

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

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

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

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

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

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

## **Mortality Studies vs Passive Reporting**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

squads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Minimum and Maximum Range**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

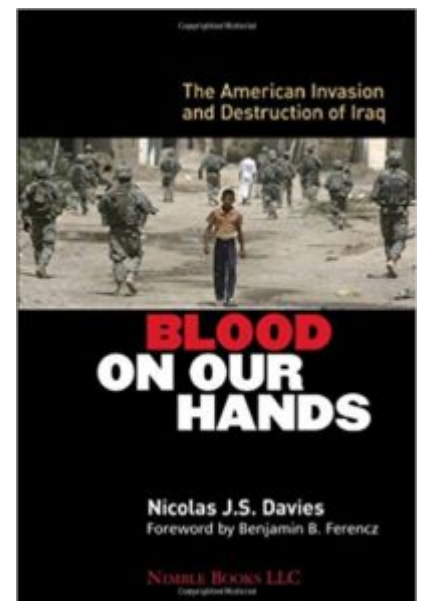
It is very important that the public health community provide the world with accurate and up-to-date mortality surveys of Iraq and other post-9/11 war zones.

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

By Inder Comar

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

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

Aggression: the supreme international crime.

A crime that was banned at Nuremberg.

A crime which sent Nazi leaders to the gallows.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Today, President Trump claims the authority and the power:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These three reasons are of course related.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this does not have to be our future.

There is another way.

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

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

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

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

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

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

cannot go unpunished.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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# Senate Votes to Continue Yemen Devastation

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

By Dennis J. Bernstein

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



continue aid to the Saudis?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Gilbert Doctorow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## American Public Troubled by 'Deep State'

Although most Americans are unfamiliar with the term 'Deep State,' according to recent polling they are nevertheless skeptical of unelected government and military officials who secretly manipulate or direct national policy, John V. Walsh reports.

By John V. Walsh

"Public Troubled by Deep State" is the headline that the Monmouth University Polling Institute tags to its [recent poll](#). Acknowledging that polling about the term "Deep State" is problematic because "few Americans (13%) are very familiar with the term 'Deep State,'" the pollsters at Monmouth defined the term as follows for their interviewees: "The term Deep State refers to the possible existence of a group of unelected government and military officials who secretly manipulate or direct national policy."

Then they asked whether such a group exists.

Monmouth reports the results as follows: "Nearly 3-in-4 (74%) say they believe this type of apparatus exists in Washington. This includes 27% who say it definitely exists and 47% who say it probably exists. Only 1-in-5 say it does not exist (16% probably not and 5% definitely not)."

These opinions do not follow a partisan divide. The report explains that belief in the Deep State's existence "comes from more than 7-in-10 Americans in each partisan group, although Republicans (31%) and independents (33%) are somewhat more likely than Democrats (19%) to say that the Deep State definitely exists."

This leads the director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute, Patrick Murray, to volunteer: "We usually expect opinions on the operation of government to shift depending on which party is in charge. But there's an ominous feeling by Democrats and Republicans alike that a 'Deep State' of unelected operatives are pulling the levers of power."

In addition, there are some significant but not drastic racial and ethnic differences on this question. Says the report, "Americans of black, Latino and Asian backgrounds (35%) are more likely than non-Hispanic whites (23%) to say that the Deep State definitely exists."

The report also asked about government surveillance of the citizenry and here again there is widespread concern: Fully 8-in-10 believe that the U.S. government currently monitors or spies on the activities of American citizens, including a majority (53%) who say this activity is widespread and another 29% who say such monitoring happens but is not widespread. Just 14% say this monitoring does not happen at all. There are no substantial partisan differences in these results.

This too causes the director of the Institute to be concerned. "This is a worrisome finding. The strength of our government relies on public faith in protecting our freedoms, which is not particularly robust. And it's not a Democratic or Republican issue. These concerns span the political spectrum," says director Murray.

We can add to the concern about a manipulative unelected apparatus at work in the government the widespread distrust of the press summarized in this [recent Gallup/Knight poll](#):

"\*Today, 66% of Americans say most news media do not do a good job of separating fact from opinion. In 1984, 42% held this view.

"\*Less than half of Americans, 44%, say they can think of a news source that reports the news objectively.

"\*On a multiple-item media trust scale with scores ranging from a low of zero to a high of 100, the average American scores a 37."

This paints a pretty grim picture of trust in both our government and our media. Perhaps "Deep Media" should be a term added to "Deep State."

But perhaps it is cause for optimism. It seems that people are waking up and thinking for themselves. This is, perhaps, good news for those who are trying to end U.S. wars being ginned up by the Deep State.

**John V. Walsh can be reached at [john.endwar@gmail.com](mailto:john.endwar@gmail.com)**

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## The New CIA Director Nominee and the Massacre at My Lai

Protecting those who commit heinous crimes in the name of the U.S. government provides a dangerous precedent and could lead to the conclusion by many in the military and CIA that they can "get away with murder," Ann Wright observes.

By Ann Wright

On March 16, 2018, the same day I was with a delegation from Veterans for Peace at the 50th annual ceremonies commemorating the deaths of 504 civilians who were murdered by U.S. Army soldiers over a period of four hours on March 16, 1968, in the hamlet of My Lai, Viet Nam and surrounding villages, President Donald Trump nominated Gina Haspel to be the new CIA Director.

That day therefore became a day of remembering murder and torture committed by members of the U.S. government a half-century ago—and much more recently in 2002.

We know what the U.S. Army soldiers did 50 years ago. In what is now called the My Lai massacre, U.S. soldiers executed 182 women including 17 pregnant women and raped many of them before they were killed. They murdered 173 children, 68 of whom were five years old or younger and they executed 89 middle aged persons and 60 persons over the age of 60, some of whom were burned alive, tortured, gang-raped, scalped and had their tongues cut out during the rampage of the U.S. Army soldiers.

And we now know that Gina Haspel, President Trump's nominee for CIA director was the CIA senior officer in charge of a secret CIA prison in Thailand in 2002 in which prisoners were tortured – waterboarded (one person 82 times), kept in dog cages for weeks at a time, put into coffin boxes with things they were afraid of. To cover up her crimes, she ordered the destruction of the videotapes of the torture that happened in her prison.

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Army chain of command covered up the My Lai massacre and attempted to malign those who made the massacre public. Army veteran Ron Ridenhour described what had happened in letters to the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and others.

Helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson testified before Congress that he saw U.S. Army personnel killing Vietnamese civilians and landed his helicopter near the killing fields to end the rampage. He was told by the platoon leader Lieutenant William Calley to butt out, but instead Thompson picked up civilians running from the carnage and flew them to safety.

After several years of investigation, out of 26 men initially charged, Calley was the only person court-martialed and found guilty – of killing 22 villagers, and given a life sentence, but served only three and a half years under house arrest at Fort Bragg, NC and never spent one day in jail. President Nixon ultimately pardoned Calley.

Forty years later, in 2007, CIA whistleblower Jon Kiriakou revealed to the world



that the CIA was waterboarding prisoners in secret and not-so-secret prisons in many parts of the world.

Kiriakou was imprisoned for almost two years for revealing that the CIA was torturing persons but none of those – including CIA director nominee Gina Haspel – who made torture a policy of the CIA or actually committed the acts of torture, including waterboarding, were ever charged with a crime.

The protection of those who commit heinous crimes in the name of the U.S. government (by the government in whose name the crimes are committed) provides a dangerous precedent and could lead to the conclusion by many in the military and CIA that they can “get away with murder.”

The sad history of our country is that murders and executions (remember the extrajudicial drone assassinations ordered by Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump) are acts that continue to be the policy of our country. These acts are known throughout the world, but seldom spoken about in the United States. That President Trump would nominate a known torturer to be the director of the CIA is horrific. Her confirmation by the U.S. Congress would be a tragedy.

For what little credibility the U.S. left in the world, the Congress must refuse to confirm a known torturer as director of the CIA.

**Ann Wright was in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves for 29 years and retired as a Colonel. She was also a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to Bush’s war on Iraq and since then has been very active in anti-war and social justice issues. She is the co-author of “Dissent: Voices of Conscience.”**

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## Trump Supports ‘Space Force’ For War-Making And Dominance in Space

Calls by Trump for a new ‘Space Force’ could further the potential of an armed showdown between US and foreign powers, such as China and Russia, reports Dennis J Bernstein in this interview with peace activist Bruce Gagnon.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In the few dreamy moments between his various personal dramas and dramas of

State, Trump has been floating the idea of creating a 'Space Force' to fight wars in space. Bruce Gagnon is concerned. Last Thursday, March 15, Gagnon, coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space said, "The aerospace industry sees an opportunity to expand their profit capability by the creation of a new 'Space Force' that would direct the expanding U.S. war-making program in space.

"The industry," Gagnon continued, "has been pushing Congress to authorize this new separate service while the leadership of the Air Force have opposed the plan claiming that it would increase inefficiency and bureaucracy. In the recent NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] it was mandated that the Air Force increase their focus on space and make it a higher priority."

When I reached Gagnon in Maine, he was on the 31st day of a hunger strike protesting a corporate welfare bill for General Dynamics in Maine, where he lives. Nevertheless, he was quite strong and coherent about his opposition to the aggressive and highly costly US program toward full dominance in Space.

And he warns of the power of the aerospace industry to control the day. "Last year a bill to create a separate 'Space Force' passed the House but failed to be approved by the Senate," he said. "Trump's endorsement of the 'Space Force' concept indicates that the aerospace industry has found a strong ally in the White House and the pressure on the Senate to approve the plan will now increase dramatically."

I spoke to Gagnon in Maine on Wednesday, March 14th, 2018.

**Dennis Bernstein:** You are on the 31st day of a hunger strike. Tell us about the strike and why it is happening.

**Bruce Gagnon:** General Dynamics, which owns Bath Iron Works in my hometown of Heron, Maine, builds destroyers for the navy, which are being sent off to encircle Russia and China with so-called "missile defense systems." General Dynamics is demanding from our very poor state \$60 million that we don't have. They don't need it, they made \$3 billion in profits last year. They are also asking Connecticut for \$150 million and they have already gotten \$20 million from Rhode Island. I have been organizing a campaign across the state to try to block this.

**DB:** How are you doing, by the way?

**BG:** Well, my mind is getting a little foggier, as you will probably notice in this interview.

**DB:** Why a hunger strike? Why put your life on the line?

**BG:** I did it for two reasons. Number one, when I came home from a public hearing on this bill before the taxation committee in our capital, I was cursing the whole way home. I said that night that if I don't go on a hunger strike I'm going to have a heart attack before this is over.

The political reason is that, because this bill is being sponsored by two Democrats from our local community and has the support of the Democratic Party leadership, a lot of Democratic front groups in the state that work on social justice have been told to stay away from this. So it is really the peace community that has been organizing this. I knew that if I did a hunger strike more people would be inspired to get involved.

**DB:** Tell us about this new concept of a "space force." What is it, what is it meant to do, and do we really need it?

**BG:** Like the Air Force or the Army or the Navy, this is meant to be a separate branch of the military. The aerospace industry are the people who are really pushing this. They know that if they can get established a separate entity, they can make even more money. They have long said that "Star Wars" would be the largest industrial project in history.

In an industry publication years ago, they wrote that they would have to come up with a dedicated funding source to pay for all of this and they referred to it as the entitlement program. That is why today we see efforts in Congress to defund those programs and move the money into this very expensive "Star Wars" program.

Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein, told reporters recently, "The nation expects its Air Force to own the ultimate high ground and to achieve space superiority which, like air superiority, means freedom to attack and freedom to maneuver." As the United States encircles Russia and China today militarily, trying to bring about regime change in those countries, space superiority becomes a linchpin in that whole strategy.

In the last NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] there was a provision that said that the Air Force had to put more effort into the space operation. The bill passed the House and then was sent to the Senate where it failed, largely because the Air Force is opposed to it, saying that it will create inefficiencies and more bureaucracy.

But as a result of the latest NDAA passing, a division has been created within the Air Force that will direct the US space command and will be headquartered in Washington. This is part of a broader effort by the Air Force to comply with this legislative mandate to focus on space and to make it a high priority. The

aerospace industry is pushing hard and has a lot of power in Washington and, as we have seen, they have Trump's ear.

**DB:** The seeds for this sort of program have been laid since at least Clinton with the move to try to control the entire world from space.

**BG:** Most people think of the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] program initiated under Reagan. When Clinton came in, he basically announced that we were shutting down SDI. But what people didn't know is that he basically shifted funding over to a program called BMDO [Ballistic Missile Defense Organization], which did the same research and development. When George W. Bush became president he changed the name again, to Missile Defense Agency. Now we are moving into whole new realms of space weapon technology development.

Obviously, Russia doesn't want this. They have been going to the UN since the Clinton years begging the United States to join them in negotiating a treaty called PAROS, Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. The US position has always been that there is no arms race and so there is no need to negotiate this treaty.

**DB:** This program has everything to do with the kind of negotiations that the new secretary of state [Mike Pompeo] is going to push for [if he is approved by Congress]. This is all about controlling the powerhouses of this new century through full dominance in space. This is what is really going on behind the scenes when the United States threatens North Korea as being the aggressor.

**BG:** That's right. North Korea is a sideshow to justify US massive investment in weapons technology in the region. Remember that it was Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama who came up with the "Pivot to Asia," whereby we would move 60% of US military forces into Asia to encircle both China and Russia.

As a result, they need more ports of call for their ships, such as on Jeju Island, they need more airfields as we see in Okinawa, more barracks for US soldiers such as those being built in Darwin, Australia. And now we are seeing NATO expanding into the Asian Pacific.

**DB:** The worst polluter in the world is the United States military. The US pulled out of the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] treaty in 2002 and ever since then it has been "full spectrum dominance" all the way.

**BG:** It is really about China and Russia saying, "We want a multi-polar world where many countries are involved in the economy of the world and dealing with the security issues of the planet." The United States recognizes that it only has about two or three years to try to take down Russia and China before they reach a point where they cannot be taken down.

What Putin has said is, we don't want war, but we are not going to let you control and dominate space. Missile defense is really the shield the US will use after launching a first-strike attack.

**DB:** Does General Dynamics stand to gain from this "space force" scenario?

**BG:** Oh, yes. These destroyers they build in my community are equipped with one of these missile defense systems, called SM3 interceptors. They park the ships very close to Russia and China so that they can pick off a retaliatory strike. They are also putting these systems on the ground in Romania and Poland, right up on the border to Russia.

**DB:** Has the industry essentially bought off Congress to push this new space program forward?

**BG:** Absolutely, Republicans and Democrats alike. That is the reality of America. We have been hollowed out and turned into a country that builds weapons. Our number-one export product today is weapons. Then what becomes your global marketing strategy?

**DB:** How would you estimate the amount of money that is being sucked into this permanent war economy?

**BG:** All told, we are spending a trillion dollars a year on the military. It is a massive amount of money and that is why there is no money for social programs, for environmental clean-up, for combating climate change. Military spending is by far the worst way to create jobs.

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

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## Iraq +15: Accumulated Evil of the Whole

Brushing aside warnings that he was about to unleash Armageddon in the Middle East, George W. Bush launched an unprovoked attack on Iraq on March 19-20, 2003, the ramifications of which we are still grappling with today, Nat Parry writes.

By Nat Parry

Robert Jackson, the Chief United States Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals, once denounced aggressive war as "the greatest menace of our

time.” With much of Europe laying in smoldering ruin, he said in 1945 that “to initiate a war of aggression ... is not only an international crime: it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of whole.”

When it comes to the U.S. invasion of Iraq 15 years ago today, the accumulated evil of the whole is difficult to fully comprehend. Estimates of the war’s costs vary, but commonly cited figures put the financial cost for U.S. taxpayers at upwards of a trillion dollars, the cost in Iraqi lives in the hundreds of thousands, and U.S. soldier deaths at nearly 5,000. Another 100,000 Americans have been wounded and four million Iraqis driven from their homes as refugees.

As staggering as those numbers may be, they don’t come close to describing the true cost of the war, or the magnitude of the crime that was committed by launching it on March 19-20, 2003. Besides the cost in blood and treasure, the cost to basic principles of international justice, long-term geopolitical stability, and the impacts on the U.S. political system are equally profound.

### **Lessons Learned and Forgotten**

Although for a time, it seemed that the lessons of the war were widely understood and had tangible effects on American politics – with Democrats, for example, taking control of Congress in the midterm elections of 2006 based primarily on growing antiwar sentiment around the country and Barack Obama defeating Hillary Clinton in the 2008 primaries based largely on the two candidates’ opposing views on the Iraq War – the political establishment has, since then, effectively swept these lessons under the rug.

One of those lessons, of course, was that proclamations of the intelligence community should be treated with huge grain of salt. In the build-up to war with Iraq a decade and a half ago, there were those who pushed back on the politicized and “cherry-picked” intelligence that the Bush administration was using to convince the American people of the need to go to war, but for the most part, the media and political establishment parroted these claims without showing the due diligence of independently confirming the claims or even applying basic principles of logic.

For example, even as United Nations weapons inspectors, led by Swedish diplomat Hans Blix, were coming up empty-handed when acting on tips from the U.S. intelligence community, few within the mainstream media were willing to draw the logical conclusion that the intelligence was wrong (or that the Bush administration was lying). Instead, they assumed that the UN inspectors were simply incompetent or that Saddam Hussein was just really good at hiding his weapons of mass destruction.

Yet, despite being misled so thoroughly back in 2002 and 2003, today Americans show the same credulousness to the intelligence community when it claims that “Russia hacked the 2016 election,” without offering proof. Liberals, in particular, have hitched their wagons to the investigation being led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is widely hailed as a paragon of virtue, while the truth is, as FBI Director during the Bush administration, he was a key enabler of the WMD narrative used to launch an illegal war.

Mueller testified to Congress that “Iraq has moved to the top of my list” of threats to the domestic security of the United States. “As we previously briefed this Committee,” Mueller said on February 11, 2003, “Iraq’s WMD program poses a clear threat to our national security.” He warned that Baghdad might provide WMDs to al-Qaeda to carry out a catastrophic attack in the United States.

Mueller drew criticism at the time, including from FBI whistleblower Coleen Rowley, for conflating Iraq and al-Qaeda, with demands that the FBI produce whatever evidence it had on this supposed connection.

Today, of course, Mueller is celebrated by Democrats as the best hope for bringing down the presidency of Donald Trump. George W. Bush has also enjoyed a revival of his image thanks largely to his public criticisms of Trump, with a majority of Democrats now viewing the 43rd president favorably. Many Democrats have also embraced aggressive war – often couched in the rhetoric of “humanitarian interventionism” – as their preferred option to deal with foreign policy challenges such as the Syrian conflict.

When the Democratic Party chose Clinton as its nominee in 2016, it appeared that Democrats had also embraced her willingness to use military force to achieve “regime change” in countries that are seen as a threat to U.S. interests – whether Iraq, Iran or Syria.

As a senator from New York during the build-up for military action against Iraq, Clinton not only voted to authorize the U.S. invasion, but fervently supported the war – which she backed with or without UN Security Council authorization. Her speech on the floor of the Senate on Oct. 10, 2002 arguing for military action promoted the same falsehoods that were being used by the Bush administration to build support for the war, claiming for example that Saddam Hussein had “given aid, comfort, and sanctuary to terrorists, including al-Qaeda members.”

“If left unchecked,” she said, “Saddam Hussein will continue to increase his capacity to wage biological and chemical warfare, and will keep trying to develop nuclear weapons. Should he succeed in that endeavor, he could alter the political and security landscape of the Middle East, which as we know all too

well affects American security.”

Clinton maintained support for the war even as it became obvious that Iraq in fact had no weapons of mass destruction – the primary *casus belli* for the war – only cooling her enthusiasm in 2006 when it became clear that the Democratic base had turned decisively against the war and her hawkish position endangered her chances for the 2008 presidential nomination. But eight years later, the Democrats had apparently moved on, and her support for the war was no longer considered a disqualification for the presidency.

One of the lessons that should be recalled today, especially as the U.S. gears up today for possible confrontations with countries including North Korea and Russia, is how easy it was in 2002-2003 for the Bush administration to convince Americans that they were under threat from the regime of Saddam Hussein some 7,000 miles away. The claims about Iraq’s WMDs were untrue, with many saying so in real time – including by the newly formed group Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which was regularly issuing memoranda to the president and to the American people debunking the falsehoods that were being promoted by the U.S. intelligence community.

But even if the claims about Iraq’s alleged stockpiles were true, there was still no reason to assume that Saddam Hussein was on the verge of launching a surprise attack against the United States. Indeed, while Americans were all but convinced that Iraq threatened their safety and security, it was actually the U.S. government that was threatening Iraqis.

Far from posing an imminent threat to the United States, in 2003, Iraq was a country that had already been devastated by a U.S.-led war a decade earlier and crippling economic sanctions that caused the deaths of 1.5 million Iraqis (leading to the resignation of two UN humanitarian coordinators who called the sanctions genocidal).

### **Threats and Bluster**

Although the invasion didn’t officially begin until March 20, 2003 (still the 19th in Washington), the United States had been explicitly threatening to attack the country as early as January 2003, with the Pentagon publicizing plans for a so-called “shock and awe” bombing campaign.

“If the Pentagon sticks to its current war plan,” CBS News reported on January 24, “one day in March the Air Force and Navy will launch between 300 and 400 cruise missiles at targets in Iraq. ... [T]his is more than the number that were launched during the entire 40 days of the first Gulf War. On the second day, the plan calls for launching another 300 to 400 cruise missiles.”



A Pentagon official warned: "There will not be a safe place in Baghdad."

These public threats appeared to be a form of intimidation and psychological warfare, and were almost certainly in violation of the UN Charter, which states: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

The Pentagon's vaunted "shock and awe" attack began with limited bombing on March 19-20, as U.S. forces unsuccessfully attempted to kill Hussein. Attacks continued against a small number of targets until March 21, when the main bombing campaign began. U.S.-led forces launched approximately 1,700 air sorties, with 504 using cruise missiles.

During the invasion, the U.S. also dropped some 10,800 cluster bombs on Iraq despite claiming that only a fraction of that number had been used.

"The Pentagon presented a misleading picture during the war of the extent to which cluster weapons were being used and of the civilian casualties they were causing," reported USA Today in late 2003. Despite claims that only 1,500 cluster weapons had been used resulting in just one civilian casualty, "in fact, the United States used 10,782 cluster weapons," including many that were fired into urban areas from late March to early April 2003.

The cluster bombs killed hundreds of Iraqi civilians and left behind thousands of unexploded bomblets that continued to kill and injure civilians weeks after the fighting stopped.

(Because of the indiscriminate effect of these weapons, their use is banned by the international Convention on Cluster Munitions, which the United States has refused to sign.)

Attempting to kill Hussein, Bush ordered the bombing of an Iraqi residential restaurant on April 7. A single B-1B bomber dropped four precision-guided 2,000-pound bombs. The four bunker-penetrating bombs destroyed the target building, the al Saa restaurant block and several surrounding structures, leaving a 60-foot crater and unknown casualties.

Diners, including children, were ripped apart by the bombs. One mother found her daughter's torso and then her severed head. U.S. intelligence later confirmed that Hussein wasn't there.

## **Resistance and Torture**

It was evident within weeks of the initial invasion that the Bush administration had misjudged the critical question of whether Iraqis would fight. They put up stiffer than expected resistance even in southern Iraqi cities such as Umm Qasr, Basra and Nasiriya where Hussein's support was considered weak, and soon after the fall of the regime on April 9, when the Bush administration decided to disband the Iraqi army, it helped spark an anti-U.S. insurgency led by many former Iraqi military figures.

Despite Bush's triumphant May 1 landing on an aircraft carrier and his speech in front of a giant "Mission Accomplished" banner, it looked as though the collapse of the Baathist government had been just the first stage in what would become a long-running war of attrition. After the Iraqi conventional forces had been disbanded, the U.S. military began to notice in May 2003 a steadily increasing flurry of attacks on U.S. occupiers in various regions of the so-called "Sunni Triangle."

These included groups of insurgents firing assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades at U.S. occupation troops, as well as increasing use of improvised explosive devices on U.S. convoys.

Possibly anticipating a long, drawn-out occupation and counter-insurgency campaign, in a March 2003 memorandum Bush administration lawyers devised legal doctrines to justify certain torture techniques, offering legal rationales "that could render specific conduct, otherwise criminal, not unlawful."

They argued that the president or anyone acting on the president's orders were not bound by U.S. laws or international treaties prohibiting torture, asserting that the need for "obtaining intelligence vital to the protection of untold thousands of American citizens" superseded any obligations the administration had under domestic or international law.

"In order to respect the President's inherent constitutional authority to manage a military campaign," the memo stated, U.S. prohibitions against torture "must be construed as inapplicable to interrogations undertaken pursuant to his Commander-in-Chief authority."

Over the course of the next year, disclosures emerged that torture had been used extensively in Iraq for "intelligence gathering." Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh disclosed in The New Yorker in May 2004 that a 53-page classified Army report written by Gen. Antonio Taguba concluded that Abu Ghraib prison's military police were urged on by intelligence officers seeking to break down the Iraqis before interrogation.

"Numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses were

inflicted on several detainees,” wrote Taguba.

These actions, authorized at the highest levels, constituted serious breaches of international and domestic law, including the Convention Against Torture, the Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of Prisoners of War, as well as the U.S. War Crimes Act and the Torture Statute.

They also may have played a role in the rise of the ISIS terror group, the origins of which were subsequently traced to an American prison in Iraq dubbed Camp Bucca. This camp was the site of rampant abuse of prisoners, one of whom, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, later became the leader of ISIS. Al-Baghdadi spent four years as a prisoner at Bucca, where he started recruiting others to his cause.

### **America’s Weapons of Mass Destruction**

Besides torture and the use of cluster bombs, the crimes against the Iraqi people over the years included wholesale massacres, long-term poisoning and the destruction of cities.

There was the 2004 assault on Fallujah in which white phosphorus – banned under international law – was used against civilians. There was the 2005 Haditha massacre, in which 24 unarmed civilians were systematically murdered by U.S. marines. There was the 2007 “Collateral Murder” massacre revealed by WikiLeaks in 2010, depicting the indiscriminate killing of more than a dozen civilians in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad – including two Reuters news staff.

There is also the tragic legacy of cancer and birth defects caused by the U.S. military’s extensive use of depleted uranium and white phosphorus. In Fallujah the use of depleted uranium led to birth defects in infants 14 times higher than in the Japanese cities targeted by U.S. atomic bombs at close of World War II, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Noting the birth defects in Fallujah, Al Jazeera journalist Dahr Jamail told Democracy Now in 2013:

“And going on to Fallujah, because I wrote about this a year ago, and then I returned to the city again this trip, we are seeing an absolute crisis of congenital malformations of newborn. ... I mean, these are extremely hard to look at. They’re extremely hard to bear witness to. But it’s something that we all need to pay attention to, because of the amount of depleted uranium used by the U.S. military during both of their brutal attacks on the city of 2004, as well as other toxic munitions like white phosphorus, among other things.”

A report sent to the UN General Assembly by Dr. Nawal Majeed Al-Sammarai, Iraq’s Minister of Women’s Affairs, stated that in September 2009, Fallujah General Hospital had 170 babies born, 75 percent of whom were deformed. A quarter of them died within their first week of life.

The military's use of depleted uranium also caused a sharp increase in Leukemia and birth defects in the city of Najaf, which saw one of the most severe military actions during the 2003 invasion, with cancer becoming more common than the flu according to local doctors.

By the end of the war, a number of Iraq's major cities, including Fallujah, Ramadi, and Mosul, had been reduced to rubble and by 2014, a former CIA director conceded that the nation of Iraq had basically been destroyed.

"I think Iraq has pretty much ceased to exist," said Michael Hayden, noting that it was fragmented into multiple parts which he didn't see "getting back together." In other words, the United States, using its own extensive arsenal of actual weapons of mass destruction, had completely destroyed a sovereign nation.

### **Predictable Consequences**

The effects of these policies included the predictable growth of Islamic extremism, with a National Intelligence Estimate – representing the consensus view of the 16 spy services inside the U.S. government – warning in 2006 that a whole new generation of Islamic radicalism was being spawned by the U.S. occupation of Iraq. According to one American intelligence official, the consensus was that "the Iraq war has made the overall terrorism problem worse."

The assessment noted that several underlying factors were "fueling the spread of the jihadist movement," including "entrenched grievances, such as corruption, injustice, and fear of Western domination, leading to anger, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness," and "pervasive anti-U.S. sentiment among most Muslims all of which jihadists exploit."

But rather than leading to substantive changes or reversals in U.S. policies, the strategy agreed upon in Washington seemed to be to double down on the failed policies that had given rise to radical jihadist groups. In fact, instead of withdrawing from Iraq, the U.S. decided to send a surge of 20,000 troops in 2007. This is despite the fact that public opinion was decidedly against the war.

A Newsweek poll in early 2007 found that 68 percent of Americans opposed the surge, and in another poll conducted just after Bush's 2007 State of the Union Address, 64 percent said Congress was not being assertive enough in challenging the Bush administration over its conduct of the war.

An estimated half-million people marched on Washington on Jan. 27, 2007, with messages for the newly sworn in 110th Congress to "Stand up to Bush," urging Congress to cut the war funding with the slogan, "Not one more dollar, not one more death." A growing combativeness was also on display in the antiwar movement

with this demonstration marked by hundreds of protesters breaking through police lines and charging Capitol Hill.

Although there were additional large-scale protests a couple months later to mark the sixth anniversary of the invasion, including a march on the Pentagon led by Iraq War veterans, over the next year the antiwar movement's activities steadily declined. While fatigue might explain some of the waning support for mass mobilizations, much of the decline can also surely be explained by the rise of Barack Obama's candidacy. Millions of people channeled their energies into his campaign, including many motivated by a hope that he represented real change from the Bush years.

One of Obama's advantages over Clinton in the Democratic primary was that he had been an early opponent of the Iraq War while she had been one of its most vocal supporters. This led many American voters to believe in 2008 that they had elected someone who might rein in some of the U.S. military adventurism and quickly end U.S. involvement in Iraq. But this wasn't to be the case. The combat mission dragged on well into President Obama's first term.

### **War, War and More War**

After its well-publicized failures in Iraq, the U.S. turned its attention to Libya, overthrowing the government of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 utilizing armed militias implicated in war crimes and backed with NATO air power. Following Gaddafi's ouster, his caches of weapons ended up being shuttled to rebels in Syria, fueling the civil war there. The Obama administration also took a keen interest in destabilizing the Syrian government and to do so began providing arms that often fell into the hands of extremists.

The CIA trained and armed so-called "moderate" rebel units in Syria, only to watch these groups switch sides by joining forces with Islamist brigades such as ISIS and Al Qaeda's affiliate the Nusra Front. Others surrendered to Sunni extremist groups with the U.S.-provided weapons presumably ending up in the arsenals of jihadists or sometimes just quit or went missing altogether.

Beyond Syria and Libya, Obama also expanded U.S. military engagements in countries including Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and sent a surge of troops to Afghanistan in 2009. And despite belatedly withdrawing U.S. forces from Iraq, with the last U.S. troops finally leaving on December 18, 2011, Obama also presided over a major increase in the use of drone strikes and conventional air wars.

In his first term, Obama dropped 20,000 bombs and missiles, a number that shot up to over 100,000 bombs and missiles dropped in his second term. In 2016, the

final year of Obama's presidency, the U.S. dropped nearly three bombs every hour, 24 hours a day.

Obama also had the distinction of becoming the fourth U.S. president in a row to bomb the nation of Iraq. Under criticism for allowing the rise of ISIS in the country, Obama decided to reverse his earlier decision to disengage with Iraq, and in 2014 started bombing the country again. Addressing the American people on Sept. 10, 2014, President Obama said that "ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and the broader Middle East including American citizens, personnel and facilities."

"If left unchecked," he continued, "these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies."

Of course, this is precisely the result that many voices of caution had warned about back in 2002 and 2003, when millions of Americans were taking to the streets in protest of the looming invasion of Iraq. And, to be clear, it wasn't just the antiwar left urging restraint – establishment figures and paleoconservatives were also voicing concern.

Retired Gen. Anthony Zinni, for example, who served as a Middle East envoy for George W. Bush, warned in October 2002 that by invading Iraq, "we are about to do something that will ignite a fuse in this region that we will rue the day we ever started." Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser in the first Bush administration, said a strike on Iraq "could unleash an Armageddon in the Middle East."

No matter, Bush was a gut player who had made up his mind, so those warnings were brushed aside and the invasion proceeded.

## **Campaign 2016**

When presidential candidate Donald Trump began slamming Bush for the Iraq War during the Republican primary campaign in 2015 and 2016, calling the decision to invade Iraq a "big fat mistake," he not only won over some of the antiwar libertarian vote, but also helped solidify his image as a political outsider who "tells it like it is."

And after Hillary Clinton emerged as the Democratic nominee, with her track record as an enthusiastic backer of virtually all U.S. interventions and an advocate of deeper involvement in countries such as Syria, voters could have been forgiven for getting the impression that the Republican Party was now the antiwar party and the Democrats were the hawks.

As the late Robert Parry observed in June 2016, “Amid the celebrations about picking the first woman as a major party’s presumptive nominee, Democrats appear to have given little thought to the fact that they have abandoned a near half-century standing as the party more skeptical about the use of military force. Clinton is an unabashed war hawk who has shown no inclination to rethink her pro-war attitudes.”

The antiwar faction within the Democratic Party was further marginalized during the Democratic National Convention when chants of “No More War” broke out during former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta’s speech. The Democratic establishment responded with chants of “USA!” to drown out the voices for peace and they even turned the lights out on the antiwar section of the crowd. The message was clear: there is no room for the antiwar movement inside the Democratic Party.

While there were numerous factors that played a role in Trump’s stunning victory over Clinton in November 2016, it is no stretch of the imagination to speculate that one of those factors was lingering antiwar sentiment from the Iraq debacle and other engagements of the U.S. military. Many of those fed up with U.S. military adventurism may have fallen for Trump’s quasi-anti-interventionist rhetoric while others may have opted to vote for an alternative party such as the Libertarians or the Greens, both of which took strong stances against U.S. interventionism.

But despite Trump’s occasional statements questioning the wisdom of committing the military to far-off lands such as Iraq or Afghanistan, he was also an advocate for war crimes such as “taking out [the] families” of suspected terrorists. He urged that the U.S. stop being “politically correct” in its waging of war.

So, ultimately, Americans were confronted with choosing between an unreconstructed regime-changing neoconservative Democratic hawk, and a reluctant interventionist who nevertheless wanted to teach terrorists a lesson by killing their children. Although ultimately the neocon won the popular vote, the war crimes advocate carried the Electoral College.

Following the election it turned out that Trump was a man of his word when it came to killing children. In one of his first military actions as president, Trump ordered an attack on a village in Yemen on Jan. 29, 2017, which claimed the lives of as many as 23 civilians, including a newborn baby and an eight-year-old girl, Nawar al-Awlaki.

Nawar was the daughter of the al-Qaeda propagandist and American citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed in a September 2011 U.S. drone strike in Yemen.

## Normalized Aggression

2017, Trump's first year in office, turned out to be the deadliest year for civilians in Iraq and Syria since U.S. airstrikes began on the two countries in 2014. The U.S. killed between 3,923 and 6,102 civilians during the year, according to a tally by the monitoring group Airwars. "Non-combatant deaths from Coalition air and artillery strikes rose by more than 200 per cent compared to 2016," Airwars noted.

While this spike in civilian deaths did make some headlines, including in the *Washington Post*, for the most part, the thousands of innocents killed by U.S. airstrikes are dismissed as "collateral damage." The ongoing carnage is considered perfectly normal, barely even eliciting a comment from the pundit class.

This is arguably one of the most enduring legacies of the 2003 invasion of Iraq – an act of military aggression that was based on false pretenses, which brushed aside warnings of caution, and blatantly violated international law. With no one in the media or the Bush administration ever held accountable for promoting this war or for launching it, what we have seen is the normalization of military aggression to a level that would have been unimaginable 20 years ago.

Indeed, I remember well the bombing of Iraq that took place in 1998 as part of Bill Clinton's Operation Desert Fox. Although this was a very limited bombing campaign, lasting only four days, there were sizable protests in opposition to the military action. I joined a picket of a couple hundred people in front of the White House holding a hand-made sign reading "IMPEACH HIM FOR WAR CRIMES" – a reference to the fact that Congress was at the time impeaching him for lying about a blowjob.

Compare that to what we see today – or, more accurately what we don't see today – in regards to antiwar advocacy. Despite the fact that the U.S. is now engaged in at least seven military conflicts, there is little in the way of peace activism or even much of a national debate over the wisdom, legality or morality of waging war. Few even raise objections to its significant financial cost to U.S. taxpayers, for example the fact that one day of spending on these wars amounts to about \$200 million.

Fifteen years ago, one of the arguments of the antiwar movement was that the war on terror was morphing into a perpetual war without boundaries, without rules, and without any end game. The U.S., in other words, was in danger of finding itself in a state of endless war.

We are now clearly embroiled in that endless war, which is a reality that even



Senate war hawk Lindsey Graham acknowledged last year when four U.S. troops were killed in Niger. Claiming that he didn't know that the U.S. had a military presence in Niger, Graham – who chairs the Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs – stated that “this is an endless war without boundaries, no limitation on time or geography.”

Although it wasn't clear whether he was lamenting or celebrating this endless and borderless war, his words should be taken as a warning of where the U.S. stands on this 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq – in a war without end, without boundaries, without limits on time or geography.

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## Behind Colin Powell's Legend – My Lai

**From the Archive:** With media focus on the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War's My Lai massacre, Colin Powell's role as a military adviser has continued to elude scrutiny, so we're republishing a 1996 article by Robert Parry and Norman Solomon.

By Robert Parry and Norman Solomon (first published in 1996)

On March 16, 1968, a bloodied unit of the Americal division stormed into a hamlet known as My Lai 4. With military helicopters circling overhead, revenge-seeking American soldiers roused Vietnamese civilians – mostly old men, women and children – from their thatched huts and herded them into the village's irrigation ditches.

As the round-up continued, some Americans raped the girls. Then, under orders from junior officers on the ground, soldiers began emptying their M-16s into the terrified peasants. Some parents desperately used their bodies to try to shield their children from the bullets. Soldiers stepped among the corpses to finish off the wounded.

The slaughter raged for four hours. A total of 347 Vietnamese, including babies, died in the carnage that would stain the reputation of the U.S. Army. But there also were American heroes that day in My Lai. Some soldiers refused to obey the direct orders to kill.

A pilot named Hugh Clowers Thompson Jr. from Stone Mountain, Ga., was furious at the killings he saw happening on the ground. He landed his helicopter between one group of fleeing civilians and American soldiers in pursuit. Thompson ordered his helicopter door gunner to shoot the Americans if they tried to harm

the Vietnamese. After a tense confrontation, the soldiers backed off. Later, two of Thompson's men climbed into one ditch filled with corpses and pulled out a three-year-old boy whom they flew to safety.

### **A Pattern of Brutality**

While a horrific example of a Vietnam war crime, the My Lai massacre was not unique. It fit a long pattern of indiscriminate violence against civilians that had marred U.S. participation in the Vietnam War from its earliest days when Americans acted primarily as advisers.

In 1963, Capt. Colin Powell was one of those advisers, serving a first tour with a South Vietnamese army unit. Powell's detachment sought to discourage support for the Viet Cong by torching villages throughout the A Shau Valley. While other U.S. advisers protested this countrywide strategy as brutal and counter-productive, Powell defended the "drain-the-sea" approach then – and continued that defense in his 1995 memoirs, *My American Journey*.

After his first one-year tour and a series of successful training assignments in the United States, Maj. Powell returned for his second Vietnam tour on July 27, 1968. This time, he was no longer a junior officer slogging through the jungle, but an up-and-coming staff officer assigned to the Americal division.

By late 1968, Powell had jumped over more senior officers into the important post of G-3, chief of operations for division commander, Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys, at Chu Lai. Powell had been "picked by Gen. Gettys over several lieutenant colonels for the G-3 job itself, making me the only major filling that role in Vietnam," Powell wrote in his memoirs.

But a test soon confronted Maj. Powell. A letter had been written by a young specialist fourth class named Tom Glen, who had served in an Americal mortar platoon and was nearing the end of his Army tour. In a letter to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam, Glen accused the Americal division of routine brutality against civilians. Glen's letter was forwarded to the Americal headquarters at Chu Lai where it landed on Maj. Powell's desk.

"The average GI's attitude toward and treatment of the Vietnamese people all too often is a complete denial of all our country is attempting to accomplish in the realm of human relations," Glen wrote. "Far beyond merely dismissing the Vietnamese as 'slopes' or 'gooks,' in both deed and thought, too many American soldiers seem to discount their very humanity; and with this attitude inflict upon the Vietnamese citizenry humiliations, both psychological and physical, that can have only a debilitating effect upon efforts to unify the people in loyalty to the Saigon government, particularly when such acts are carried out at

unit levels and thereby acquire the aspect of sanctioned policy.”

Glen’s letter contended that many Vietnamese were fleeing from Americans who “for mere pleasure, fire indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves.” Gratuitous cruelty was also being inflicted on Viet Cong suspects, Glen reported.

“Fired with an emotionalism that belies unconscionable hatred, and armed with a vocabulary consisting of ‘You VC,’ soldiers commonly ‘interrogate’ by means of torture that has been presented as the particular habit of the enemy. Severe beatings and torture at knife point are usual means of questioning captives or of convincing a suspect that he is, indeed, a Viet Cong...

“It would indeed be terrible to find it necessary to believe that an American soldier that harbors such racial intolerance and disregard for justice and human feeling is a prototype of all American national character; yet the frequency of such soldiers lends credulity to such beliefs. ... What has been outlined here I have seen not only in my own unit, but also in others we have worked with, and I fear it is universal. If this is indeed the case, it is a problem which cannot be overlooked, but can through a more firm implementation of the codes of MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) and the Geneva Conventions, perhaps be eradicated.”

Glen’s letter echoed some of the complaints voiced by early advisers, such as Col. John Paul Vann, who protested the self-defeating strategy of treating Vietnamese civilians as the enemy. In 1995, when we questioned Glen about his letter, he said he had heard second-hand about the My Lai massacre, though he did not mention it specifically. The massacre was just one part of the abusive pattern that had become routine in the division, he said.

### **Maj. Powell’s Response**

The letter’s troubling allegations were not well received at Americal headquarters. Maj. Powell undertook the assignment to review Glen’s letter, but did so without questioning Glen or assigning anyone else to talk with him. Powell simply accepted a claim from Glen’s superior officer that Glen was not close enough to the front lines to know what he was writing about, an assertion Glen denies.

After that cursory investigation, Powell drafted a response on Dec. 13, 1968. He admitted to no pattern of wrongdoing. Powell claimed that U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were taught to treat Vietnamese courteously and respectfully. The Americal troops also had gone through an hour-long course on how to treat prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions, Powell noted.

"There may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs," Powell wrote in 1968. But "this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the Division." Indeed, Powell's memo faulted Glen for not complaining earlier and for failing to be more specific in his letter.

Powell reported back exactly what his superiors wanted to hear. "In direct refutation of this [Glen's] portrayal," Powell concluded, "is the fact that relations between American soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent."

Powell's findings, of course, were false. But it would take another American hero, an infantryman named Ron Ridenhour, to piece together the truth about the atrocity at My Lai. After returning to the United States, Ridenhour interviewed American comrades who had participated in the massacre.

On his own, Ridenhour compiled this shocking information into a report and forwarded it to the Army inspector general. The IG's office conducted an aggressive official investigation and the Army finally faced the horrible truth. Courts martial were held against officers and enlisted men implicated in the murder of the My Lai civilians.

But Powell's peripheral role in the My Lai cover-up did not slow his climb up the Army's ladder. Powell pleaded ignorance about the actual My Lai massacre, which pre-dated his arrival at the Americal. Glen's letter disappeared into the National Archives – to be unearthed only years later by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sims for their book *Four Hours in My Lai*. In his best-selling memoirs, Powell did not mention his brush-off of Tom Glen's complaint.

### **MAM Hunts**

Powell did include, however, a troubling recollection that belied his 1968 official denial of Glen's allegation that American soldiers "without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." After mentioning the My Lai massacre in *My American Journey*, Powell penned a partial justification of the Americal's brutality. In a chilling passage, Powell explained the routine practice of murdering unarmed male Vietnamese.

"I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male," Powell wrote. "If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen (West Germany), Lt. Col. Walter Pritchard, was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to

dull fine perceptions of right and wrong.”

While it’s certainly true that combat is brutal, mowing down unarmed civilians is not combat. It is, in fact, a war crime. Neither can the combat death of a fellow soldier be cited as an excuse to murder civilians. Disturbingly, that was precisely the rationalization that the My Lai killers cited in their own defense.

But returning home from Vietnam a second time in 1969, Powell had proved himself the consummate team player.

*For more on Colin Powell’s real record, please [check out the “Behind Colin Powell’s Legend” series.](#)*

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## Acceptable Bigotry and Scapegoating of Russia

Exclusive: The scapegoating of Russia has taken on an air of bigotry and ugliness, based largely on Cold War-era stereotypes. In this article, Natylie Baldwin counters this intolerance with some of her positive impressions having traveled the country extensively.

By Natylie Baldwin

Over the last year and a half, Americans have been bombarded with the [Gish Gallop](#) claims of Russiagate. In that time, the most reckless comments have been made against the Russians in service of using that country as a scapegoat for problems in the United States that were coming to a head, which were the real reasons for Donald Trump’s upset victory in 2016. It has even gotten to the point where irrational hatred against Russia is becoming normalized, with the usual organizations that like to warn of the pernicious consequences of bigotry silent.

The first time I realized how low things would likely get was when Ruth Marcus, deputy editor of the *Washington Post*, sent out the following tweet in March of 2017, squealing with delight at the thought of a new Cold War with the world's other nuclear superpower: "So excited to be watching *The Americans*, throwback to a simpler time when everyone considered Russia the enemy. Even the president."



Not only did Marcus's comment imply that it was great for the U.S. to have an enemy, but it specifically implied that there was something particularly great about that enemy being Russia.

Since then, the public discourse has only gotten nastier. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – who notoriously perjured himself before Congress about warrantless spying on Americans – stated on Meet the Press last May that Russians were uniquely and "genetically" predisposed toward manipulative political activities. If Clapper or anyone else in the public eye had made such a statement about Muslims, Arabs, Iranians, Jews, Israelis, Chinese or just about any other group, there would have been some push-back about the prejudice that it reflected and how it didn't correspond with enlightened liberal values. But Clapper's comment passed with hardly a peep of protest.

More recently, John Sipher, a retired CIA station chief who reportedly spent years in Russia – although at what point in time is unclear – was interviewed in Jane Mayer's recent *New Yorker* piece trying to spin the Steele Dossier as somehow legitimate. On March 6, Sipher took to Twitter with the following comment: "How can one not be a Russophobe? Russia soft power is political warfare. Hard power is invading neighbors, hiding the death of civilians with chemical weapons and threatening with doomsday nuclear weapons. And they kill the opposition at home. Name something positive."

In fairness to Sipher, he did backpedal somewhat after being challenged; however, the fact that his unfiltered blabbering reveals such a deep antipathy toward Russians ("How can one not be a Russophobe?") and an initial assumption that he could get away with saying it publicly is troubling.

Glenn Greenwald re-tweeted with a comment asking if Russians would soon acceptably be referred to as "rats and roaches." Another person replied with: "Because they are rats and roaches. What's the problem?"

This is just a small sampling of the anti-Russian comments and attitudes that pass, largely unremarked upon, in our media landscape.

There are, of course, the larger institutional influencers of culture doing their part to push anti-Russian bigotry in this already contentious atmosphere. *Red Sparrow*, both the book and the movie, detail the escapades of a female Russian spy. The story propagates the continued fetishization of Russian women based on the stereotype that they're all hot and frisky. Furthermore, all those who work in Russian intelligence are evil and backwards rather than possibly being motivated by some kind of patriotism, while all the American intel agents are paragons of virtue and seem like they just stepped out of an ad for Nick at Nite's How to be Swell.

The recent Academy Awards continued their politically motivated trend of awarding Oscars for best documentary to films on topics that just happen to coalesce nicely with Washington's latest adversarial policy. Last year it was the *White Helmets* film to support the regime change meme in Syria. This year it's *Icarus* about the doping scandal in Russia.

Similarly, *Loveless*, the new film by Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev (director of *Leviathan*) is being reviewed – as Catherine Brown points out – by writers from the mainstream American media in a predictably biased fashion. The film focuses on the disintegration of a married Moscow couple's relationship and the complicated web of factors involved which have tragic ramifications for the couple's 12-year old son.

American reviewers manage to paint the factors detailed in the film that are prevalent in most modern capitalist cities (e.g. being self-centered, materialistic and preoccupied with technological gadgets) as somehow uniquely Russian sins. They also ignore a prominent character in the film that defies their negativity about modern Russia – a character that represents altruism and the growth of civil society in the country.

A common theme in all this is that Russia is a bad country and Russians can't help but be a bunch of good-for-nothings at best and dangerous deviants at worst. Indeed, according to media depictions, sometimes they manage to be both at the same time. But what they don't manage to be is positive, constructive or even complicated. Sipher knows that the average American has been deluged with this anti-Russian prejudice, as reflected in his challenge at the end of his initial tweet about the largest country, geographically at least, in the world: Name something positive.

### **Countering the Negative**

Most people know, at least in the abstract, that few individuals or groups are purely good or bad. Most are a complex combination of both. But many – including those who normally consider themselves to be open-minded liberals – have allowed their lizard brains to be triggered by the constant demonization of Russia in the hopes of taking down Trump whom they deem to be a disproportionate threat to everything they hold dear. So as a counterweight to all the negative constantly pumped out about Russia and to take Sipher up on his challenge, I will list some positive things about Russia and the contribution of the country and its people to the world.

### **Contemporary Russia's Domestic Policy**

Russia has one of the most educated populations in the world, universal health care for its people, a home ownership rate of 84%, strong gun control laws, no death penalty, 140 days of guaranteed maternity leave for women at 100% salary, and Moscow was just voted the 4th safest megacity in the world for women.

And, despite claims that are often repeated in corporate media and even by many in the alternative press, Russia has independent and critical voices in the print media. Even on television, which is heavily influenced by the Kremlin, the Western position is often given airtime by either pro-Western Russian critics or Westerners themselves. During both of my visits to Russia (in 2015 and 2017) I interviewed a cross-section of Russians who all confirmed that they had access to Western media through both satellite and the internet. Furthermore, while violence against journalists is a concern, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, journalist murders have decreased significantly under Putin compared to the era of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s.

Am I saying that Russia is a utopia without any problems? No. Like most countries, it has plenty. Most Russians, including Putin, admit this. These problems include still significant poverty rates, comparatively low productivity and life expectancy, and corruption. But it is important to note the direction of trends, which are mostly positive since Putin took over. Under his leadership, poverty rates have been cut in half, life expectancy has increased by several years – especially among men who had suffered the worst mortality crisis since WWII, crime has dropped, pensions have increased and are paid regularly, the unemployment rate has been around 5% for years, great investments in infrastructure and agriculture have been seen along with development throughout the country.

And that development has not just been seen in Moscow and St. Petersburg – the latter city which, by the way, culturally and architecturally rivals those in France and Italy.



There are plenty of medium-sized cities throughout Russia that are becoming well-developed and culturally engaging. As one example, during my 2015 trip, I visited Krasnodar, located in the Black Sea region. The rate of civic construction in the city during 2014 surpassed even Moscow. As a consequence of the challenges of this rapid development, the public felt that decisions were not being made with sufficient feedback from residents, several of whom got together and created a group called the Public Council which eventually found ways to get city authorities to listen to their concerns.

The group had received significant media attention, networked with youth groups and infrastructure specialists, and received foreign experts in urban planning, public arts, transportation and city marketing. They have also organized periodic clean-up and renovation days, which are sponsored by local businesses that donate use of equipment. Currently, they are working on the creation of protected green zones, including one that connects all of the city's hiking paths and another to connect its 16 lakes. They have received no opposition from the Russian government and have elicited the interest of other cities who want to model their approach to local issues.

While in Krasnodar I met a dozen or more professionals, from lawyers to engineers and doctors, who lived in the city and were part of another civic group engaged in charitable, conservation and youth programs. At one point, I took a walking tour of the city. In terms of architecture, I saw the old and the new side by side, including a large shopping center that was built around a large tower that had been there for generations that local residents saved from destruction by the mall planners, a square with controversial fountains, and a main thoroughfare that was closed to auto traffic, allowing pedestrians free reign. Couples – including some of mixed race, parents pushing baby strollers, and bicyclists – all wound their way through the streets as both Russian and American music was piped in and building walls on one side of the street for a stretch displayed delicate illustrations of Russian history.

Fifteen hundred miles away in the Ural mountain region, the city of Yekaterinburg – named after Catherine I – has the infamous distinction of being the place where Czar Nicholas II and his family were massacred by the Bolsheviks in 1918. On the site where the family's bodies were exhumed, a magnificent Russian Orthodox Church has been erected and dedicated to the last royal family. Nearby is the Yeltsin Library, denoting the Russian Federation's first President, although his legacy is not popular in Russia today.

The city is also home to a wide variety of precious metals and gems, along with a thriving economy. According to Sharon Tennison, an independent program coordinator who has traveled there numerous times over the past 15 years,

hundreds of new apartment blocks can be seen on the outskirts of the city to accommodate the recent economic and population growth.

Yekaterinburg has a bustling cultural life that includes an opera house, a ballet, numerous theaters and museums, as well as dozens of libraries. In this respect, the city has continued its preoccupation with the classical arts as in Catherine's period. At the same time, many modern Russian rock bands with a distinctive sound have formed there (known as Ural rock).

The city also has a low rate of violence and crime.

As the New York Times and NPR like to point out and generalize out from, there are some rural and industrial areas in Russia that still need attention and investment. However, there are other towns in the countryside that are doing well.

### **Russia's Contributions to the World**

Russia has made many cultural and humanitarian contributions to the world. In the 18th and 19th centuries, imperial Russia produced some of the most renowned figures in the world of arts. These include writers, such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, whose works are often cited by American readers as among the greatest of all time; great composers include Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff.

The country also has a rich history of pre-Soviet philosophers who debated questions of politics, history, spirituality and meaning. One of the most famous is Vladimir Solovyev, classified as belonging to the Slavophile school but distinguished from his fellow Slavophiles by his openness to and integration of several lines of thought.

He acknowledged the intuitive as well as the rational. He was friends with Dostoyevsky but had disagreements over Orthodoxy since Solovyev was an advocate of ecumenism and healing the schism between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Furthermore, he is credited with influencing Nicolai Berdyaev, Rudolf Steiner and the Russian Symbolists, among others. He admired the Greek goddess Sophia who he characterized as the "merciful unifying feminine wisdom of God." Solovyev was adept at integrating several spiritual strands, such as Greek philosophy, Buddhism, Kabbalah, and Christian Gnosticism.

Solovyev was famous for his debates with Slavophile contemporary, Nicolai Fedorov. In these and other writings, questions about morality and technological progress, how much humans should control nature, and prioritizing which problems to invest man's resources in solving were all given great consideration by Solovyev and are still relevant today, in both Russian society and the larger

world.

It is interesting to note that, of all the early Slavophile philosophers, Putin chose Solovyev, the one who was the least strident and most open to the synthesis of differing values and viewpoints, as part of his assignment of books for Russia's regional governors to read a few years back. Of course, that didn't stop several western pundits – who showed they knew virtually nothing of Solovyev but perhaps some cherry-picked and out-of-context tidbits they'd found online – from distorting his writings, which naturally had to be horrible because Putin recommended them.

Moving on to the 20th century, it should not be forgotten that the Soviet Union bore the brunt of defeating the Nazis during WWII, losing 27 million people, and saw a third of their country destroyed in the process.

In the 21st century, Russia provided significant aid to Americans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. They also provided safe transport to Yemeni-Americans out of that devastated country after the U.S. State Department effectively abandoned them in 2015. Russia provided medical aid to 60,000 people affected by the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014. Last September, Russia provided 35 tons of aid to earthquake victims in Mexico.

For someone who spent years in Russia as a professional expert working for the U.S. intelligence community, John Sipher is either not well-informed on his subject or is intentionally being disingenuous when it comes to the suggestion that Russia has done nothing positive, whether under Putin's governance or before.

### **The Purpose of Scapegoating Russia**

In early 2017, journalists Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes published a book called *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*. Largely based on interviews with insiders from Hillary Clinton's failed 2016 presidential campaign, the book was an attempt to analyze why she lost. The insiders agreed that Clinton had trouble providing a plausible explanation to voters as to why she was running other than that she simply wanted to be president. They also noted her trouble connecting with average Americans and her failure to campaign in certain rust belt areas that Trump ultimately got support in. The book also states that within 24 hours of Clinton's loss, members of her campaign had decided to home in on the excuse of "Russian interference" to explain away her humiliating defeat.

In addition to a bloc of Clinton's supporters continuing to push this excuse for her loss and the ratings motive that channels like CNN and MSNBC have in

continuing to milk the scandal, there is also Robert Mueller's investigation which has dragged on for over a year.

The most notable thing about the Mueller investigation to anyone who takes a sober look at it is its constantly evolving purpose. First, the purpose of the investigation was to find any evidence to support the allegation that Russia had hacked into the DNC's emails. When no substantial evidence could be found to support that allegation, the purpose evolved into collusion between Trump and Russia to steal the election on behalf of Trump.

When no substantial evidence could be found to support that allegation, the purpose evolved yet again into Russia influencing the election on behalf of Trump, possibly without his knowledge or participation. When no substantial evidence could be found to support that allegation and all that could be found was a paltry number of social media ad buys – many of which were purchased after the election or advocated conflicting positions or didn't even have anything to do with the election, the purpose became "sowing discord."

After all of this, we have an indictment against 13 private individuals who worked for a "troll farm" that had been exposed several years ago and is run by a caterer with no proven orchestration by Putin or the Kremlin. Mueller also knows that this indictment will never be legally tested because the 13 individuals will never be extradited and stand trial.

After all the shrieking and howling 24/7 for close to a year and a half that Trump was an illegitimate president installed by the Kremlin, this is the best Mueller and the mainstream Democrats can come up with. It's pretty obvious by now that this investigation has simply been feeding into the media and Democratic Party circus mentioned above rather than uncovering anything substantive with which to impeach Trump.

The 2016 election showed that the Democrats faced a sleeping giant that had been awakened – one that the Democratic Party had helped to create for decades by enabling lower living standards, outsourcing of good-paying jobs, the proliferation of low-wage jobs, unaffordable education, lack of health care coverage, public health problems, and decrepit infrastructure.

Consequently, there was a demand for meaningful policies that would help average Americans, policies that polls show they want. But mainstream Democrats will not deliver on such policies, like \$15/hour minimum wage, Medicare for All, and pulling out of our wars and investing the money saved in jobs and infrastructure. They won't deliver on these things for the same reason that Republicans won't deliver on them: because their donors don't want them to. But they are not going to admit that to the American people who were going to keep

demanding, so they needed a scapegoat and a diversion.

It's a cheap trick that the political elite is using to appeal to the basest instincts of their fellow Americans while shoring up support for their most reckless tendencies in the area of foreign policy.

Natylie Baldwin is co-author of *Ukraine: Zbig's Grand Chessboard & How the West Was Checkmated*, available from Tayen Lane Publishing. Since October of 2015, she has traveled to six cities in the Russian Federation and has written several articles based on her conversations and interviews with a cross-section of Russians. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in various publications including Consortium News, The New York Journal of Books, The Common Line, and the Lakeshore. She is currently submitting her first novel to agents and finishing a second. She blogs at [natyliesbaldwin.com](http://natyliesbaldwin.com).

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