges. Gorton is known as a hanging judge; he proved that with Gottesfeld's sentence.

### **Reporting from Prison**

Gottesfeld has tried to make good use of his time since he entered the "justice" system. He has reported on waste, fraud, abuse, and illegality in the Justice Department; he's written about the corruption and conflict of interest of his judge; and he has spoken out against intolerable prison conditions. His punishment has been swift and severe.

Last week Gottesfeld was transferred to the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn, New York. This is the

same prison that had a power outage last month resulting in conditions so severe that they violated the human rights of the prisoners there and made international news. And to make matters worse, Marty was placed in solitary confinement and is now scheduled to be transferred to something called a Communications Management Unit (CMU).

A CMU puts onerous controls on a prisoner's ability to communicate with the outside world. I was in a "modified CMU" when I was at the Federal Correctional Institution at Loretto, Pennsylvania. With a modified CMU, both my incoming and outgoing mail were read, scanned, and kept in the prison's Investigative Unit. My phone calls were all monitored in real time, and I was subjected to routine and regular "shake downs," where the guards confiscated whatever it was that I happened to be writing at any given time.

Marty's experience will likely be worse. He has been covering Justice Department malfeasance for years now at such sites as *The Western Journal*, *Red State*, *World News Daily*, and now *The Intercept*. But CMU placement will deny him any access to the press whatsoever. It will silence him. This is, of course, a violation of his constitutional right to freedom of speech. But the Justice Department has only to say that Marty's journalism is a "threat to the continuing operation of the institution" to justify this loss of rights. Solitary confinement makes everything even worse.

I called the Justice Department to ask several questions. Why was Marty Gottesfeld transferred to MDC Brooklyn and not directly to a low-security prison? Why was he placed in solitary confinement? And why is he being designated for a

CMU? The response was short: No comment.

The Gottesfeld experience should be a reminder for all of us. The Justice Department will stop at nothing to silence truth-tellers. It doesn't want people to know about crooked judges and prosecutors, unsanitary and unhealthy conditions, animal-grade food, and the violation of constitutional rights. It doesn't matter who the president is. They all do it. We just have to keep up the fight.

**John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act—a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration's torture program.**

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## Brexit's Imperial Nostalgia

Anis Chowdhury and Jomo Kwame Sundaram confront the notion that British rule helped “develop” the empire.

**By [Jomo Kwame Sundaram](#) in Kuala Lumpur**

and **Anis Chowdhury** in Sydney

Inter Press Service



As the possible implications of Britain's self-imposed "no-deal" exit from the European Union loom larger, a new round of imperial nostalgia has come alive.

After turning its back on the Commonwealth since the Thatcherite 1980s, some British Conservative Party leaders are seeking to revive colonial connections in increasingly desperate efforts to avoid self-inflicted marginalization following divorce from its European Union neighbors across the Channel.

Part of the new Brexit induced neo-imperial mythology is that its colonies did not provide any significant economic benefit to Britain itself. Instead, it is suggested that colonial administrations were run at great cost to Britain itself.

The empire, it is even claimed, was long maintained due to a benevolent imperial sense of responsibility. To revive patron-client relations neglected with the turn to Europe in the 1980s, the new mantra is that British rule helped 'develop' the empire.

As the sun never set on Britain's far flung empire, acquired by diverse means for different reasons at various points in time, few generalizations are appropriate. Nevertheless,

there is already significant research indicating otherwise for many colonies, but India, of course, was the jewel in the crown.

### **Empire Strikes Back**

Former Indian foreign minister Shashi Tharoor has debunked many imperial apologetic claims, including those made by former Oxford and Harvard historian Niall Ferguson. Probably the most prominent, Ferguson famously insisted decades ago that countries progressed thanks to imperialism in an influential TV series and coffee table book sponsored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "Empire."

Malaysian Sultan Nazrin Shah's Oxford University Press book has underscored the crucial contribution of colonial Malayan commodity exports in the first four decades of the 20th century, while other scholarship has shown that post-war British recovery depended crucially on the export earnings' contribution of its Southeast Asian colony.

Less well known is Utsa Patnaik's painstaking work on nearly two centuries of tax and trade data. She estimates that Britain drained nearly \$45 trillion from the Indian subcontinent between 1765 and 1938, equivalent to 17 times the United Kingdom's current gross domestic product.

### **Colonial Surplus**

After the English East India Company gained control of and monopolized Indian external trade, EIC traders "bought" Indian goods with tax revenue collected from them. After the British crown displaced the EIC in 1847, its monopoly broke down, and traders had to pay London in gold to get rupees to

pay Indian producers.

Under imperial monetary arrangements, the colonies' export earnings were considered British, and hence booked as a deficit in their own "national" accounts despite their often large trade surpluses with the rest of the world until the Great Depression.

Thus, the empire has been depicted by imperial apologists as liabilities to Britain, with India having to borrow from Britain to finance its own imports. Thus, India remained in debt to and thus "bonded" by debt to Britain.

Not surprisingly, two centuries of British rule did not raise Indian per capita income significantly. In fact, income fell by half in the last half of the 19th century while average life expectancy dropped by a fifth between 1870 and 1920! Infamously, tens of millions died due to avoidable famines induced by colonial policy decisions, including the two Bengal famines.

## **Slavery Too**

Britain used such fraudulent gains for many purposes, including further colonial expansion, first in Asia and later in Africa. Taxpayers in the colonies thus paid not only for the administration of their own exploitation, but also for imperial expansion elsewhere, including Britain's wars.

Early accumulation for Britain's Industrial Revolution depended significantly on such colonial arrangements. Imperial tribute financed the expansion of colonialism and investments abroad, including the European settler colonies.

Not unlike Eduardo Galeano's magnum opus, "Open Veins of Latin America," Walter Rodney's 1972 classic, "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" showed how slavery and other imperial economic policies transformed, exploited and brutalized Africa.

In "[The Empire Pays Back](#)," Robert Beckford estimated that Britain should pay a whopping £7.5 trillion in reparations for its role in the transatlantic slave trade, breaking it down as follows: £4 trillion in unpaid wages, £2.5 trillion for unjust enrichment and £1 trillion for pain and suffering.

Britain has made no apology for slavery or colonialism, as it has done for the Irish potato famine. There has been no public acknowledgement of how wealth extracted through imperialism made possible the finance, investment, manufacturing, trade and prosperity of modern Britain.

With Brexit imminent, a renewed narrative and discourse of imperial nostalgia has emerged, articulated, *inter alia*, in terms of a return to the Commonwealth, long abandoned by Maggie Thatcher. Hence, well over half of those surveyed in U.K. actually believe that British imperialism was beneficial to the colonies.

This belief is not only clearly self-deluding, but also obscures Britain's neo-colonial scramble for energy and mineral resources, enhanced role as tax haven for opportunistic finance, as well as its continued global imperial leadership, albeit only in a fading, supporting role to the U.S. as part of its "special relationship."

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University and the University of New South Wales (Australia). He has held senior United Nations positions in New York and Bangkok.

Jomo Kwame Sundaram, a former economics professor, was United Nations assistant secretary-general for economic development, and received the Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought in 2007.

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## Misguided Spying and the New Zealand Massacre

While intelligence agencies were looking in all the wrong places, a conspicuous target slipped through the cracks, writes Suzie Dawson.

By [Suzie Dawson](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



Now that the bodies of 49 innocent human beings are lying in a Christchurch, New Zealand, morgue – gunned down [by a heavily armed terrorist](#) – New Zealand media are asking the obvious questions: why didn't our intelligence agencies know there were xenophobic, murderous, white supremacists on the loose in Christchurch?

“Questions are being asked of the nation's security services in the wake of a mass shooting described as ‘one of New Zealand's darkest days,’ [Stuff.co.nz reports](#) and quotes a University of Waikato professor of international law, Alexander Gillespie, as saying: ‘If it's a cell we need to



ask why weren't they detected, because that's why we have security services and it may be that those services have been looking under the wrong rocks.' "

According to the same article, in response to the terrorist attack, "A crisis meeting of national security agencies was held at Police National Headquarters in Wellington after the shooting."

In the NZ Herald, veteran intelligence reporter David Fisher asked many pertinent questions in an opinion piece titled "Christchurch massacre – what did we miss and who missed it?"

"We need answers," says Fisher. "The NZSIS [New Zealand's equivalent of the FBI] – and its electronic counterpart, the Government Communications Security Bureau – have more funding than ever, and almost double the staff numbers they had six years ago. They also now have the most powerful legislation they have ever had."

We know thanks to the findings of an inquiry by the State Services Commission last December that as many as a dozen government agencies, including the NZ Police, were too busy squandering their resources spying on NGOs such as Greenpeace NZ; political parties such as the New Zealand Green Party and then-Internet Party aligned Mana Movement, as well as on anti-TPP protesters and activists such as myself.

As if that weren't egregious enough, they were even spying on Christchurch earthquake insurance claimants and historical victims of institutional state child abuse.

An ex-cabinet minister and now chief executive of Greenpeace

New Zealand, Russel Norman called it “New Zealand’s Watergate moment.”

The government contractor engaged to perform the on-the-ground victimization of targets is the notorious Thompson & Clark Investigations Limited – a company I had been publicly naming since April of 2012 for having targeted my independent media team and me. A company that we now know was illegally granted access to New Zealand police databases on thousands of occasions, and that has been linked to the NZ Security Intelligence Services.

Their nefarious activities are not isolated to the private sector. The NZ Police have also been found to have made thousands of warrantless data requests.

In 2014 acclaimed New Zealand investigative journalist Nicky Hager – himself judged by a court to have been wrongfully targeted by the NZ Police as a result of his reporting – revealed in his seminal book “Dirty Politics” that a political network that went as high as the Office of the prime minister of New Zealand– under ex-Prime Minister John Key, who was then minister in charge of the NZ security services – had targeted dozens of journalists, as well as other political targets and issue-based dissenters.

What the police and intelligence agencies of New Zealand must recognize is thus: Journalism is not terrorism. Non-violent pro-democratic activism is not terrorism. Dissent is not terrorism.

Arming yourself with weapons and violently attacking innocent people is terrorism.

## Holding to Account

Agencies that for too long have been blurring the distinction between what is and isn't terrorism, must now be held to account.

I was spied on for my independent journalism and my legal, pro-democratic activism despite having no history of violence, no access to weapons, no weapons training and no extremist ideological beliefs.

Internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom, founder of the Internet Party of New Zealand of which I am party president, was spied on by both the New Zealand and United States governments for as little as a suspected civil violation, alleged copyright infringement.

On Friday, the mania and obsessive hatred of an actual terrorist in Christchurch in possession of automatic weapons, culminated in his posting a racist manifesto online and then live streaming his hate crime in real time. Yet he was never spied on.



While the intelligence agencies were looking in all the wrong places, someone who should have been a target slipped

through the cracks.

Let that sink in.

Some will say that as injured parties of the intelligence agencies, we just have an axe to grind and are exploiting this tragedy to criticize them.

But as always, it is those very agencies that have failed their charges, who will be first in line to exploit the news cycle in a quest to justify the provision of ever more money, more power, more resources and ultimately, the ability for them to engage in ever more spying.

The question is, how will they choose to employ those gains once they are inevitably granted?

In the absence of meaningful intervention by oversight bodies or an official inquiry – and if their recent history is any measure – the answer may well be: poorly, undemocratically, and unjustly.

**Suzie Dawson is a Kiwi journalist, activist and current president of the Internet Party of New Zealand. She specializes in writing about whistleblowers, intelligence agencies, geopolitics and technology. Her work has been shared by WikiLeaks for the last five years running, as well as by other noteworthy figures. Suzie is the organizer of the #Unity4J movement in support of Julian Assange. Journalists who write truth pay a high price to do so. If you respect and value this work, please consider supporting Suzie's efforts via Bitcoin donation [at this link](#). Thank you! Twitter: [@Suzi3D](#) Official Website: [Suzi3d.com](#)**

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## School Shooters and Drones

Allegra Harpootlian links gun violence at home to U.S. wars abroad.

By [Allegra Harpootlian](#)

[TomDispatch.com](#)



**I**n the wake of the Feb. 14, 2018, mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which killed 17 students and staff members, a teacher [said](#) the school looked “like a war zone.” And to many young Americans, that’s exactly what it felt like. But this shooting was different. Refusing to be victims, Parkland survivors disrupted the [“thoughts and prayers”](#) cycle by immediately rallying student activists and adults across the country, mobilizing them around such tragedies and the [weapons of war](#) that often facilitate them.

[Recent history](#) suggested that such a movement, sure to be unable to keep the public’s attention or exert significant pressure on lawmakers, would collapse almost instantly. Yet, miraculously enough, the same fear – of their school being next – that had kept young Americans paralyzed for almost 20 years was what drove these newly impassioned activists not to back down.

Let me say that, much as I admire them, I look at their

remarkable movement from an odd perspective. You see, I grew up in the “school-shooting era” and now work for a non-profit called [ReThink Media](#) tracking coverage of the American drone war that has been going on for 17 years.

To me, the U.S. military and CIA drones that hover [constantly](#) over eight countries across the Greater Middle East and Africa, and regularly [terrorize](#), [maim](#), and [kill](#) civilians, including [children](#), are the equivalents of the disturbed shooters in American schools. But that story is hard to find anywhere in this country. What reports Americans do read about those drone strikes usually focus on successes (a major terrorist taken out in a distant land), not the “collateral damage.”

With that in mind, let me return to those teenage activists against gun violence who quickly grasped three crucial things. The first was that such violence can't be dealt with by focusing on gun control alone. You also have to confront the other [endemic problems](#) exacerbating the gun violence epidemic, including inadequate mental health resources, systemic racism and police brutality, and the depth of economic inequality. As Parkland teen organizer [Edna Chavez](#) explained, “Instead of police officers we should have a department specializing in restorative justice. We need to tackle the root causes of the issues we face and come to an understanding of how to resolve them.”

The second was that, no matter how much you shouted, you had to be aware of the privilege of being heard. In other words, when you shouted, you had to do so not just for yourself but for all those voices so regularly drowned out in this country. After all, black Americans represent

the majority of gun homicide victims. Black children are 10 times as likely to die by gun and yet their activism on the subject has been largely demonized or overlooked even as support for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas students rolled in.

The third was that apathy is the enemy of progress, which means that to make change you have to give people a sense of engagement and empowerment. As one of the Parkland students, Emma Gonzalez, put it: “What matters is that the majority of American people have become complacent in a senseless injustice that occurs all around them.”

### **Washington’s Expanding Drone Wars**

Here’s the irony, though: while those teenagers continue to talk about the repeated killing of innocents in this country, their broader message could easily be applied to another type of violence that, in all these years, Americans have paid next to no attention to: the U.S. drone war.

Unlike school shootings, drone strikes killing civilians in distant lands rarely make the news here, much less the headlines. Most of us at least now know what it means to live in a country where school shootings are an almost weekly news story. Drones are another matter entirely, and beyond the innocents they so regularly slaughter, there are long-term effects on the communities they are attacking.

As Veterans for Peace put it, “Here at home, deaths of students and others killed in mass shootings and gun violence, including suicide gun deaths, are said to be the price of freedom to bear arms. Civilian casualties in war are written off as ‘collateral damage,’ the price of freedom

and U.S. security.”

And yet, after 17 years, three presidents, and little transparency, America’s drone wars have never truly made it into the national conversation. Regularly marketed over those years as “precise” and “surgical,” drones have always been seen by lawmakers as a “sexy,” casualty-free solution to fighting the bad guys, while protecting American blood and treasure.

According to reports, President Donald Trump actually expanded the U.S. global drone war, while removing the last shreds of transparency about what those drones are doing – and even who’s launching them. One of his first orders on entering the Oval Office was to secretly reinstate the CIA’s ability to launch drone strikes that are, in most cases, not even officially acknowledged. And since then, it’s only gotten worse. Just last week, he revoked an Obama-era executive order that required the director of national intelligence to release an annual report on civilian and combatant casualties caused by CIA drones and other lethal operations. Now, not only are the rules of engagement – whom you can strike and under what circumstances– secret, but the Pentagon no longer even reveals when drones have been used, no less when civilians die from them. Because of this purposeful opaqueness, even an estimate of the drone death toll no longer exists.

Still, in the data available on all U.S. airstrikes since Trump was elected, an alarming trend is discernible: there are more of them, more casualties from them, and ever less accountability about them. In Iraq and Syria alone, the



monitoring group [Airwars](#) believes that the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS is responsible for between 7,468 and 11,841 civilian deaths, around 2,000 of whom were children. (The U.S.-led coalition, however, only admits to killing 1,139 civilians.)

In [Afghanistan](#), the U.N. recently found that U.S. airstrikes (including drone strikes) had killed approximately the same number of Afghan civilians in 2018 as in the previous three years put together. In response to this report, the U.S.-led NATO mission there claimed that “all feasible precautions” were being taken to limit civilian casualties and that it investigates all allegations of their occurrence. According to such NATO investigations, airstrikes by foreign forces caused 117 civilian casualties last year, including 62 deaths – about a fifth of the U.N. tally.

And those are only the numbers for places where Washington is officially at war. In Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Libya, even less information is available on the [number](#) of civilians the U.S. has killed. [Experts](#) who track drone strikes in such gray areas of conflict, however, place that number in the thousands, though there is no way to confirm them, as even our military acknowledges. U.S. Army Colonel Thomas Veale, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS, [put it](#) this way last year: “As far as how do we know how many civilians were killed, I am just being honest, no one will ever know. Anyone who claims they will know is lying, and there’s no possible way.”

After a U.S. strike killed or injured an entire Afghan family, the trauma surgeon treating a 4-year-old survivor told [NBC](#), “I am sad. A young boy with such big injuries. No

eyes, brain out. What will be his future?”

In other words, while America’s teenagers fight in the most public way possible for their right to live, a world away Afghanistan’s teenagers are marching for the same thing – except instead of gun control, in that heavily armed land, they want peace.

### **Trauma Is Trauma Is Trauma**

Gun violence – and school shootings in particular – have become the preeminent fear of American teenagers. A Pew poll taken last year found that 57 percent of teens are worried about a shooting at their school (1-in-4 are “very worried.”) This is even truer of nonwhite teens, with roughly two-thirds of them expressing such fear.

As one student told Teen Vogue: “How could you not feel a little bit terrified knowing that it happens so randomly and so often?” And she’s not exaggerating. More than 150,000 students in the U.S have experienced a shooting on campus since the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, considered the first modern mass school shooting.

And in such anticipatory anxiety, American students have much in common with victims of drone warfare. Speaking to researchers from Stanford University, Haroon Quddoos, a Pakistani taxi driver who survived two U.S. drone strikes, explained it this way:

“No matter what we are doing, that fear is always inculcated in us. Because whether we are driving a car, or we are working on a farm, or we are sitting home playing... cards – no matter what we are doing, we are always thinking the

drone will strike us. So we are scared to do anything, no matter what.”

Similar symptoms of post-traumatic stress, trauma, and anxiety are commonplace emotions in countries where U.S. drones are active, just as in American communities like Parkland that have lived through a mass shooting. Visiting communities in Yemen that experienced drone strikes, forensic psychologist Peter Schaapveld found that 92 percent of their inhabitants were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, with children the most significantly affected. Psychologists have come up with similar figures when studying both survivors of school shootings and children who have been psychologically affected by school-lockdown drills, by the media’s focus on violence, and by the culture of fear that has developed in response to mass shootings.

## **Voices Left Out**

The Parkland students have created a coherent movement that brings together an incredibly diverse group united around a common goal and a belief that all gun violence victims, not just those who have experienced a mass shooting, need to be heard. As one Parkland survivor and leader of the March For Our Lives movement, David Hogg, put it, the goal isn’t to talk for different communities, but to let them “speak for themselves and ask them how we can help.”

The Parkland survivors have essentially created an echo chamber, amplifying the previously unheard voices of young African-Americans and Latinos in particular. At last year’s March For Our Lives, for instance, 11-year-old Naomi

Wadler started her speech this way: “I am here today to acknowledge and represent the African-American girls whose stories don’t make the front page of every national newspaper, whose stories don’t lead the evening news.”

In 2016, there were nearly 39,000 gun deaths, more than 14,000 of them homicides and almost 23,000 suicides. Such routine gun violence disproportionately affects black Americans. Mass shootings accounted for only about 1.2 percent of all gun deaths that year. Yet the Parkland students made headlines and gained praise for their activism – Oprah Winfrey even donated \$500,000 to the movement – while black communities that had been fighting gun violence for years never received anything similar.

As someone who spends a lot of her time engrossed in the undercovered news of drone strikes, I can’t help but notice the parallels. Stories about U.S. drone strikes taking out dangerous terrorists proliferate, while reports on U.S.-caused civilian casualties disappear into the void. For example, in January, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command claimed that a precision drone strike finally killed Jamel Ahmed Mohammed Ali al-Badawi, the alleged mastermind behind the deadly October 2000 suicide bombing of the *USS Cole* in Yemen. Within a day, more than 24 media outlets had covered the story.

Few, however, focused on the fact that the U.S. command only claimed al-Badawi’s death was “likely,” despite similar reports about such terrorists that have repeatedly been proven wrong. The British human rights group Reprieve found back in 2014 that even when drone operators end up successfully targeting specific individuals like al-

Badawi, they regularly kill vastly more people than their chosen targets. Attempts to kill 41 terror figures, Reprieve reported, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,147 people. That was five years ago, but there's no reason to believe anything has changed.

By contrast, when a U.S. airstrike – it's not clear whether it was a drone or a manned aircraft – killed at least 20 civilians in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in December 2018, only four American media outlets (Reuters, the Associated Press, Voice of America, and The New York Times) covered the story and none followed up with a report on those civilians and their families. That has largely been the norm since the war on terror began with the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. In the Trump years so far, while headlines scream about mass school shootings and other slaughters of civilians here, the civilian casualties of America's wars and the drone strikes that often go with them are, if anything, even more strikingly missing in action in the media.

When Safa al-Ahmad, a journalist for PBS's Frontline, was asked why she thought it was important to hear from Yemenis experiencing American drone strikes, she responded:

“I think if you're going to talk about people, you should go talk to them. It's just basic respect for other human beings. It really bothered me that everyone was just talking about the Americans... The other civilians, they weren't given any names, they weren't given any details. It was like an aside to the story... This is part of the struggle when you construct stories on foreign countries, when it comes to the American public. I think we've done [Americans] a

disservice, by not doing more of this... We impact the world, we should understand it. An informed public is the only way there can be a functioning democracy. That is our duty as a democracy, to be informed.”

This one-sided view of America’s never-ending air wars fails everyone, from the people being asked to carry out Washington’s decisions in those lands to ordinary Americans who have little idea what’s being done in their name to the many people living under those drones. Americans should know that, to them, it’s we who seem like the school shooters of the planet.

### **Waking Up an Apathetic Nation**

For the better part of two decades, young Americans have been trapped in a cycle of violence at home and abroad with little way to speak out. Gun violence in this country was a headline-grabbing given. School shootings, like so many other mass killings here, were deemed “tragic” and worthy of thoughts, prayers, and much fervid media attention, but little else.

Until Parkland.

What changed? Well, a new cohort, Generation Z, came on the scene and, unlike their millennial predecessors, many of them are refusing to accept the status quo, especially when it comes to issues like gun violence.

Every time there was a mass shooting, millennials would hold their breath, wondering if today would be the day the country finally woke up. After Newtown. After San Bernadino. After Las Vegas. And each time, it wasn’t. Parkland could

have been the same, if it hadn't been for those meddling kids. Having witnessed the dangers of apathy, Gen-Z seems increasingly to be about movement and action. In fact, in a Vice youth survey, 71 percent of respondents reported feeling "capable" of enacting change around global warming and 85 percent felt the same about social problems. And that's new.

For so long, gun violence seemed like an unstoppable, incurable plague. Fed up with the "adults in the room," however, these young activists have begun to take matters into their own hands, giving those particularly at risk of gun violence, children, a sense of newfound power – the power to determine their own futures. Whether it's testifying in front of Congress in the first hearing on gun violence since 2011, protesting at the stores and offices of gun manufacturers, or participating in "die-ins," these kids are making their voices heard.

Since the Parkland massacre, there has been actual movement on gun control, something that America has not seen for a long time. Under pressure, the Justice Department moved to ban the bump stocks that can make semi-automatic weapons fire almost like machine guns, Florida signed a \$400 million bill to tighten the state's gun laws, companies began to cut ties with the National Rifle Association, and public support grew for stricter gun control laws.

Although the new Gen Z activists have focused on issues close to home, sooner or later they may start to look beyond the water's edge and find themselves in touch with their counterparts across the globe, who are showing every

day how dedicated they are to changing the world they live in, with or without anyone's help. And if they do, they will find that, in its endless wars, America has been the true school shooter on this planet, terrorizing the global classroom with a remarkable lack of consequences.

In March 2018, [according to](#) Human Rights Watch, American planes bombed a school that housed displaced people in Syria, killing dozens of them, including children. Similarly, in Yemen that August, a Saudi plane, using a [Pentagon-supplied](#) laser-guided bomb, blew away a school bus, killing 40 schoolchildren. Just as at home, it's not only about the weaponry like those planes or drones. Activists will find that they have to focus their attention as well on the root causes of such violence and the scars they leave behind in the communities of survivors.

More tolerant, more [diverse](#), less trustful of major institutions and less inclined to believe in American exceptionalism than any generation before them, Generation Z may be primed to care about what their country is doing in their name from Afghanistan to Syria, Yemen to Libya. But first they have to know it's happening.

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# THE ANGRY ARAB: Why Ilhan Omar is a Dangerous Woman for the US

Washington doesn't like its Muslims or Arabs to take pride in their heritage or oppose the Israeli occupation, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

By **As'ad AbuKhalil**

*Special to Consortium News*



Washington was not expecting the arrival of Reps. Ilhan Omar or Rashida Tlaib. The nation's capital has seen Arabs and Muslims before but they were not like these two new assertive and defiant members of Congress.

The White House, under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, hosted Iftar dinners for Ramadan and invited a variety of Muslims (including of course the Israeli ambassador because he is wildly popular among the world's Muslims), but they were of a different brand. The Bush administration even employed Muslim Arabs or Muslim-born Americans who preached Bush's doctrine to anyone who would listen in the Middle East.

But those were different Arabs. They were the "non-threatening" Arabs who made Westerners feel comfortable in their racism and bigotry. The Arabs who are welcomed in the halls of Congress are usually mimics of the late president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, and the current king of Jordan. They are the type of Arabs who praise Western wars and downplay Arab anger at the long record of Israeli occupation and aggression.

Some of those Arabs in D.C. are employed as correspondents for Gulf-regime media. Some had even received their training at the research arm of the Israeli lobby, while others work for racist Congress people. They are the kind of Arabs who are paraded before Western audiences to show them that there are Muslim Arabs who are exceptions: the ones who are willing to insult other Arabs and Muslims, and who tell tales about how they were saved from the terrorism of the religion or the culture of the region.

But Minnesota's Ilhan Omar and Michigan's Rashida Tlaib are different. The Muslims whom Washington has been used to receiving from Lebanon or from Gulf embassies are Muslims who are embarrassed about their religion and about their culture. They are the Muslims who apologize day and night for the terrorism of Muslims, as if all Muslims are responsible for the crimes of the few. (The blaming of all Jews for the crimes of Israel is certainly anti-Semitic—just as the blaming of all Muslims for the crimes of the few Muslims is Islamophobic.)

Ilhan Omar, from the second she entered Congress, has made her audience feel uncomfortable, and the press has had a hard time dealing with her.

### **Acceptable Extremism**

Acceptable and subservient Muslims or Arabs are allowed to hold extremist views and to express hatred and hostility to Jewish people as long as they don't offend Israel or Western governments. Anwar Sadat's background as an anti-Semitic Nazi was never an issue for Israel or Western Zionists. In fact, Stuart Eizenstat, Jimmy Carter's domestic policy

advisor, downplays the Nazi sympathy of Sadat and attributes it dismissively to anti-British sentiments, in his recent book, "President Carter."

And when Mahmoud Abbas, the president of Palestine, agreed after the assassination of Yasser Arafat to serve Israeli occupation interests, his anti-Semitic past (his PhD dissertation in Moscow contained Holocaust denial) was also forgiven. The Saudi regime, the largest-by far-purveyor of anti-Semitic propaganda among Muslims in the last century is also forgiven.

It is not about anti-Semitism, as evidenced by Israeli alliances with evangelical Christians and European far-right groups. Zionists object to anti-Semitism—real or concocted as is the case with Omar—when there is criticism of Israel and calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions on Israel, or BDS.

Ilhan Omar also doesn't look the part. Westerners prefer whiskey-drinking Muslims who are willing to mock fellow Muslims, and who are willing to denigrate Palestinian political aspirations for the amusement of the Zionist think-tank crowd in D.C.

And what is rarely mentioned about Ilhan Omar is that she wears the veil. At least in France, where Islamophobia has become the national secular religion of the republic, the hostility to the veil has become unmasked at all points of the political spectrum, left, right and center.

Hostility to the veil has been less vocally expressed in D.C. (veiled Muslim women have numerous stories of harassment and abuse to tell). But Congress had to change

its rules to allow Omar to wear the veil under its roof, even though exceptions to the longstanding hat ban had reportedly been made for the wearing of yarmulkes.

It would have been less irksome for Omar's haters if she did not wear the veil. Westerners prefer Muslims to be atheists or non-practicing Muslims. (In the second teaching position I held at Tufts University, the most senior member of the department of political science once rushed to my office and asked me hurriedly: "You are not Muslim, are you?" I said: "Well, I am from a Muslim family but I am personally an atheist." He said: "Oh, that is good," and left.)

### **Unacceptable Candor**

And Omar speaks in a refreshingly candid language that does not stick to the rhetorical clichés of D.C. politicians.

By contrast, New York's Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has learned to censor herself. Ever since she was attacked for previous remarks she had made about Palestinians, Ocasio-Cortez has resorted to speaking in the vague generalities that U.S. diplomats also use to avoid the wrath of Israel and its supporters. She no longer seems to even utter the word Palestine. She has become too aware of the price to be paid.

Omar and Rashida Tlaib have also supported BDS, which is the biggest sin, as far as Israel and AIPAC are concerned. The U.S. has made it very clear that BDS has emerged as the second danger to Israel after the threat of military resistance to Israeli occupation and aggression.

The endorsement of BDS by two members of Congress bestows

official legitimacy on a movement that Israel has been desperately trying to paint as an anti-Semitic reincarnation of Nazism. But this has been the history of Israeli propaganda: all enemies of Israel, communists, Arab nationalists, Palestinian nationalists, rightists, leftists, have been labeled as anti-Semitic. Even the secular Arab nationalist leader, the late Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, was accused of anti-Semitism by Israel when none of his speeches ever contained an anti-Semitic word.

And now, the U.S. Congress, which sat silent about the wave of Islamophobia unleashed during and after the Trump campaign, suddenly sees the need to issue a proclamation against religious bigotry and racism.

It is a bitter irony that the U.S. Congress has, for the first time, condemned Islamophobia in a statement widely understood to be an attempt to discipline the first Muslim American female member of Congress. The resolution had nothing to do with ostensible congressional outrage against Islamophobia. (Since Sept. 11, many members of Congress have become vocal anti-Islam bigots, as is U.S. President Donald Trump, who advocated a ban on all Muslim visitors to the country). The reference to Islamophobia was added to appease those new progressive members of Congress and the African American members who protested against a very selective standard of outrage.

Weeks after Omar's election to Congress, the Zionist lobby succeeded in turning her into a caricature. They inserted the word "Jewish" every time she spoke against support for Israel (she did not once refer to Jews in her discourse about Israel and its supporters).

The word “trope” is now a convenient tool to turn someone’s criticisms of Israel into grotesque anti-Semitic hatred. Even the progressive Michele Goldberg, one of the few refreshingly courageous columnists in *The New York Times*, insisted that Omar resorted to anti-Semitic “tropes.”

The Israeli lobby and the government want to send a clear message through the mistreatment and abuse of Ilhan Omar: that progressive members of Congress, especially if they are Muslim Arab women of color, won’t be allowed to express their views on Israel without mobilizing the entire AIPAC machinery in Congress against them.

Ilhan Omar is indeed dangerous. She has broken taboos, along with her colleague Rashida Tlaib. She is dangerous to the hegemony imposed on the nation’s capital by the supporters of Israel (and evangelical Christian, not Jews, are now the most fanatical Zionists in U.S. politics). Because Omar is seen as dangerous, the abuse won’t end. It has just started.

As’ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the “Historical Dictionary of Lebanon” (1998), “Bin Laden, Islam and America’s New War on Terrorism (2002), and “The Battle for Saudi Arabia” (2004). He tweets as @asadabukhalil

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## A Tale of Two Incarcerated Women

Chelsea Manning has done a great service in finally stripping away the last vestige of excuse from the figures who refuse to support Julian Assange, says Craig Murray.

**By Craig Murray**

[CraigMurray.org.uk](http://CraigMurray.org.uk)



**O**n International Women's Day on March 8 Chelsea Manning was imprisoned yet again, this time for refusing to testify against Julian Assange before a Grand Jury. Chelsea has already suffered over seven years of total imprisonment – no American had ever previously spent more than three years in jail for releasing government secrets to the public, in a land which had historically valued free speech.

I am in awe of Chelsea's courage in refusing to testify, and shocked at a system that imprisons somebody for contempt of court for maintaining dignified silence.

Chelsea has also done a great service in finally stripping away the last vestige of excuse from the figures who refuse to support Julian Assange, pretending that they do not believe he faces extradition to the United States, and that the legal issue is not about Wikileaks' right to publish.

The potential charges in Sweden – always based on quite

ludicrous accusations – were dropped years ago after he was finally interviewed in the Ecuadorean Embassy by Swedish police and prosecutors, and it became very plain indeed there was no viable case against him.

Chelsea has gone to prison for refusing to participate in the prosecution of Wikileaks for publishing materials that revealed war crimes in the American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Chelsea is a whistleblower, not a publisher. Assange is a publisher, not a whistleblower. If Assange can be prosecuted for publishing official secrets, then so can every newspaper editor or television editor involved in the receipt of whistleblower material.

There is a massive, a fundamental, media freedom issue at stake here. Even so, the MSM in the UK do not even have the guts to state the truth about what causes Julian to be confined to the Ecuadorean Embassy, let alone to support his right to publish.

### **Meanwhile in Iran**

Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe is in jail in Iran for spying for the British. She is certainly not an MI6 officer, and I can't see that she would have sufficient access to information to make her of much use as an agent (as MI6 calls its informants). That she was involved in training Iranian journalists or citizen journalists in ways the Iranian government did not like is much more probable, but does not amount to espionage. Even if she were some kind of low level informant to MI6 (which I doubt), the Iranian authorities have sufficiently made their point and it is time to let her go.



The British government's attitude to this case has been particularly interesting and extremely unusual. I cannot criticise them for the things they have done, because they are the things I used to get frustrated with them for never doing. But their handling of this case is truly out of the ordinary.

The UK allows dual citizenship. It has been longstanding Foreign Office policy that the UK does not give consular protection to UK dual nationals in the country where they are also a national. If the other state does not allow dual citizenship, it might not recognise any British standing in the matter. But there is another compelling reason for the standard policy of not assisting in these circumstances.

When working in Embassies, I used to get infuriated by cases where I wished to help people but was not allowed to, because they were dual citizens. It was explained to me, that if in Nigeria alone we accepted as consular cases all the British/Nigerian dual nationals in Nigerian jails, that would already double the FCO's entire consular caseload worldwide. To accept dual nationals as consular cases everywhere in their other homeland would increase consular work by a large multiple and require a very large increase in FCO resources.

I nevertheless always felt we could do more. That the British government had, prior to yesterday, already done so much to try to help Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe, even though she was an Iranian dual national in Iran, was already extremely unusual. That the UK has now "adopted" the case, raising it to the level of a state dispute, is something not just unusual, but which I don't think has happened since the

First World War. Please note this is not the same process as granting Zaghari Ratcliffe herself diplomatic status, which has not been done.

Again, I can't criticise the FCO for this, because adoption is something I had urged them to do in a past case while I was on the inside, (shout out to my friend John Carmichael), again being told by the FCO it was not possible as we never do it.

Whether the move is effective or wise in this case, is quite another question. It seems to me likely the Iranians will take it as confirmation that she is a spy. I would urge the Iranian government to take this course; they should now declare the the adoption of the case as a state dispute proves that Zaghari Ratcliffe is a spy, and having been proven right before the world, they will let her go as an example of mercy and compassion.

There are two fundamental points here. The first is that Iran has been subjected for years to crippling sanctions and an international campaign of hate spread by western government propoganda and their MSM. Western governments have aligned themselves with Saudi and Israeli sponsored brutal proxy wars against Shia communities across the Middle East, which look to Iran for protection. If the Iranian government is defensive and suspicious, is that really surprising? The week after the British government declared Hezbollah, the political and security organisation of Lebanese Shias, to be nothing but a terrorist organisation, do the Tories really think the Iranians will be looking kindly on them and their demands over Zaghari Ratcliffe?

The second point is that the entire purpose of the state “adopting” a case, is to make available the dispute resolution mechanisms which operate between states. But the UK only a few days ago repudiated the International Court of Justice, the final arbiter of such disputes, over the Chagos Islands. As the UK shows total contempt for international law, this attempt to access its remedies will be met with derision by the wider international community.

**Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010.**

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## Joe Biden on the Relaunch Pad

Whether Biden can win the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination will largely depend on how little voters know about his actual record, writes Norman Solomon.

# ***Biden is No Friend of the Working Class; Solidly Backed Invasion of Iraq in 2003***

By Norman Solomon



When *The New York Times* front-paged its latest anti-left polemic masquerading as a news article, the March 9 piece declared: “Should former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. enter the race, as his top advisers vow he soon will, he would have the best immediate shot at the moderate mantle.”

On the verge of relaunching, Biden is poised to come to the rescue of the corporate political establishment – at a time when, in the words of the *Times*, “the sharp left turn in the Democratic Party and the rise of progressive presidential candidates are unnerving moderate Democrats.” After 36 years in the Senate and eight as vice president, Biden is by far the most seasoned servant of corporate power with a prayer of becoming the next president.

When Biden read this paragraph in a recent *Politico* [article](#), his ears must have been burning: “Early support from deep-pocketed financial executives could give Democrats seeking to break out of the pack an important fundraising boost. But any association with bankers also opens presidential hopefuls to sharp attacks from an ascendant left.”

The direct prey of Biden’s five-decade “association with bankers” include millions of current and former college students now struggling under avalanches of debt; they can thank Biden for his prodigious services to the lending industry. Andrew Cockburn identifies an array of victims in his [devastating profile](#) of Biden in the March issue of *Harper’s* magazine. For instance:

- “Biden was long a willing foot soldier in the campaign to emasculate laws allowing debtors relief from loans

they cannot repay. As far back as 1978, he helped negotiate a deal rolling back bankruptcy protections for graduates with federal student loans, and in 1984 worked to do the same for borrowers with loans for vocational schools.”

- “Even when the ostensible objective lay elsewhere, such as drug-related crime, Biden did not forget his banker friends. Thus the 1990 Crime Control Act, with Biden as chief sponsor, further limited debtors’ ability to take advantage of bankruptcy protections.”
- Biden worked diligently to strengthen the hand of credit-card firms against consumers. At the same time, “the credit card giant MBNA was Biden’s largest contributor for much of his Senate career, while also employing his son Hunter as an executive and, later, as a well-remunerated consultant.”

Media mythology about “Lunch Bucket Joe” cannot stand up to scrutiny. His bona fides as a pal of working people are about as solid and believable as those of the last Democratic nominee for president.

But Biden’s fealty to corporate power has been only one aspect of his many-faceted record that progressives will widely find repugnant to the extent they learn about it.

Since the #MeToo movement began, some retrospective media coverage has assessed Biden’s highly problematic role in chairing the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill hearings of the Senate Judiciary Committee. And in recent days, *Washington Post* reporting has brought into focus his backstory of pandering to white racism against African-Americans during much of his Senate career.

## It Doesn't Matter

As a 32-year-old senator in 1975, Biden commented: “I do not buy the concept, popular in the '60s, which said, ‘We have suppressed the black man for 300 years and the white man is now far ahead in the race for everything our society offers. In order to even the score, we must now give the black man a head start, or even hold the white man back, to even the race.’ I don’t buy that.”

More attention is also needed to Biden’s role as Judiciary Committee chair pushing through the now-notorious landmark 1994 crime bill. In the process of championing the bill, Biden warned of “predators on our streets” during a 1993 speech on the Senate floor.

“It doesn’t matter whether or not they were deprived as a youth,” Biden proclaimed. “It doesn’t matter whether or not they had no background that enabled them to become socialized into the fabric of society. It doesn’t matter whether or not they’re the victims of society. The end result is they’re about to knock my mother on the head with a lead pipe, shoot my sister, beat up my wife, take on my sons.”

Now, a new Iowa poll shows Biden and Bernie Sanders neck and neck in the first-in-the-nation contest for the nomination, with the rest of the candidates far behind in the state. For quite a while, Biden has been sharpening his hatchet to swing at progressive populism in general – and Bernie in particular.

In typical Biden style, the former vice president is eager to stake out the middle of the road, between ultra-predatory

capitalism and solidarity with working-class people. At an October 2017 gathering in Alabama, he said: “Guys, the wealthy are as patriotic as the poor. I know Bernie doesn’t like me saying that, but they are.” Later, Biden elaborated on the theme when he told an audience at the Brookings Institution, “I don’t think five hundred billionaires are the reason we’re in trouble. The folks at the top aren’t bad guys.”

As Branko Marcetic pointed out in *Jacobin* last summer, “at a time when left-wing populism is increasingly accepted as the antidote to Trump and the GOP’s nativist and corporate-friendly pitch, Biden stands as a remnant of precisely the sort of left-averse, triangulating Democratic politics that Hillary Clinton was relentlessly criticized for personifying.”

Biden makes clear his distaste for the current progressive populist wave. “I know some want to single out big corporations for all the blame,” he wrote in a blog post. “It is true that the balance has shifted too much in favor of corporations and against workers. But consumers, workers, and leaders have the power to hold every corporation to a higher standard, not simply cast business as the enemy or let industry off the hook.”

### **Supports the Business of War**

One of the many industries that Biden has a long record of letting “off the hook” is the war business. In that mode, Biden did more than any other Democratic senator to greenlight the March 2003 invasion of Iraq.

It wasn’t just that Biden voted for the Iraq war on the

Senate floor five months before it began. During the lead-up to that vote, in August 2002, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, he presided over sham hearings – refusing to allow experts who opposed an invasion to get any words in edgewise – while a cavalcade of war hawks testified in the national spotlight.

“It is difficult to over-estimate the critical role Biden played in making the tragedy of the Iraq war possible,” Middle East studies professor Stephen Zunes wrote. “More than two months prior to the 2002 war resolution even being introduced, in what was widely interpreted as the first sign that Congress would endorse a U.S. invasion of Iraq, Biden declared on August 4 that the United States was probably going to war. In his powerful position as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he orchestrated a propaganda show designed to sell the war to skeptical colleagues and the America public by ensuring that dissenting voices would not get a fair hearing.”

Joe Biden’s friendly TV persona appeals to many. He smiles well and has a gift of gab. Most political journalists in the mass media like him. He’s an apt frontrunner for the military-industry complex and the corporate power structure that it serves. Whether Biden can win the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination will largely depend on how many voters don’t know much about his actual record.

**Norman Solomon is cofounder and national coordinator of RootsAction.org. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 Democratic National Convention and is currently a coordinator of the relaunched Bernie Delegates Network. Solomon is the author of a dozen books include *War***



***Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.***

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## Is War With Iran on the Horizon?

Despite growing Trump administration tensions with Venezuela and even with North Korea, Iran is the likeliest spot for Washington's next shooting war, says Bob Dreyfuss for TomDispatch.

# ***The Trump Administration is Reckless Enough to Turn the Cold War With Iran Into a Hot One***

By **Bob Dreyfuss**

[TomDispatch.com](http://TomDispatch.com)



Here's the foreign policy question of questions in 2019: Are President Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, all severely weakened at home and with few allies abroad, reckless enough to set off a war with Iran?

Could military actions designed to be limited – say, a heightening of the Israeli bombing of Iranian forces inside Syria, or possible U.S. cross-border attacks from Iraq, or a clash between American and Iranian naval ships in the Persian Gulf – trigger a wider war?

Worryingly, the answers are: yes and yes. Even though Western Europe has lined up in opposition to any future conflict with Iran, even though Russia and China would rail against it, even though most Washington foreign policy experts would be horrified by the

outbreak of such a war, it could happen.

Despite growing Trump administration tensions with Venezuela and even with North Korea, Iran is the likeliest spot for Washington's next shooting war. Years of politically charged anti-Iranian vituperation might blow up in the faces of President Trump and his two most hawkish aides, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton, setting off a conflict with potentially catastrophic implications.

Such a war could quickly spread across much of the Middle East, not just to Saudi Arabia and Israel, the region's two major anti-Iranian powers, but Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and the various Persian Gulf states. It might indeed be, as Iranian President Hassan Rouhani suggested last year (unconsciously echoing Iran's former enemy, Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein) the "mother of all wars."

With Bolton and Pompeo, both well-known Iranophobes, in the driver's seat, few restraints remain on President Trump when it comes to that country. White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, President Trump's former favorite generals who had urged caution, are no longer around. And though the Democratic National Committee passed a resolution last month calling for the United States to return to the nuclear agreement that President Obama signed, there are still a significant number of congressional Democrats who believe that Iran is a major threat to U.S. interests in the region.

During the Obama years, it was *de rigueur* for Democrats to support the president's conclusion that Iran was a prime state sponsor of terrorism and should be treated accordingly. And the congressional Democrats now leading the party on foreign policy – Eliot Engel, who currently chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Bob Menendez and Ben Cardin, the two ranking Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – were opponents of the 2015 nuclear accord (though all three now claim to have changed their minds).

## Deadly Flashpoints for a Future War

On the roller coaster ride that is Donald Trump's foreign policy, it's hard to discern what's real and what isn't, what's rhetoric and what's not. When it comes to Iran, it's reasonable to assume that Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo aren't planning an updated version of the unilateral invasion of Iraq that President George W. Bush launched in the spring of 2003.

Yet by openly calling for the toppling of the government in Tehran, by withdrawing from the Iran nuclear agreement and reimposing onerous sanctions to cripple that country's economy, by encouraging Iranians to rise up in revolt, by overtly supporting various exile groups (and perhaps covertly even terrorists), and by joining with Israel and Saudi Arabia in an informal anti-Iranian alliance, the three of them are clearly attempting to force the collapse of the Iranian regime, which just celebrated the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

There are three potential flashpoints where limited skirmishes, were they to break out, could quickly escalate into a major shooting war.

The first is in Syria and Lebanon. Iran is deeply involved in defending Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (who only recently returned from a visit to Tehran) and closely allied with Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political party with a potent paramilitary arm. Weeks ago, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu openly boasted that his country's air force had successfully taken out Iranian targets in Syria. In fact, little noticed here, dozens of such strikes have taken place for more than a year, with mounting Iranian casualties.

Until now, the Iranian leadership has avoided a direct response that would heighten the confrontation with Israel, just as it has avoided unleashing Hezbollah, a well-armed, battle-tested proxy force. That could, however, change if the hardliners in Iran decided to retaliate. Should this simmering conflict explode, does

anyone doubt that President Trump would soon join the fray on Israel's side or that congressional Democrats would quickly succumb to the administration's calls to back the Jewish state?

Next, consider Iraq as a possible flashpoint for conflict. In February, a blustery Trump told CBS's *Face the Nation* that he intends to keep U.S. forces in Iraq "because I want to be looking a little bit at Iran because Iran is the real problem." His comments did not exactly go over well with the Iraqi political class, since many of that country's parties and militias are backed by Iran.

Trump's declaration followed a *Wall Street Journal* report late last year that Bolton had asked the Pentagon – over the opposition of various generals and then-Secretary of Defense Mattis – to prepare options for "retaliatory strikes" against Iran. This roughly coincided with a couple of small rocket attacks against Baghdad's fortified Green Zone and the airport in Basra, Iraq's Persian Gulf port city, neither of which caused any casualties.

Writing in Foreign Affairs, however, Pompeo blamed Iran for the attacks, which he called "life-threatening," adding, "Iran did not stop these attacks, which were carried out by proxies it has supported with funding, training, and weapons." No "retaliatory strikes" were launched, but plans do undoubtedly now exist for them and it's not hard to imagine Bolton and Pompeo persuading Trump to go ahead and use them – with incalculable consequences.

Finally, there's the Persian Gulf itself. Ever since the George W. Bush years, the U.S. Navy has worried about possible clashes with Iran's naval forces in those waters and there have been a number of high-profile incidents. The Obama administration tried (but failed) to establish a hotline of sorts that would have linked U.S. and Iranian naval commanders and so make it easier to defuse any such incident, an initiative championed by then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen, a longtime opponent of war with Iran.

Under Trump, however, all bets are off. Last year, he requested that Mattis prepare plans to blow up Iran's "fast boats," small gunboats in the Gulf, reportedly asking, "Why don't we sink them?" He's already reinforced the U.S. naval presence there, getting Iran's attention. Not surprisingly, the Iranian leadership has responded in kind. Earlier this year, President Hassan Rouhani announced that his country had developed submarines capable of launching cruise missiles against naval targets. The Iranians also began a series of Persian Gulf war games and, in late February, test fired one of those sub-launched missiles.

Add in one more thing: in an eerie replay of a key argument George Bush and Dick Cheney used for going to war with Iraq in 2003, in mid-February the right-wing media outlet *Washington Times* ran an "exclusive" report with this headline: "Iran-Al Qaeda Alliance may provide legal rationale for U.S. military strikes."

Back in 2002, the Office of Special Plans at Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon, under the supervision of neoconservatives Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, spent months trying to prove that al-Qaeda and Iraq were in league. *The Washington Times* piece, citing Trump administration sources, made a similar claim – that Iran is now aiding and abetting al-Qaeda with a "clandestine sanctuary to funnel fighters, money, and weapons across the Middle East."

It added that the administration is seeking to use this information to establish "a potential legal justification for military strikes against Iran or its proxies." Needless to say, few are the terrorism experts or Iran specialists who would agree that Iran has anything like an active relationship with al-Qaeda.

### **Will the Hardliners Triumph in Iran as in Washington?**

The Trump administration is, in fact, experiencing increasing difficulty finding allies ready to join a new Coalition of the Willing to confront Iran. The only two charter members so far,

Israel and Saudi Arabia, are, however, enthusiastic indeed. Last month, Prime Minister Netanyahu was heard remarking that Israel and its Arab allies want war with Iran.

At a less-than-successful mid-February summit meeting Washington organized in Warsaw, Poland, to recruit world leaders for a future crusade against Iran, Netanyahu was heard to say in Hebrew: "This is an open meeting with representatives of leading Arab countries that are sitting down together with Israel in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran." (He later insisted that the correct translation should have been "combating Iran," but the damage had already been done.)

That Warsaw summit was explicitly designed to build an anti-Iranian coalition, but many of America's allies, staunchly opposing Trump's decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear accord, would have nothing to do with it. In an effort to mollify the Europeans in particular, the United States and Poland awkwardly renamed it: "The Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East."

The name change, however, fooled no one. As a result, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo were embarrassed by a series of no-shows: the French, the Germans, and the European Union, among others, flatly declined to send ministerial-level representatives, letting their ambassadors in Warsaw stand in for them. The many Arab nations not in thrall to Saudi Arabia similarly sent only low-level delegations. Turkey and Russia boycotted altogether, convening a summit of their own in which Presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Iran's Rouhani.

Never the smoothest diplomat, Pence condemned, insulted, and vilified the Europeans for refusing to go along with Washington's wrecking-ball approach. He began his speech to the conference by saying: "The time has come for our European partners to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal." He then launched a direct attack on Europe's efforts to preserve that accord by seeking a way around

the sanctions Washington had re-imposed: “Sadly, some of our leading European partners... have led the effort to create mechanisms to break up our sanctions. We call it an effort to break American sanctions against Iran’s murderous revolutionary regime.”

That blast at the European allies should certainly have brought to mind Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s disparaging comments in early 2003 about Germany and France, in particular, being leaders of the “old Europe.” Few allies then backed Washington’s invasion plans, which, of course, didn’t prevent war. Europe’s reluctance now isn’t likely to prove much of a deterrent either.

But Pence is right that the Europeans have taken steps to salvage the Iran nuclear deal, otherwise known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In particular, they’ve created a “special purpose vehicle” known as INSTEX (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges) designed “to support legitimate trade with Iran,” according to a statement from the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Great Britain. It’s potentially a big deal and, as Pence noted, explicitly designed to circumvent the sanctions Washington imposed on Iran after Trump’s break with the JCPOA.

INSTEX has a political purpose, too. The American withdrawal from the JCPOA was a body blow to President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, and other centrists in Tehran who had taken credit for, and pride in, the deal between Iran and the six world powers (the United States, France, Germany, Britain, Russia, and China) that signed the agreement. That deal had been welcomed in Iran in part because it seemed to ensure that country’s ability to expand its trade to the rest of the world, including its oil exports, free of sanctions.

Even before Trump abandoned the deal, however, Iran was already finding U.S. pressure overwhelming and, for the average Iranian, things hadn’t improved in any significant way. Worse yet, in the past year the economy had taken a nosedive, the currency had plunged, inflation was running rampant, and strikes and street

demonstrations had broken out, challenging the government and its clerical leadership. Chants of “Death to the Dictator!” – not heard since the Green Movement’s revolt against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s reelection in 2009 – once again resounded in street demonstrations.

At the end of February, it seemed as if Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo had scored a dangerous victory when Zarif, Iran’s well-known, Western-oriented foreign minister, announced his resignation. Moderates who supported the JCPOA, including Rouhani and Zarif, have been under attack from the country’s hardliners since Trump’s pullout. As a result, Zarif’s decision was widely assumed to be a worrisome sign that those hardliners had claimed their first victim.

There was even unfounded speculation that, without Zarif, who had worked tirelessly with the Europeans to preserve what was left of the nuclear pact, Iran itself might abandon the accord and resume its nuclear program. And there’s no question that the actions and statements of Bolton, Pompeo, and crew have undermined Iran’s moderates, while emboldening its hardliners, who are making I-told-you-so arguments to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country’s supreme leader.

Despite the internal pressure on Zarif, however, his resignation proved short-lived indeed: Rouhani rejected it, and there was an upsurge of support for him in Iran’s parliament. Even General Qassem Soleimani, a major figure in that country’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the commander of the Quds Force, backed him.

As it happens, the Quds Force, an arm of the IRGC, is responsible for Iran’s paramilitary and foreign intelligence operations throughout the region, but especially in Iraq and Syria. That role has allowed Soleimani to assume responsibility for much of Iran’s foreign policy in the region, making him a formidable rival to Zarif – a tension that undoubtedly contributed to his brief



resignation and it isn't likely to dissipate anytime soon.

According to [analysts](#) and [commentators](#), it appears to have been a ploy by Zarif (and perhaps Rouhani, too) to win a vote of political confidence and it appears to have strengthened their hand for the time being.

Still, the Zarif resignation crisis threw into stark relief the deep tensions within Iranian politics and raised a key question: As the Trump administration accelerates its efforts to seek a confrontation, will they find an echo among Iranian hardliners who'd like nothing more than a face-off with the United States?

Maybe that's exactly what Bolton and Pompeo want. If so, prepare yourself: another American war unlikely to work out the way anyone in Washington dreams is on the horizon.

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## Africa's Sovereignty Over Food

Local food and seed systems must be rebuilt for Africans, write Mariam Mayet, Stephen Greenberg and Linzi Lewis.

**By Mariam Mayet, Stephen Greenberg and Linzi Lewis African Centre for Biodiversity**

**in Johannesburg**

Inter Press Service

**A**frica is facing dire times. Climate change is having major impacts on the region and on agriculture in particular, with smallholder farmers –many of them women – facing drought, general lack of water, shifting seasons, and floods in some areas.

Smallholder farmers are often women because in the prevailing division of labor, women are generally responsible for food acquisition and diets. Smallholder farmers are facing the loss of agricultural biodiversity, deforestation, declining soil health and fertility, land and water grabs by the powerful, loss of land access, marginalization and loss of indigenous knowledge and generalized lack of essential services and support.

At the same time, economies are weakening and remain heavily dependent on foreign aid, with extractivist interventions from outside. There is a strong authoritarian orientation in governments in the region, with secrecy and lack of transparency and accountability, weak and fragmented civil society organization and top-down development interventions.

There has been corporate capture of key state institutions, decision making processes and functions. Seed and food systems have been appropriated for multinational corporate profit.

### **Unchecked Corporate Power**

At present, corporate power is almost unchecked in agricultural input supply. The dominant narrative of

agribusinesses being indispensable for feeding the world holds great sway on the continent, where corporations have captured policy making processes.

Although most seed on the continent is sourced from farmers' own savings, sharing and local markets, this system is not recognized in policies and laws in most countries. Instead, farmer seed practices are marginalized and generally denigrated as poor quality and backward.

The predominant thrust of agricultural and seed policy and programming on the continent is to seek to replace them. Multinational corporate interests, with support from key continental, regional and national state institutions and agencies, are driving two trends. One is large-scale commercial industrialization by a global agribusiness coalition, or through a Green Revolution smallholder strategy to integrate a layer of smallholder farmers into corporate value chains for the export of bulk commodity crops such as maize and soya.

Women play an essential role in the selection, saving, and sharing of seeds, as part of a broader network within farmer-managed seed systems, shaping the agricultural diversity that meets needs of local populations. This applies to both staple crops, as well as other food crops. In many ways, this pool of genetic resources, which women continue to develop and maintain, is the backbone of human society.

The restrictions placed over reproductive materials, i.e. seed (including all cultivation materials), and the centralized decision-making around reproduction towards

uniformity, homogeneity, ownership, creates greater inequality, amplified vulnerability and a reliance on external inputs, which places the future of food production at greater risk.

Increasing restrictions on use, lack of support for these activities and even their criminalization makes production conditions more challenging for all smallholder farmers

Restrictions on seed use, what may and may not be produced and how, translate into limits on food diversity at the household level, which is a key element of nutrition.

Since the majority of seed cultivated on the continent is saved on farms, exchanged and locally traded by farmers, this provides a solid base for alternative seed sovereignty systems to thrive outside the credit and corporate market.

For small-holder farmers in Africa, the importance of farmer seed systems as central to conserving biodiversity, ensuring nutrition diversity and supporting livelihoods has been highlighted in a huge body of work over the past 30 or 40 years.

However, these systems can benefit from external support. A key priority for smallholder farmers in Africa is resilience in the face of harsh weather events. This requires seed variety adaptation and greater agricultural diversity. Women are the primary custodians of our seed diversity, the custodians of reproduction, of life. This highlights the struggles of farmers' rights, of reproductive rights, to self-determination, and to maintain life-supporting systems.

An ecological, food-systems-transition coalition, based on

agroecology and food sovereignty, has found some traction in Africa and globally, but remains relatively weak, fragmented and under-resourced.

Farmers, with support from civil society groups, are doing important work on agroecology and sustainable agriculture, but are often unable to break out of their localized practices.

These need to urgently connect with others on the continent into a bigger and more coherent movement for change, especially radical feminist movements on the continent.

Together, we can fight back and contest the hegemony of large-scale commercial farming and corporate agri-business. We must, together, rebuild and strengthen local food and seed systems for all Africans.

**The [African Centre for Biodiversity \(ACB\)](#) is a nonprofit organization based in South Africa with staff in Tanzania. It carries out research and analysis, learning and exchange, capacity and movement building, and advocacy to widen awareness, catalyze collective action and influence decision making on issues of biosafety, genetic modification (GM) and new technologies, seed laws, farmer seed systems, agricultural biodiversity, agroecology, corporate expansion in African agriculture, and food sovereignty in Africa.**

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