

Trump Should Withdraw Haspel Nomination, Intel Vets Say

More than two dozen former U.S. intelligence officers urge President Trump to rescind Gina Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA, citing torture that she oversaw while supervising a black site prison, as well as her role in destroying evidence.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Request to Withdraw Nomination of Gina Haspel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With respect, we veteran intelligence officers from CIA and other agencies urge you to withdraw the nomination of Gina Haspel for CIA director. From what is already known of her leading role in CIA torture 16 years ago, she has disqualified herself.

In 2002 Haspel supervised the first CIA "black site" for interrogation, where cruel and bizarre forms of torture were applied to suspected terrorists. And when the existence of 92 videotapes of those torture sessions was revealed, Haspel signed a cable ordering their destruction, against the advice of legal counsel at CIA and the White House.

Does Torture 'Work?'

We are confident that if you set aside some time to read the unredacted portions of the Senate Intelligence Committee report of 2014 on the torture ordered and supervised by Haspel and other CIA managers, you will change your mind about her nomination. The five-year Senate investigation was based primarily on original CIA cables and other sensitive documents.

In addition to revealing clear violations of the UN Convention Against Torture, the Senate investigation shows that claims by senior CIA officials that torture is effective are far from true. The US Army – in which many of us have served – has been aware of the ineffectiveness of torture for decades.

General John Kimmons, head of Army Intelligence, drove home that point on September 6, 2006 – approximately an hour before President George W. Bush publicly extolled the virtues of torture methods that became known as "enhanced interrogation techniques." Gen. Kimmons stated: "No good intelligence is going

to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years – hard years – tell us that.”

We believe that Defense Secretary James Mattis’ lack of enthusiasm for torture reflects lessons drawn from the historical experience of the Marine Corps, as well. Not to mention the twin reality that torture brutalizes the brutalizer, and that US use of torture puts our own troops in serious jeopardy when captured. Moreover, there is no more effective recruitment tool than torture to attract more terrorists.

International and Domestic Law

Please also be aware that many signatories to the UN Convention Against Torture take seriously their obligations under the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” which applies when those who authorize or practice torture are not brought to justice by authorities in their home countries.

George W. Bush experienced a precarious brush with this reality in 2011, when he had to abruptly cancel a visit to Geneva, Switzerland, after discovering that plans were in place to arrest him as soon as he stepped onto Swiss soil. [See [“America’s Stay-at-Home Ex-President”](#)] The widely respected European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights already has made no secret of its intention to proceed quickly against Haspel, should she set foot in Europe.

We believe that CIA’s activities and general focus have become severely unbalanced, with the lion’s share of funding and energy going to the paramilitary-prone operational side – where the potential for human rights abuses is not given sufficient consideration.

That trend has gone on steroids in more recent decades, and it is a safe bet that Gina Haspel would accelerate it. We would also observe that if most of the talent and funding goes to CIA paramilitary operations, then the by-products will necessarily include a tendency to engage in politically motivated – and therefore shabby – analysis. That means that senior policymakers like you will be poorly informed, particularly with respect to complex world issues – including biased perspectives on Russia and its newly re-elected president, Vladimir Putin.

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We Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) are extremely concerned at the possibility that Gina Haspel might become the next Director of the CIA. Haspel actually supervised a CIA “black site” codenamed “Cat’s Eye” in Thailand where a number of suspected terrorists were tortured. She subsequently collaborated in destroying all 92 videotapes of the torture sessions,

effectively covering up what were likely serious war crimes.

There should be no question about the illegality of torture. It has been universally condemned and banned by both the Geneva Conventions and United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 and ratified by the Senate in 1994.

The UN Convention defines torture “as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession...” and makes clear that “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.”

The Convention’s Article 2 requires signatories to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction. The complete prohibition of torture is absolute. Under international law, officials cannot receive immunity in cases involving torture and governments that have signed the Convention are obligated to bring torturers to justice. US domestic law was brought in line with the Convention once the US became a signatory and ratified it.

In the wake of the Abu Ghraib revelations, torture, to include its variations that have been euphemistically described as “enhanced interrogation techniques” (EIT), is now explicitly banned by the US military in its training manuals. A number of soldiers were tried and imprisoned in the wake of Abu Ghraib, although the “upper ranks” – in civilian as well as military spheres – who approved torture managed to escape serious consequences.

Some in the Pentagon clearly took seriously allegations of torture and were willing to file criminal charges against those involved, though Department of Defense leadership never saw fit to assume responsibility for having set up a policy environment that quite clearly condoned EIT.

There is also another significant historical and legal precedent that demonstrates that the United States government has by its own actions agreed that what is today being called “enhanced interrogation” is a war crime. In 1946-1948, Japanese officers who tortured Allied soldiers – including what is now referred to as waterboarding – were tried at the Tokyo post-war tribunals for that crime, found guilty, and executed.

Heinous

More recently, the meticulously documented unclassified 528 page Executive

Summary of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) report on the CIA's secret Rendition, Detention and Interrogation (RDI) program is remarkable for its candor. That five-year investigation was based on original CIA cables and other documents.

In blunt language, the Senate report describes the horrors of the black site secret prisons and the efforts that were made to get terrorist suspects to talk. It demonstrates that the interrogations were brutal – worse than anyone had been led to believe – and also that they did not produce any information that might not have been developed otherwise or, in many cases, any actionable intelligence whatsoever. The full classified text of the report – which names names of the actual torture perpetrators redacted in the summary – runs to almost 7,000 pages.

Moreover, coercive interrogation frequently produced misleading or fabricated intelligence that wasted resources by having to be meticulously checked before being used. This conclusion was also arrived at by former FBI interrogator Ali Soufan – who deplored CIA methods – as well as by a review conducted by CIA's then-Inspector General (IG), John Helgerson, in 2004. The "Helgerson Report" condemned both CIA leadership and Langley's on-the-ground management of questionable programs driven by "analytical assessments that were unsupported by credible intelligence" – programs which quickly became abusive.

It is our collective judgment that the loathsome physical abuses that included beatings, repeated waterboardings and anal violations referred to as "rectal feeding" – as well as physical threats to family members – cannot be whitewashed with the convenient euphemism of "enhanced interrogation." All of those are acts of torture – plain and simple.

And while there are undoubtedly many good moral arguments against torture, there are practical considerations as well. Despite what the media would have Americans believe, torture does not work.

We recall the unambiguous remarks of then-commander of Army intelligence, Gen. John Kimmons, who held a Pentagon press conference on Sept. 6, 2006 – the same day President George W. Bush announced what he called "an alternative set of procedures" for interrogation (which later morphed into the term "enhanced interrogation techniques"). Anticipating that Bush would claim the EITS to be necessary and effective, Gen. Kimmons told the media: "No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years – hard years –tells us that."

Colin Powell Mousetrapped by 'Intelligence' From Torture

Worse still, intelligence officials have used information, which they knew was gained from torture, to mislead the most senior US officials on issues of war and peace. One of the signatories below was eyewitness to how CIA Director George Tenet persuaded Secretary of State Colin Powell to tell the UN of a “sinister nexus” between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

Tenet did not tell Powell that this “intelligence” came from a source, Abu Yahya al-Libi, who had been “rendered” to, and waterboarded by, Egyptian intelligence. The Defense Intelligence Agency had deemed this intelligence unreliable, but Tenet chose to ignore DIA and never informed Powell. Al-Libi recanted less than a year later, admitting that he fabricated the story about Saddam and al-Qaeda in order to stop his torture.

Moreover, when you wink at torture, you motivate enemies of the United States to do the same to captured US soldiers, diplomats and travelers while also providing a propaganda bonanza for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Indeed, the only reason why CIA torturers have not been tried and sentenced to prison for the damage they have done to the nation is that an intimidated President Barack Obama – who once proclaimed that “nobody is above the law” – balked at allowing the judicial process to run its course, thereby whitewashing the Bush Administration’s many crimes related to the so-called “global war on terror.” Obama attempted to justify his inaction as looking forward rather than backward, but it is more likely that he feared opening up a Pandora’s Box of shameful government secrets that no doubt would have emerged.

Promoting Haspel in spite of her tainted record would send a message to both intelligence and military personnel that embracing practices like torture – indisputably a war crime – can be a path to promotion.

Haspel’s involvement with torture began when she accepted the assignment to go to Thailand – which she could have turned down – to run the “black site” where the interrogations were being conducted. She was, at the time, the deputy in CIA’s Counter Terrorism Center (CTC), working for Jose Rodriguez.

She was in charge of the secret Thailand base in late 2002 while Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri and possibly more suspects were being tortured in a process that included slamming victims’ heads against walls, subjecting them to painful stress positions, regularly depriving them of sleep, confining them to small, coffin-like boxes, and waterboarding.

The “confinement boxes” were of two types; one was coffin-sized, and the other was smaller and less than waist-high. Both had strong claustrophobic effects. A prisoner would be forced into the smaller box as an extreme form of stress

positioning, creating excruciating pain. To maximize psychological distress and exploit phobias, insects were sometimes placed in the pitch-black “coffin” alongside the victim.

Destroying the Evidence

In 2005, after returning to CIA headquarters at Langley, she acted on instructions from Rodriguez and drafted the order to destroy the 92 videotapes that had been made of the interrogations. It has been reported that she was a “strong advocate” for the destruction. This was contrary to instructions provided by CIA Counsel John Rizzo and the White House. Thus, her act may have constituted destruction of evidence – a felony.

Jose Rodriguez was investigated for destruction of evidence by a Special Prosecutor who eventually ruled against charging him. An aide to CIA Executive Director Kyle “Dusty” Foggo later revealed Rodriguez’s rationale for shredding the tapes, writing in an email that “the heat from destroying [them] is nothing compared with what it would be if the tapes ever got into public domain – he [Rodriguez] said that they would make us look terrible; it would be devastating to us.” Gina Haspel ensured that these tapes – important, damning evidence of US government torture – would never see the light of day.

Haspel’s defenders claim that she was not the creator of the torture program and only served as a willing executor of a government initiative that she believed to be legal. That may be true as no one has access to the CTC documents that might prove otherwise. Nevertheless, it does not provide her a free pass under international law, where it is generally referred to as the “Nuremberg Defense” – a thoroughly discredited “defense” that harkens back to the era of Nazi atrocities and those who attempted to justify them by claiming perpetrators were “just following orders.”

‘Nuremberg Defense’ Didn’t Work at Nuremberg

Several former CIA leaders have supported her, saying that she was “implementing the legal orders of the president,” but many of them may be concerned about their own reputations or questionable decisions they may have made in the name of the “war on terror.” And the UN’s International Law Commission says something quite different in its codification of the legal options surrounding torture, writing that “the fact that a person acted pursuant to an order of his government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him.”

It is also claimed that Gina Haspel was working for the CIA Chief of Station (COS) in Bangkok and acting under the COS’s orders, but those of us who have

worked in and led CIA bases would dispute that that type of tight control was common, particularly since in this case, she was reporting directly to the Counterterrorism Center at Langley. Haspel would have been the boss and would have had independence in the field in executing directives from CIA Headquarters and the Counterterrorism Center – some of which she herself had a hand in drafting.

If Haspel is confirmed and wishes to travel abroad, she may have to restrict herself to countries not party to the UN Convention Against Torture because of her widely known involvement in the “black site” in Thailand. The 42 countries that have signed and ratified the Convention include the US and most of its allies. All take on a legal obligation to enforce the prohibition against torture, based on the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” when necessary. In other words, they are empowered to act when the accused’s home country refuses to do so.

Not Too Late to Do the Right Thing

If you do not withdraw the nomination of Gina Haspel and she is confirmed, this will cast a moral stain on the vast numbers of patriotic and ethically upright Americans who serve their country in the field of national security. It will also be a continuation of the steady erosion of human rights standards and rule of law post-9/11.

Apparent widespread support for torture among the US public – enabled largely by the false message of Hollywood, the media and the Cheney family that it “works” – is deplorable. It might have been headed off by the prosecutions of Haspel, Rodriguez and others by former President Obama, together with graphic exposure of the evidence. You have an opportunity to reverse this wrong.

Withdrawing Haspel’s nomination now would be a step in the right direction. Confirming her as Director of CIA would signal that Washington embraces what then-Vice President Dick Cheney referred to as the “dark side.” Regrettably, torture was once part of US policy. Indeed, one of this Memorandum’s signatories spent nearly two years in federal prison because he revealed that. But torture cannot be relied upon to yield accurate intelligence. It remains an internationally condemned malignancy that must be excised, never to return.

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For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

Jean Maria Arrigo, PhD, member of 2005 American Psychological Association task force evaluating the role of psychologists in U.S. intelligence and military interrogations of detainees (associate VIPS)

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard H. Black, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Bogdan Dzakovic, former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

George Hunsinger, Professor, Princeton Theological Seminary; Founder, National Religious Campaign Against Torture (associate VIPS)

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (ret.), Intelligence Officer & ex-Master SERE Instructor

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, Lt. Col., USAF (ret.)

Linda Lewis, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Edward Loomis, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence Council & CIA political analyst (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Valerie Plame, former operations officer, CIA (associate VIPS)

Diane Roark, Republican Professional Staff, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, 1985-2002 (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director, Office of Strategic, Political, and Military Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, State Department; Former staff member, Senate Intelligence Committee

Peter Van Buren, US Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel, US Army (ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who resigned in opposition to the US war on Iraq

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ANNEX

MEMORANDA from VIPS to President Barack Obama Regarding Torture

1 –

US Media Ignores CIA Cover-up on Torture

September 16, 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR: Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Vice Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: U.S. Media Mum On How Your Committee Faced Down Both CIA and Obama

2 –

US Intel Vets Decry CIA's Use of Torture

September 19, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Intelligence Veterans Challenge CIA's "Rebuttal" on Torture

3 –

Udall Urged to Disclose Full Torture Report

December 29, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senator Mark Udall

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Time to Speak Out on Floor of Congress to Stop Torture

4 –

<https://consortiumnews.com/2009/092809a.html>

September 27, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: There Must be Accountability for Torture

5 –

<https://consortiumnews.com/2009/042909e.html>

April 29, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Torture: An Accumulated Evil (see Nuremberg): John Brennan Publicly Defended "Extraordinary Rendition" Knowing Its Purpose Was Torture

Austin Bombings, Russophobia and the Law of Immutable Vulnerability

The Austin bomber offered a frightening reminder how vulnerable the U.S. is to asymmetrical attacks – something that should be kept in mind as U.S. leaders exacerbate tensions with Russia and other targeted regimes, writes David Hamilton.

By David Hamilton

Austin's bomber revealed many things. Despite being inexperienced and not terribly bright, he terrorized a major city, stretched police resources to their limit, significantly disrupted commerce and grabbed worldwide headlines. He doubtless also caused the CEOs at UPS and Fedex to have nightmares.

Try to imagine what a very smart person with some professional training in explosives, ideological motivation and a strategic plan might be able to do, especially with a small and skilled support group.

The crucial factor is that significant targets are so limitless and far-flung that they simply cannot be secured. Forget blowing up random people while on surveillance cameras, what about those electric power lines crossing the desert to the far horizon? The power grid is flagrantly exposed. What about flyovers? Or the petro-chemical plant sitting beside the ship channel? Any bridge? Or Edward Abbey's idea of a boat bomb floated against Glen Canyon Dam? Our ubiquitous, complex and crumbling infrastructure and our open society provide unguarded targets ad infinitum.

The immutable vulnerability cannot be eliminated by military means. We cannot patrol below every power line and bridge. No border wall will matter, just another target. Besides, our principal enemies are internal, not an alien

invasion. The Austin bomber was not a Russian. Nor was Timothy McVeigh or the perpetrators at Parkland HS or at the Pulse nightclub or at the Mandalay hotel Las Vegas or at Sandy Hook Elementary, all terrorist attacks by white male Americans with no criminal record who probably considered themselves Christians.

There is no military means to fully guarantee our security. It is statistically irrefutable that having guns increases one's likelihood of getting shot. Our safety will instead be primarily dependent on how we treat others, as human beings and as a nation.

But there are those who are actively trying to convince us that Russia, among others, is our existential enemy and we should obsessively worry about them instead of the real factors affecting our lives. These war mongers are thereby promoting a distraction from what is truly meaningful in the interest of winning our support for future U.S. aggressions, specifically war with Russia, Iran and Syria in Syria, U.S. instigation of regime change taken to its logical conclusion. Considering the actors involved, at the end of that path could await mutual annihilation.

The essential issue is simply power; the ability to control others for one's own advantage. The US capitalist elite is trying desperately to maintain their post WWII crusade for world dominance in the face of other growing power centers and despite the ineptitude of the Insane Yellow Clown leading them. They are particularly alarmed over the growth of Russia and China, their developing alliance and their expanding influence and stature worldwide relative to the U.S.

We might reasonably ask why the US doesn't settle for a multi-polar world of mutually respectful global citizens. The answer would unfortunately be that doing so would be totally out of character for those who actually make the decisions in our country. Old habits of asserting hegemony die hard.

Before we allow our government and its compliant media to cast some country into the role of being our adversary, we might wish to ponder just why that country is our existential enemy whose subjugation merits risking the annihilation of all past human achievement along with our progeny.

Want real security? There is clearly one most effective way to get it. Don't make enemies.

Today, our "liberal" media heap daily scorn on Russia and its president Putin while slavishly befriend the autocratic religious fanatics that compose the Saudi monarchy. How have I missed a comparable outpouring of disgust at Russian homophobia and the Saudi law allowing execution by stoning for "homosexual

behavior”? Would one rather be gay in Moscow or Mecca? Could the Saudi’s being annual multi-billion dollar benefactors of the owners of the US military-industrial complex be linked to the conscious campaign to convince us of the diabolical nature of all things Russian?

To be a peace activist at this time requires continuous pushback at the concerted propaganda campaigns perpetually being conducted in the U.S. corporate news media and among their collaborating politicians to demonize their next prospective victims; currently Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Venezuela, Cuba and North Korea along with other various non-state actors, usually Muslims or leftists.

Regardless of how reprehensible one considers the domestic policies of these “enemy” nation’s leaders, there is literally nothing worth risking Armageddon. Without complete nuclear disarmament, human survival requires that diplomacy take place. That requires talking to other nuclear powers in a non-adversarial manner, especially between the two nuclear super-powers who together possess over 90% of all such weapons.

Dems Kept Cheerleading Bush-Era Neocons – Now There’s One In The White House

Dems are criticizing Trump’s National Security Advisor pick, not because he’s a warmonger who was one of the original members of the Project for a New American Century, but because he’s allegedly too soft on Russia, Caitlin Johnstone explains.

By Caitlin Johnstone

As so many of us have been dreading, PNAC’s favorite bloodthirsty child killer John Bolton has been added to the Trump administration. And as many half-jokingly predicted, Democrats seized on this opportunity to accuse Bolton of being a Kremlin agent.

That’s right, John Bolton, the guy who has been trying to start a war with Russia since long before the name Vladimir Putin meant anything to the average Democrat, is being accused of colluding with Russia. Count on Democrats to oppose the most virulent neocon in Washington by accusing him of not being hawkish enough.

“John Bolton once suggested Russian hack of DNC may have been a false flag

operation by Obama Admin," fretted lead Democratic Russiagate Adam Schiff, mistaking brazen partisan hackery for actual skepticism about a likely intelligence community false flag.

"Don't forget the reason for H.R. McMaster's departure: He criticized Russia," added Democratic Coalition co-founder Scott Dworkin. "McMaster said publicly that Russia needed to face serious consequences for what they've done in Syria & for the gas attack in the UK. John Bolton would never say anything like that."

"Trump has outdone himself by selecting Bolton," Democratic Rep. Ted Deutch tweeted with a link to a story about Bolton having appeared in a 2013 video for a Russian gun rights group. "In one appointment, he simultaneously increased the influence of the NRA in his Admin. & found another way to tie himself to Russia. Does he still claim he hires the best people? #TrumpRussia."

"Bolton is *pre-indictment* for many crimes against America," tweeted renowned professional intelligence LARPer Eric Garland.

Was he referring to Bolton's unforgivable war crimes? Of course not.

"He's owned by Russia," Garland explained.

There are of course many, many, many extremely legitimate reasons to criticize John Bolton, and none of them involve being too soft on Russia. Not only is he a PNAC signatory who played a major role in manufacturing the lies that led to the Iraq invasion, but he still insists that that invasion was a great idea. He's advocated for escalations and acts of military violence against every single government that is in any way oppositional to U.S. hegemony including Venezuela, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Russia and China, and account after account of his personal behavior toward people he's worked with indicate that he is in all likelihood an actual, literal psychopath.

But Democratic opposition to Bolton, even when it doesn't get sucked up into idiotic Russia conspiracy theory, appears to be receiving a relatively lukewarm response from mainstream America. It certainly isn't attracting the urgent attention it should be, and certainly isn't eliciting the level of viral interest as a new "bombshell" Russiagate revelation. And why should it? Propagandists have been pacing rank-and-file Democrats into embracing Iraq-raping Bush-era neocons for more than a year now.

In addition to Democrats being forced to spend 2016 gaslighting themselves into believing that a warmongering neocon who supported the Iraq war would make a great First Female President, they have also been manipulated by the cult of blind anti-Trumpism into accepting neoconservative death worshippers like Bill

Kristol, David Frum and Max Boot into their #Resistance fold.

“One of the most amazing outcomes of the Trump administration is the number of neo-conservatives that are now my friends and I am aligned with,” MSNBC pundit Joy Reid openly admitted in an interview last year. “I found myself agreeing on a panel with Bill Kristol. I agree more with Jennifer Rubin, David Frum, and Max Boot than I do with some people on the far left. I am shocked at the way that Donald Trump has brought people together.”

Just as Bolton has cozied up to the Trump crowd by disguising his brazen neoconservative globalism as libertarian-leaning nationalism, neocons like Frum, Boot and Kristol who helped decimate Iraq have been cozying up to mainstream Democrats by posing as woke progressives, and now they’re in like Flynn. Dems had to stretch and compartmentalize their thinking to accommodate the other Bush-era neocons, and even Bush himself to a large extent, so why would a few experts saying “Uh seriously this Bolton guy is deeply terrifying” have any influence over them? They already had to gaslight themselves into believing the bloodshed caused by neoconservatism is fine.

So the American mainstream has been successfully manipulated on both sides of the artificial political divide into supporting vestigial Bush neocons, with #TheResistance proudly retweeting depraved death cultists like Bill Kristol while a majority of the #MAGA crowd support Trump’s elevation of Bolton, and now there’s no one left but us homeless nonpartisans to point and scream about where this all seems to be headed.

Partisan hack Trump supporters are worthless. Partisan hack Democrats are equally worthless. Only those who have awakened from the relentless barrage of mass media psy-ops and seen beyond the fake uni-party trap can see what’s going on. It’s up to us to awaken everyone else.

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

6,700 More U.S. Missiles for Saudi Arabia to Shoot at Yemeni Kids

Following a failed attempt by three senators to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war against Yemen, the State Department announced a sale of 6,700 missiles

to Saudi Arabia, Ann Wright reports.

By Ann Wright

How much more slaughter in Yemen is the United State government willing to help with?

We found out when State Department announced on March 23 the sale of 6,700 anti-tank missiles to Saudi Arabia.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to discuss the Saudi-led bombing of Yemen on March 23 and the missile deal was announced a few hours later. The State Department notified Congress of the proposed sale which is a part of a \$1 billion weapons sales deal.

The State Department on Thursday announced the sale of 6,700 anti-tank missiles to Saudi Arabia, hours after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to discuss the Saudi-led bombing of Yemen.

Coming almost three years to the day that Saudi Arabia, supported by the U.S., began a campaign of airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen, the State Department ironically and sarcastically wrote: "This proposed sale will support U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives by improving the security of a friendly country which has been, and continues to be, an important force for political stability and economic growth in the Middle East... and will not alter the basic military balance in the region."

The U.S. increased its air strikes in Yemen in 2017 by having six times more airstrikes that in 2016.

Secretary of Defense Mattis was unconcerned about civilian casualties in Yemen: "We have been working very hard with the new U.N. envoy to end the fight in Yemen. And we believe that Saudi Arabia is part of the solution. They have stood by the United Nations recognized government. And we are going to end this war. That's the bottom line."

The U.S. is not the only country whose weapons manufacturers are making a killing out of killing Yemeni kids. The U.K., France, Spain and Italy, have sold billions of dollars of weaponry to countries around the world, with Saudi Arabia being one of the biggest weapons purchaser.

A war powers resolution for Yemen that represented an attempt to insert congressional oversight into U.S. military operations in the deadly civil war there was defeated by a vote of 55-44 by the U.S. Senate on March 21. Co-sponsored by three members of the Senate – Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Mike

Lee (R-Utah), and Chris Murphy (D-Conn), the resolution called for the end of the U.S. role in the war.

Under the proposed massive weapons sale, Saudi Arabia will buy 6,696 TOW 2B missiles and associated training materials worth \$670 million; parts and repairs support worth \$300 million for its Abrams tanks and fighting vehicles, and maintenance equipment worth \$100 million for its fleet of AH-64D/E, UH-60L, Schweizer 333 and Bell 406CS helicopters.

Congress now has 30 days to block the whole or parts of the sale through a privileged resolution under the AECA.

To save the lives of innocent women and children in Yemen, let's hope Congress says no more sales to Saudi Arabia.

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."

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in February focused on the release of the so-called "Nunes Memo", the US system of perpetual warfare, and the growing risk of confrontations in Syria, North Korea and Iran.

"Outpouring of Support Honors Robert Parry" Feb. 1, 2018

"U.S. Media's Objectivity Questioned Abroad" by Andrew Spannaus, Feb. 2, 2018

"Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ" by Ray McGovern, Feb. 2, 2018

"'Duck and Cover' Drills Exacerbate Fears of N. Korea War" by Ann Wright, Feb. 3, 2018

"Do We Really Want Nuclear War with Russia?" by Robert Parry, Feb. 4, 2018

"Recipe Concocted for Perpetual War is a Bitter One" by Robert Wing and Coleen Rowley, Feb. 4, 2018

"WMD Claims in Syria Raise Concerns over U.S. Escalation" by Rick Sterling, Feb. 4, 2018

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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 Hoshiyar 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

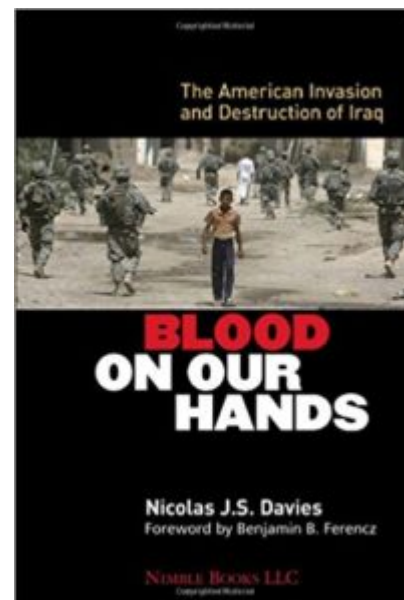
It is very important that the public health community provide the world with accurate and up-to-date mortality surveys of Iraq and other post-9/11 war zones.

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*.

The Iraq War and the Crisis of a Disintegrating Global Order

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

By Inder Comar

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

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

Aggression: the supreme international crime.

A crime that was banned at Nuremberg.

A crime which sent Nazi leaders to the gallows.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is also clear the war was not conducted in self-defense. Self-defense is

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

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

However, in 2017 a court of appeals ruled in the case *Saleh v. Bush* that former President Bush and other high officials were immune from civil investigation. The appellate court relied upon a domestic law that grants U.S. officials immunity for alleged crimes, including heinous international crimes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The U.S. has never prosecuted any high-ranking government employee for these war crimes, including for torture. And in light of that 2017 judgment in *Saleh v. Bush* there is virtually no chance that a civil inquiry will produce restitution

for victims, or change anyone's behavior in high office. In fact, just this week, the woman who helped oversee the Bush-era torture program has been rewarded for her complicity and is now the nominee to run the Central Intelligence Agency.

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

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

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

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

Today, President Trump claims the authority and the power:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These three reasons are of course related.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this does not have to be our future.

There is another way.

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

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

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

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

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

The people who commandeered my country and my government must be held to account before a judge—so that they know, and others may know, that the supreme crime cannot go unpunished.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, I urge the Human Rights Council to appoint a Special Rapporteur for the human rights situation in Iraq. I urge the United Nations to condemn illegal

acts of aggression, torture and mass killings, including those committed by powerful countries like the United States.

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

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

Thank you.

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Senate Votes to Continue Yemen Devastation

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

By Dennis J. Bernstein

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dennis Bernstein: Shireen, what is your response to the Senate voting to continue aid to the Saudis?

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

DB: Could you give us a little background?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAA: People have lost their jobs. There is no future to look forward to. People who were once wealthy or middle-class are now resorting to begging on the streets and selling their possessions. Three million are displaced internally because there is nowhere to go with the blockade in place. People can't find water, they can't find food, they can't find medicine or fuel. They can't decide whether to take a sick child to the hospital or provide them with food. It is as bad as it can get.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAA: Organizations such as Oxfam and Save the Children do have their ships there and they do bring in aid and food to the 7 million people who depend on it every day. But even that flow is obstructed by the Saudis. The cost of fuel has increased 200%. Family members like myself are sending cash, as are organizations like Doctors without Borders, to keep people employed and afloat. Kids are dying of diseases that are completely preventable. No one has to die from cholera.

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

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

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

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

By Gilbert Doctorow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And so we have been getting saturation news coverage of the "Skripal nerve gas attack," of the alleged cyber attack on the US energy grid and water systems. Both are pure "Russians did it" stories. And we read about the repositioning of U.S. naval forces in the Mediterranean to within cruise-missile range of

Damascus for a possible punitive blow in response to a chemical attack on civilians by Assad's regime that still has not happened, all with intent to humiliate Assad's backers, the Russians.

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

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

The *Financial Times* has this to say on page one: "Donald Trump said he wanted to meet Russian president Vladimir Putin to discuss an arms race that was 'getting out of control' and other issues over which the countries remain at loggersheads. 'Being in an arms race is not a great thing,' the US president said on Tuesday, adding that he would probably meet his Russian counterpart in the 'not too distant future'."

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

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

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

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

To put the present situation in an historical context: in the past year or two, the United States and Russia have reached a level of confrontation that

approaches that of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That crisis was resolved by mutual retreats on positioning of nuclear capable missiles near the borders of the other side. The mutuality of the solution was not announced to the American public until decades later, when the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey was made public.

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

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

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.

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