

Vietnam's Lessons and the U.S. Culture of Violence

In the wake of another deadly school shooting in Florida, the lessons of past massacres in Vietnam can teach us about U.S. violence and the need to reform unchecked gun culture, discusses Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Back in October 2016 I wrote an analysis entitled "Are Humans Natural-Born Killers?" It described and commented on research on the origins of human violence published in the science journal *Nature*. The conclusion offered in the article is that humans come from an evolutionary line that has the capability for violent behavior genetically built into it. It is a reasonable hypothesis. As just about every serious historian knows, the human propensity for lethal violence goes back as far as the evidence can take us – so far that there can be little doubt that this trait is inherited from our pre-human ancestors.

Yet, as the *Nature* scholars also point out, in the case of our species, culture has the ability to "modulate our bloodthirsty tendencies."

I bring this up now because there is new interest in the slaughter and massacres that took place during the Vietnam War. This may in part be a response to the fact that last month marked the 50th anniversary of that war's Tet offensive.

America waged war in Vietnam roughly from 1961 to 1975. The starting date is a "rough" one because the United States never actually declared war. In this 14-year span it is generally accepted that the turning point in the struggle came during the Tet offensive of 1968. Tet is the term used for the Vietnamese new year, and that celebratory time in 1968 was when the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong launched attacks in some 100 South Vietnamese towns and cities, in an effort to change the course of the war in their favor.

Though very costly (there were an estimated 50,000 Vietnamese casualties) the offensive worked, at least in the long run. Within a year the United States started a gradual withdrawal from the country. Although the fighting dragged on for another seven years (until the fall of Saigon in 1975) it was Washington's stubborn search for face-saving terms that largely kept it going.

By the time of the Tet offensive, the war had degenerated into mutual slaughter. The U.S. ended up killing some 3 million Vietnamese, many of them civilians. The massacre at My Lai on 16 March 1968, has often been cited as the "singular" American example of such criminal behavior. It was on this date that a company

of soldiers of the 23rd Americal Division murdered, without provocation, 504 peasant villagers of all ages and both sexes.

The massacre itself, and its background year of 1968, have been accurately described in a recent book, *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968 and the Descent into Darkness*, by Howard Jones (Oxford University Press, 2017). In turn the book has been expertly reviewed and elaborated upon in the popular *London Review of Books* (LRB) (25 January 2018) by Max Hastings.

It is to be noted that both the publisher and the reviewing magazine are located in the United Kingdom. The reviews of the book offered in the United States have been, to date, in academic journals, including the U.S. Army's own *Army University Press*. Just about all of them have described Jones's work as definitive and a seminal important read. Whether this will translate into public attention in the U.S. is doubtful.

Explaining Wartime Massacres

Modern efforts to explain happenings like the My Lai massacre usually bring up the problem of waging war when it has become hard to know who the enemy is – in other words, when not everyone is wearing a uniform and a lot of resistance is coming from irregular forces. The *Army University Press* review raises this issue.

Another possibility is that such behavior is an “inevitable consequence of combat.” In his *LRB* review, Max Hastings gives a long introductory account of a number of other massacres committed by soldiers in modern times, including in Vietnam. As a consequence one comes away with the feeling that, within a war zone, these criminal acts are almost common.

While it is no doubt true that a combat situation (or perhaps we can say the culture of combat) does raise the probability of massacres, they do not make them “inevitable.” Suggesting that they are, sounds more like an excuse than an explanation. After all, most combat soldiers are not participants in massacres.

This brings us back to the judgment of the research published in *Nature* – we all might well be potential natural born killers who are restrained or encouraged by cultural variables. Within the combat scenario, Hastings suggests that a culture of self-restraint accepted and enforced by the officer corps can forestall mass killings.

This is of particular interest when it comes to the peculiar culture of the United States. In Vietnam many of the massacres (My Lai was by no means unique) were perpetrated by soldiers as well as their officers from the so-called “land of the free.” I use this descriptive term intentionally because one of the

things that is often declared to be constitutionally “free” from rational regulation in the U.S. are guns. And, as a consequence, these troops came out of a “gun culture.”

It should be kept in mind that the American gun culture, with its accompanying violence, is not new. The 2014 book *Gun Violence and Public Life* documents this history. If anything has changed from the 1960s to today it is that the public now has access to military grade weapons. What also existed then as now is a culture of bigotry and racism. In the 1960s this was just being confronted by the Civil Rights Movement. It all made for an explosive mix that carried over to influence perceptions of and behavior toward the Vietnamese.

Manipulating Culture

If the *Nature* study’s conclusions can be believed, modern violence both of military and civilian origin can be moderated by manipulating culture. In the American case this means overcoming the gun culture as well as racism. There are many ways to do this. It can be done through public education as well as the way a society designs and applies its laws.

However, if any of these approaches to a safer, less violent society is to work, citizens must commit to a consistently enforced, long-term, indeed multi-generational, effort of reform. None of this will happen until politicians and the courts understand the Second Amendment of the Constitution (the present interpretation of which underpins the nation’s gun culture) in a more literal and reasonable way. And that won’t happen until public opinion overwhelms the ideological rigidity of the U.S. gun lobby.

In the United States the desire for rational reform of the gun laws goes up after each mass shooting and then is stymied by a rigid, but very politically influential, gun lobby. This scenario is part of a “culture war” that is ongoing within the American body politic. It involves not only the issue of gun control but also other issues such as abortion, gay rights, the promotion of racial equality and immigrant rights. So heated is this “culture war” that one might see it as a (so far) non-violent form of civil war.

The lessons of Vietnam, and a greater awareness of the massacres that occurred during this war, speak to the need to reform U.S. culture – to make it less violent and more tolerant. Thus the Vietnam experience should be incorporated into the current debate about guns in America. It would be a major achievement if the 1968 slaughter at My Lai could help stop today’s slaughter on the streets of the U.S.

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Honduras Nearing Ten Years of Stolen Elections, Neo-Colonial Rule

Despite an organized and active grassroots movement, Honduran politics have been repeatedly steamrolled by the self-interests of international ruling elites, as journalist and filmmaker Jesse Freeston explained to Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

For weeks following its stolen election, the corrupt right-wing, neo-fascist government of Juan Orlando Hernández's in Honduras has been terrorizing its people. Street protests and spontaneous blockades have been met by extreme violence. Dozens have already died on the frontlines and many more have been arrested and brutalized in detention, while often being held incommunicado.

I spoke to Jesse Freeston, who has been based in Honduras for the last eight years working as a video-journalist and documentary filmmaker, ever since the US supported/Hillary Clinton sustained 2009 coup d'état that purged the duly elected president, Manuel Zelaya. Freeston, who has reported for the Real News Network and Democracy Now en Español, is the producer of the feature documentary "Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley."

Freeston reports that, among other crimes against the people, "this regime has: stolen an election; ignored calls from the Organization of American States to hold a new election; passed a law prohibiting the prosecution of all former and current members of Congress in the midst of a series of massive corruption scandals [and has] appointed a new national police chief who has clear evidence against him of drug trafficking..."

I spoke to Freeston on February 7.

Dennis Bernstein: We continue our drumbeat coverage of Honduras and the recent stolen election there, an attempt to suppress the will of the people who, by all accounts, want to have a more progressive government. It has been a very violent situation since the election. We are hearing that dozens of people have been killed and that the atrocities being perpetrated by the government have

resulted in a nightmare. Could you put this in the context of the last two recent election cycles in Honduras?

Jesse Freeston: On June 28, 2009, there was a vote on a non-binding resolution put forward by President Manuel Zelaya, who had taken up the call of various indigenous groups in the country to rewrite the constitution. When people went out to vote on that day, the military staged a coup d'état and Zelaya wound up in Costa Rica.

This led to the most organized national resistance movement Honduras has ever seen. Assemblies were held, which brought together all these people who stood to gain from a new constitution. Just about every sector of the society were represented, except perhaps the oligarchy.

This led to the formation of the Libre Party, which participated in the 2013 elections [with Manuel Zelaya's wife, Xiomara Castro, running as the party's presidential candidate]. The election was officially won by Juan Orlando Hernandez but there was massive fraud. The November, 2017 elections were even more of a farce.

Despite all that, when the electoral tribunal released its first results, the Oppositional Alliance were up by 5% with 60% of the votes counted. One of the magistrates on the tribunal described it at the time as an "irreversible trend." Then, counting stopped for over a day when the computer system supposedly crashed. When it was back up again, the tendency had completely flipped and Hernandez ended up winning by one percentage point.

This led to another massive uprising. On one day of action there were 48 blockades of highways and major boulevards in the country. During the last two months, this has been happening a couple times a week.

Even international observers such as the European Union Commission and the Organization of American States—who have been discredited here after turning their back many times in the last eight years to the crimes of this regime—even they have said that they have to redo the election or there has to be a recount.

Nevertheless, the members of those organizations, like Canada, like the United States and the countries of the European Union, went ahead and validated the election.

DB: We have heard that activists and members of the resistance have been arrested.

JF: Yes, there are dozens of political prisoners behind bars right now. One of the most worrying cases is that of Edwin Espinal. He is someone who has

consistently paid a price for his resistance against the ongoing coup d'état.

In September of 2009, Edwin Espinal's wife died from tear gas inhalation after taking part in several protests. A week later, Edwin was at a small neighborhood protest after which he was arrested for kidnapping because he took a child with him on his motorcycle when he was fleeing the tear gas. The mother of the child went over and over to the police station to explain that she had pleaded with Edwin to take her kid with him. Another time he was jailed for car theft for driving a friend's car.

The first thing that the newly-formed military-trained urban police force did was raid Espinal's house, claiming they had proof that he was a drug trafficker. The police falsely accused him of being involved in the Marriot Hotel fire and right now he is in a maximum security prison on that charge. Journalists and human rights workers are not allowed in to talk to him, his family have not been allowed to see him. This is the first time since the 1980's that a civilian will be tried inside a military base.

DB: How would you describe the US role in this situation? We know that Hillary Clinton played a key role in sustaining the coup in 2009.

JF: I think that informed people in Honduras realize that changes in political leadership in the US don't make much difference in how Honduras is treated. Decisions are made here at the US Embassy and ambassadors act as de-facto rulers here, as shadow presidents.

The one constant here is the massive military funding from the US. Since the coup, the Honduran military has received more direct funding from the US than any other country in the Americas, despite the fact that they have not been involved in a single military conflict or been threatened with one.

The military is purely used against people inside the country. Although the United States is by far the largest funder of the Honduran military, other countries are also involved because humanitarian and other aid is typically diverted to the military.

DB: You said that there is a continuity between the last administration's policy toward Honduras and the Trump administration's policy. In terms of so-called US interests, the real problem is that we push a program of "free trade" and we insist on having our military bases there. So we have every reason to sustain the government as long as it provides us with an opportunity to police the region. Could you talk about the geopolitical part of this?

JF: I think the more a country depends on its natural resources, the more everything comes down to who controls the land. In 1961, [John F.] Kennedy

launched a program called The Alliance for Progress, which was billed as a kind of Marshall Plan for Latin America. It was a response to the Cuban revolution and an attempt to ward off similar revolutions across Latin America.

We were going to give billions of dollars to countries in Latin America if they promised to undertake land reform, if the oligarchy agreed to give up a portion of their land. When Johnson replaced Kennedy there was much less priority assigned to this program. Nonetheless, the Honduran government had to pass a number of land reform laws to receive the money, but none of those laws were ever implemented.

If the US intends to keep its business interests here alive—the sweatshop sector as well as bananas and palm oil—and for Canada, gold mining primarily—they need to maintain their alliance with this land-holding oligarchy. It is this alliance that the resistance is asking the countries of the North and the West to break.

With eight and a half years of organizing experience, the people of Honduras could put together a government so fast it would make your head spin. This movement is very organized. They know who to trust, they know who can provide intellectual support, they know who can run the economy. They are just waiting for the international community to change its alliances.

DB: So will the resistance to the Hernandez regime go on?

JF: The Oppositional Alliance has decided to wage a “peaceful insurrection,” something they are entitled to do under the Honduran constitution, which states that no one owes obedience to a government which takes power by force. The numbers now at the protests have been considerably less than in the past two months, particularly since the inauguration on January 27.

It is hard to predict what will happen but the vast majority of the population do not want this regime. There is a massive corruption scandal developing and we will see what happens with that. Students are planning a strike for next month. But we will have to wait to see what kinds of ideas are going to be put forward in Honduras.

People are looking at Honduras as a laboratory for the ultra-right of the world. Fortunately, there is a well-organized movement here that will be rising up again and again. It is up to those of us in the international community to put pressure on those who claim to represent us to change their allegiances.

DB: Would you say that this is a movement inspired by young people in the country?

JF: Yes, and that is the key to understanding this new law that the National Party is trying to pass which would regulate social media. It has to do with this young generation that has grown up in this period following the coup.

Someone like Zelaya doesn't necessarily reach them. This new law the government is trying to pass would give them the right to criminalize anyone posting anything they deem "hateful" on social media. And this is a government that labels "racist" people who are defending rivers from dams being built.

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A Treacherous Crossing

Paul Ryan's recent trip to the Gulf reiterated the U.S. government's support of the Saudi-led assault on Yemen and a bellicose stance towards Iran, which has created a watershed of human suffering, writes Kathy Kelly.

By Kathy Kelly

On January 23rd an overcrowded smuggling boat capsized off the coast of Aden in Southern Yemen. Smugglers packed 152 passengers from Somalia and Ethiopia in the boat and then, while at sea, reportedly pulled guns on the migrants to extort additional money from them. The boat capsized, according to *The Guardian*, after the shooting prompted panic. The death toll, currently 30, is expected to rise. Dozens of children were on board.



The passengers had already risked the perilous journey from African shores to Yemen, a dangerous crossing that leaves people vulnerable to false promises,

predatory captors, arbitrary detention and tortuous human rights violations. Sheer desperation for basic needs has driven hundreds of thousands of African migrants to Yemen. Many hope, upon arrival, they can eventually travel to prosperous Gulf countries further north where they might find work and some measure of security. But the desperation and fighting in southern Yemen were horrible enough to convince most migrants that boarded the smuggling boat on January 23rd to try and return to Africa.

Referring to those who drowned when the boat capsized, Amnesty International's Lynn Maalouf said: "This heart-breaking tragedy underscores, yet again, just how devastating Yemen's conflict continues to be for civilians. Amid ongoing hostilities and crushing restrictions imposed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, many people who came to Yemen to flee conflict and repression elsewhere are now being forced yet again to flee in search of safety. Some are dying in the process."

In 2017, more than 55,000 African migrants arrived in Yemen, many of them teenagers from Somalia and Ethiopia where there are few jobs and severe drought is pushing people to the verge of famine. It's difficult to arrange or afford transit beyond Yemen. Migrants become trapped in the poorest country in the Arab peninsula, which now, along with several drought-stricken North African countries, faces the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II.

In Yemen, eight million people are on the brink of starvation as conflict-driven near-famine conditions leave millions without food and safe drinking water. Over one million people have suffered from cholera over the past year and more recent reports add a diphtheria outbreak to the horror. Civil war has exacerbated and prolonged the misery while, since March of 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, joined and supported by the U.S., has regularly bombed civilians and infrastructure in Yemen while also maintaining a blockade that prevented transport of desperately needed food, fuel and medicines.

Maalouf called on the international community to "halt arms transfers that could be used in the conflict." To heed Maalouf's call, the international community must finally thwart the greed of transnational military contractors that profit from selling billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and other countries in the Saudi-led coalition. For instance, a November, 2017 Reuters report said that Saudi Arabia has agreed to buy about \$7 billion worth of precision guided munitions from U.S. defense contractors. The UAE also has purchased billions in American armaments.

Raytheon and Boeing are the companies that will primarily benefit from a deal that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement coinciding with President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May.

Paul Ryan's Remarks

Another dangerous crossing happened in the region on January 24th. U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) arrived in Saudi Arabia, along with a congressional delegation, to meet with the monarchy's King Salman and subsequently with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has orchestrated the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen. Following that visit, Ryan and the delegation met with royals from the UAE.

"So rest assured", said Ryan, speaking to a gathering of young diplomats in the UAE, "we will not stop until ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates are defeated and no longer a threat to the United States and our allies."

"Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, we are focused on the Iranian threat to regional stability."

Beyond the simple well-recorded fact of lavish Saudi financial support for Islamist terrorism, Ryan's remarks overlook the Saudi-led coalition military assaults and "special operations" in Yemen, which the U.S. supports and joins. The war there is arguably undermining effort to combat jihadist groups, which have flourished in the chaos of the war, particularly in the south which is nominally under the control of the government allied to Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian government Ryan denounced does have allies in Yemen and may be smuggling weapons into Yemen, but no one has accused them of supplying the Houthi rebels with cluster bombs, laser-guided missiles and littoral (near-coastal) combat ships to blockade ports vital to famine relief. Iran does not provide in-air refueling for warplanes used in daily bombing runs over Yemen. The U.S. has sold all of these to countries in the Saudi-led coalition which have, in turn, used these weapons to destroy Yemen's infrastructure as well as create chaos and exacerbate suffering among civilians in Yemen.

Ryan omitted any mention of the starvation, disease, and displacement afflicting people in Yemen. He neglected to mention documented human rights abuses in a network of clandestine prisons operated by the UAE in Yemen's south. Ryan and the delegation essentially created a smokescreen of concern for human life that conceals the very real terror into which U.S. policies have thrust the people of Yemen and the surrounding region.

Potential starvation of their children terrifies people who can't acquire food for their families. Those who can't obtain safe drinking water face nightmarish prospects of dehydration or disease. Persons fleeing bombers, snipers, and armed militias who might arbitrarily detain them shudder in fear as they try to devise escape routes.

Paul Ryan, and the congressional delegation traveling with him, had an extraordinary opportunity to support humanitarian appeals made by UN officials and human rights organizers.

Instead, Ryan implied the only security concerns worth mentioning are those that threaten people in the U.S. He pledged cooperation with brutally repressive dictators known for egregious human rights violations in their own countries, and in beleaguered Yemen. He blamed the government of Iran for meddling in the affairs of other countries and supplying militias with funds and weapons. U.S. foreign policy is foolishly reduced to “the good guys,” the U.S. and its allies, versus “the bad guy,” – Iran.

The “good guys” shaping and selling U.S. foreign policy and weapon sales exemplify the heartless indifference of the smugglers who gamble human life in exceedingly dangerous crossings.

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Ten Commonsense Suggestions for Making Peace, Not War

President Trump’s first year in office brought an escalation of military aggression abroad as he built on the interventions of previous administrations, but there are steps America can take to move towards a more peaceful future, writes retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel William J. Astore at TomDispatch.

By William J. Astore

Whether the rationale is the need to wage a war on terror involving 76 countries or renewed preparations for a struggle against peer competitors Russia and China (as Defense Secretary James Mattis suggested recently while introducing America’s new National Defense Strategy), the U.S. military is engaged globally. A network of 800 military bases spread across 172 countries helps enable its wars and interventions. By the count of the Pentagon, at the end of the last fiscal year about 291,000 personnel (including reserves and Department of Defense civilians) were deployed in 183 countries worldwide, which is the functional definition of a military uncontained. Lady Liberty may temporarily close when the U.S. government grinds to a halt, but the country’s foreign

military commitments, especially its wars, just keep humming along.

As a student of history, I was warned to avoid the notion of inevitability.

Still, given such data points and others like them, is there anything more predictable in this country's future than incessant warfare without a true victory in sight? Indeed, the last clear-cut American victory, the last true "mission accomplished" moment in a war of any significance, came in 1945 with the end of World War II.

Yet the lack of clear victories since then seems to faze no one in Washington.

In this century, presidents have regularly boasted that the U.S. military is the finest fighting force in human history, while no less regularly demanding that the most powerful military in today's world be "rebuilt" and funded at ever more staggering levels. Indeed, while on the campaign trail, Donald Trump promised he'd invest so much in the military that it would become "so big and so strong and so great, and it will be so powerful that I don't think we're ever going to have to use it."

As soon as he took office, however, he promptly appointed a set of generals to key positions in his government, stored the mothballs, and went back to war.

Here, then, is a brief rundown of the first year of his presidency in war terms.

Trump's First Year of War-Making

In 2017, Afghanistan saw a mini-surge of roughly 4,000 additional U.S. troops (with more to come), a major spike in air strikes, and an onslaught of munitions of all sorts, including MOAB (the mother of all bombs), the never-before-used largest non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. arsenal, as well as precision weapons fired by B-52s against suspected Taliban drug laboratories. By the Air Force's own count, 4,361 weapons were "released" in Afghanistan in 2017 compared to 1,337 in 2016. Despite this commitment of warriors and weapons, the Afghan war remains – according to American commanders putting the best possible light on the situation – "stalemated," with that country's capital Kabul currently under siege.

How about Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State? U.S.-led coalition forces have launched more than 10,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since Donald Trump became president, unleashing 39,577 weapons in 2017. (The figure for 2016 was 30,743.) The "caliphate" is now gone and ISIS deflated but not defeated, since you can't extinguish an ideology solely with bombs.

Meanwhile, along the Syrian-Turkish border a new conflict seems to be heating up between American-backed Kurdish forces and NATO ally Turkey.

Yet another strife-riven country, Yemen, witnessed a sixfold increase in U.S. airstrikes against al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (from 21 in 2016 to more than 131 in 2017). In Somalia, which has also seen a rise in such strikes against al-Shabaab militants, U.S. forces on the ground have reached numbers not seen since the Black Hawk Down incident of 1993. In each of these countries, there are yet more ruins, yet more civilian casualties, and yet more displaced people.

Finally, we come to North Korea. Though no real shots have yet been fired, rhetorical shots by two less-than-stable leaders, “Little Rocket Man” Kim Jong-un and “dotard” Donald Trump, raise the possibility of a regional bloodbath.

Trump, seemingly favoring military solutions to North Korea’s nuclear program even as his administration touts a new generation of more usable nuclear warheads, has been remarkably successful in moving the world’s doomsday clock ever closer to midnight.

Clearly, his “great” and “powerful” military has hardly been standing idly on the sidelines looking “big” and “strong.” More than ever, in fact, it seems to be lashing out across the Greater Middle East and Africa. Seventeen years after the 9/11 attacks began the Global War on Terror, all of this represents an eerily familiar attempt by the U.S. military to kill its way to victory, whether against the Taliban, ISIS, or other terrorist organizations.

This kinetic reality should surprise no one. Once you invest so much in your military – not just financially but also culturally (by continually celebrating it in a fashion which has come to seem like a quasi-faith) – it’s natural to want to put it to use. This has been true of all recent administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, as reflected in the infamous question Madeleine Albright posed to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell in 1992: “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”

With the very word “peace” rarely in Washington’s political vocabulary, America’s never-ending version of war seems as inevitable as anything is likely to be in history. Significant contingents of U.S. troops and contractors remain an enduring presence in Iraq and there are now 2,000 U.S. Special Operations forces and other personnel in Syria for the long haul. They are ostensibly engaged in training and stability operations. In Washington, however, the urge for regime change in both Syria and Iran remains strong – in the case of Iran implacably so. If past is prologue, then considering previous regime-change operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the future looks grim indeed.

Despite the dismal record of the last decade and a half, our civilian leaders continue to insist that this country must have a military not only second to

none but globally dominant. And few here wonder what such a quest for total dominance, the desire for absolute power, could do to this country. Two centuries ago, however, writing to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams couldn't have been clearer on the subject. Power, he said, "must never be trusted without a check."

The question today for the American people: How is the dominant military power of which U.S. leaders so casually boast to be checked? How is the country's almost total reliance on the military in foreign affairs to be reined in? How can the plans of the profiteers and arms makers to keep the good times rolling be brought under control?

As a start, consider one of Donald Trump's favorite generals, Douglas MacArthur, speaking to the Sperry Rand Corporation in 1957:

"Our swollen budgets constantly have been misrepresented to the public. Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear – kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor – with the cry of grave national emergency. Always there has been some terrible evil at home or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up if we did not blindly rally behind it by furnishing the exorbitant funds demanded. Yet, in retrospect, these disasters seem never to have happened, seem never to have been quite real."

No peacenik MacArthur. Other famed generals like Smedley Butler and Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke out with far more vigor against the corruptions of war and the perils to a democracy of an ever more powerful military, though such sentiments are seldom heard in this country today. Instead, America's leaders insist that other people judge us by our words, our stated good intentions, not our murderous deeds and their results.

Perpetual Warfare Whistles Through Washington

Whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere in the war on terror, the U.S. is now engaged in generational conflicts that are costing us trillions of dollars, driving up the national debt while weakening the underpinnings of our democracy. They have led to foreign casualties by the hundreds of thousands and created refugees in the millions, while turning cities like Iraq's Mosul into wastelands.

In today's climate of budget-busting "defense" appropriations, isn't it finally time for Americans to apply a little commonsense to our disastrous pattern of war-making? To prime the pump for such a conversation, here are 10 suggestions for ways to focus on, limit, or possibly change Washington's now eternal war-making and profligate war spending:

1. Abandon the notion of perfect security. You can't have it. It doesn't exist. And abandon as well the idea that a huge military establishment translates into national safety. James Madison didn't think so and neither did Dwight D. Eisenhower.
2. Who could have anything against calling the Pentagon a "defense" department, if defense were truly its focus? But let's face it: the Pentagon is actually a war department. So let's label it what it really is. After all, how can you deal with a problem if you can't even name it accurately?
3. Isn't it about time to start following the Constitution when it comes to our "wars"? Isn't it time for Congress to finally step up to its constitutional duties? Whatever the Pentagon is called, this country should no longer be able to pursue its many conflicts without a formal congressional declaration of war. If we had followed that rule, the U.S. wouldn't have fought any of its wars since the end of World War II.
4. Generational wars – ones, that is, that never end – should not be considered a measure of American resolve, but of American stupidity. If you wage war long, you wage it wrong, especially if you want to protect democratic institutions in this country.
5. Generals generally like to wage war. Don't blame them. It's their profession. But for heaven's sake, don't put them in charge of the Department of "Defense" (James Mattis) or the National Security Council (H.R. McMaster) either – and above all, don't let one of them (John Kelly) become the gatekeeper for a volatile, vain president. In our country, civilians should be in charge of the war makers, end of story.
6. You can't win wars you never should have begun in the first place. America's leaders failed to learn that lesson from Vietnam. Since then they have continued to wage wars for less-than-vital interests with predictably dismal results. Following the Vietnam example, America will only truly win its Afghan War when it chooses to rein in its pride and vanity – and leave.
7. The serious people in Washington snickered when, as a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2008, Congressman Dennis Kucinich called for a Department of Peace. Remind me, though, 17 years into our latest set of wars, what was so funny about that suggestion? Isn't it better to wage peace than war? If you don't believe me, ask a wounded veteran or a Gold Star family.
8. Want to invest in American jobs? Good idea! But stop making the military-industrial complex the preferred path to job creation. That's a loser of a way to go. It's proven that investments in "butter" create double or triple the number of jobs as those in "guns." In other words, invest in education, health care, and civilian infrastructure, not more weaponry.

9. Get rid of the very idea behind the infamous Pottery Barn rule – the warning Secretary of State Colin Powell offered George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq that if the U.S. military “breaks” a country, somehow we’ve “bought” it and so have to take ownership of the resulting mess. Whether stated or not, it’s continued to be the basis for this century’s unending wars. Honestly, if somebody broke something valuable you owned, would you trust that person to put it back together? Folly doesn’t decrease by persisting in it.
10. I was an officer in the Air Force. When I entered that service, the ideal of the citizen-soldier still held sway. But during my career I witnessed a slow, insidious change. A citizen-soldier military morphed into a professional ethos of “warriors” and “warfighters,” a military that saw itself as better than the rest of us. It’s time to think about how to return to that citizen-soldier tradition, which made it harder to fight those generational wars.

Consider retired General John Kelly, who, while defending the president in a controversy over the president’s words to the mother of a dead Green Beret, refused to take questions from reporters unless they had a personal connection to fallen troops or to a Gold Star family. Consider as well the way that U.S. politicians like Vice President Mike Pence are always so keen to exalt those in uniform, to speak of them as above the citizenry. (“You are the best of us.”)

Isn’t it time to stop praising our troops to the rooftops and thanking them endlessly for what they’ve done for us – for fighting those wars without end – and to start listening to them instead? Isn’t it time to try to understand them not as “heroes” in another universe, but as people like us in all their frailty and complexity? We’re never encouraged to see them as our neighbors, or as teenagers who struggled through high school, or as harried moms and dads.

Our troops are, of course, human and vulnerable and imperfect. We don’t help them when we put them on pedestals, give them flags to hold in the breeze, and salute them as icons of a feel-good brand of patriotism. Talk of warrior-heroes is worse than cheap: it enables our state of permanent war, elevates the Pentagon, ennobles the national security state, and silences dissent. That’s why it’s both dangerous and universally supported in rare bipartisan fashion by politicians in Washington.

So here’s my final point. Think of it as a bonus 11th suggestion: don’t make our troops into heroes, even when they’re in harm’s way. It would be so much better to make ourselves into heroes by getting them out of harm’s way.

Be exceptional, America. Make peace, not war.

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Connecticut Court Decision Highlights U.S. Educational Failures

A recent court decision in Connecticut overturned a mandate that would have addressed inadequate education funding for poorer communities, a historic problem of the U.S. educational system, which relies on local resources instead of federal wealth, as Jonathan Kozol and Dennis J. Bernstein discussed.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In 1973, I was a struggling young teacher working in inner city Brooklyn when I discovered Jonathan Kozol's National Book Award-winning *Death at an Early Age*.

It became my young teacher's bible on understanding the nature of the school system and the pervasive racism at its core. Its subtitle, "The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools" is as relevant now as it was when it was published some 53 years ago.

Witness the recent decision by the Connecticut Supreme Court [Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding v. Rell], which rejected a claim by a coalition of municipalities, parents and students that the state's education funding formula is unconstitutional.

According to the AP, a divided court recently overturned a lower court ruling that had ordered state officials to develop plans for an overhaul of the state's education system, citing a huge gap in test scores between students in rich and poor towns. In response, Kozol remarked recently that this Court decision condones and sustains a system of virtual total segregation.

Kozol has worked with children in inner city schools for some fifty years.

Death at an Early Age was followed by a series of books, each one a powerful indictment of the public school system in the US, even as he celebrates the kids he meets and their teachers who continue to do their best, despite the abandonment of public schools and the racism that accompanies it.

His subsequent books include *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, and *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*.

I spoke with Kozol on January 31st in Boston.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you begin by describing what the decision was that the court overturned and explaining why it is significant.

Jonathan Kozol: A lower court had found that the inequalities within the state between wealthy and poor school districts were unacceptable and unconstitutional. But the Connecticut Supreme Court in a divided decision unfortunately overturned the lower court judge. This has been a pattern all over the United States. By and large, we have seen this for decades.

In the 1990's we had the same situation in Ohio. They actually prevailed three times in showing that the system was blatantly unequal and won at the supreme court level. Even then, in contempt of court, the governor and legislature refused to obey the order. The governor finally packed the court with new appointees and the next time around they accepted the status quo.

This kind of thing has happened everywhere. Legislatures and governors have a thousand ways to drag their heels. In some cases they just say they don't have the money to do it.

There is a very poor town in Virginia named Petersburg. It is an important city in a way because it was a center of the slave trade and some important slave rebellions took place there. They have basically an all-Black school system.

They get about \$10,000 per child a year. Not so far away, in Arlington, Virginia, they're spending \$19,000 every year per child. That is almost twice as much, and of course the irony was that the kids in Petersburg were more in need!

They don't have parents who can take them to Paris before their French finals.

They don't get three years of preschool like wealthy kids do. There's just no level playing field in the United States.

I don't think this is ever going to be solved at the state level. The problem will only be solved when the education of every child in America is financed with the real wealth of the nation by the federal government. This is the way it is done in almost every other advanced society in the world.

We can't do that now because of a dreadful court decision [San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez] way back in 1972 in Texas. The poor districts prevailed at the local level and then the US Supreme Court overruled the district court. They ruled that education is not a protected right under the US Constitution.

DB: Your first book, *Death at an Early Age*, really broke the story of the unequal distribution of wealth among schools. As a substitute teacher in New York City, I remember that I would get called into a school on the east side of

Manhattan and they had everything: a gymnasium, a library full of books, guidance counselors. You go up twenty or thirty blocks and the Dewey decimal system is still in place, athletics amounts to "here's a basketball, go out and play." It was always amazing for me to see the incredible difference in the same school system!

JK: I must say parenthetically that even in these very poorly funded schools, I keep running into terrific teachers. I've spent some time in Kern County, California, in schools that are just an hour and a half drive from L.A. These are badly funded schools but I would run into these great teachers and good principals, too.

But when these poorer kids do badly on these standardized tests, who does the media blame? They don't blame the state for cheating these kids from the hour of their birth, they blame the kids or else they blame their teachers. We have this whole regime now in the United States that holds the victims accountable.

In the poorer schools, we spend half the year drilling them for the tests, which has little to do with education but is training them to outsmart the test. We try to pump the scores a couple points and if that doesn't happen we blame the teachers.

The new solution is to set up charter schools in these cities, which become drill academies. Virtually all of them are apartheid schools because they specifically target minorities. And if they can raise the scores a few points, then the media says ah, that's the answer! Actually, they are just slightly higher-scoring separate and unequal schools.

If it were only inequality, then we could say it is a technical problem, we can solve it somehow. But there is a toxic synergy between financially unequal schools and virtually total abandonment of any integration efforts. In fact, when I talk about integration at school conferences, the corporate types that sponsor these events start to yawn.

What they do is sort of reinvent Dr. King's dream. They say, this is an all-Black school but we are living Dr. King's dream because we are training these Black and Latino kids to be more responsible for themselves and improving their character.

But Dr. King didn't say, "I have a dream that one day our victims will be more productive." It was about separate and unequal. We are back to that again. In my hometown of Boston, the system is more segregated than when I started teaching in 1964.

You mentioned New York and the Upper East Side. The Upper West Side is the

classic example of what is happening now. There are a lot of affluent white professionals who are historically liberal in every way except this one. Just ten, twenty blocks to the north in Harlem you have virtually all-minority schools. And there are some schools that are kind of on the border between the two neighborhoods, but white people, for all their liberal beliefs, shun those schools.

When enlightened civic leaders ask why these kids can't go to school together, the white parents aren't as obvious in their racism as people were in Alabama fifty years ago, but they will say, of course we believe in diversity, but if they go to those schools our kids won't do as well.

There is still this assumption of basic inferiority in the minority kids. They wouldn't say it is genetic inferiority but, for a combination of social reasons, these kids are going to ruin our kids' education. That is what it amounts to.

It is heartbreaking to me. I am 81 years old and I felt sure in 1968 that all this was going to change within ten years.

There are answers, of course. At least in small or middle-sized cities like Boston, we could very easily create a metropolitan school system. It wouldn't be a long ride for a kid to go in either direction. But that agenda is off the table, it's unfashionable now. This withdrawal from the mountaintop has been going on for a quarter century.

DB: One important point you make in *Savage Inequalities* is that we have to change the way public schools are funded. Schools are set up for failure from the get-go when so much depends on the local economic base. Is a lack of resources at the heart of the matter?

JK: These experts at the Hoover Institution and Heritage Foundation are always asking, "Is money really the answer?" Supposed liberals will look me in the face and say, "Jonathan, can you really solve the problems of those kinds by throwing money at them?" These are the same people who send their kids to prep schools that cost \$60,000 a year. My answer is always: "It seems to work for your kids, doesn't it?" It is sheer hypocrisy.

The basic funding for public schools comes from property taxes. States contribute what is known as "foundation money" so that no school goes without the bare minimum even if their local property taxes are insignificant.

The problem is that these foundation levels are always set so low. All the wealthy districts have to do is have a small bond levy and raise their property taxes half of one percent, and since they have lots of million dollar homes their funding shoots way up. Or they hold fundraising parties and in one night

they will raise half a million dollars to build a new library or bring in art and music teachers. A poor district is lucky if they can raise \$800.

The only answer, I believe, is to do what all other developed nations do already and fund education out of the real wealth of the nation. It makes sense not only in practical terms, but in moral terms, in terms of citizenship. You don't go to school to be a citizen of Nebraska or California. We go to school to be Americans. Kids pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States.

What we have today is an uneven social contract. If not for that decision in 1972, equal education would be a fundamental right under the US Constitution.

If Bernie Sanders had won, perhaps we would have ended up with a Supreme Court that would reexamine that decision.

DB: Finally, what do you think of the job our Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is doing?

JK: She is a catastrophe. First of all, although she is not very smart, she is slick and gives a slick veneer to this old slogan "freedom of choice."

This was the slogan of segregationists in the South after the Brown decision, when they started so-called "voucher schools." She is not simply in favor of more and more of these segregated charter schools, which are even more segregated than public schools; she is also in favor of vouchers, the invidious idea that goes way back to Milton Friedman in the 1950's and was tested out in Pinochet's Chile.

Devos also wants to open this up to religious schools. She represents the spearhead of the privatization movement that would like to do away with public education altogether.

We are at the lowest point in the history of education in America that I can remember since the hopeful moment at the tail end of the 1960's. Fortunately, there is a younger generation that is gathering momentum now. I am working with Black Lives Matter on a project. They are talking about these issues at last.

When I visit colleges, I'll stay up half the night with these young minority kids, and sometimes some damn decent white kids who identify with the struggle.

Maybe they are going to save us.

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.

Forced Migration vs. ‘Chain Migration’

Neoliberal economic policies have created a system of forced migration for many people but the Trump team is planning to ramp-up its assault on immigrants and those who advocate for migrants rights, activist Nativio Lopez explained to Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

On January 17, Kevin De Leon, California’s Senate President Pro Tempore stated “Immigration and Customs Enforcement is reportedly amassing agents from across the United States as it prepares to launch the most aggressive deportation raids under the Trump Administration in northern California in the coming weeks.”

According to Senator De Leon, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen “is exploring pressing criminal charges against state and local officials who implement ‘sanctuary’ policies. “The Department of Homeland Security has even admitted they are considering a move to arrest political leaders such as myself,” De Leon continued, “ who have led the charge in California to prevent the feds from commandeering state and local resources to tear hard working families apart. These extraordinary threats against the President’s political opponents are meant to intimidate us, designed to silence and subjugate us. But they will do the opposite.”

Indeed, an army of immigrants right supporters, in the form of lawyers, human rights and local community activist, and concerned politicians are now mobilizing from one end of the state to the other to fight back.

I spoke about the significance of the ICE threats and the grassroots uprising in response, with Nativio Lopez. Lopez is a longtime advocate for the undocumented Spanish-speaking communities in Southern California, and a spokesperson for Hermandad Mexicana, a social, cultural and political organization based in Los Angeles. I spoke to Lopez in Los Angeles on January 30.

Dennis Bernstein: In terms of deportations, Obama still holds the record as Deporter and Chief, but Trump seems to be pulling out all the stops now.

Nativio Lopez: Well, it is almost like “back to the future” with this administration. We saw the most devastating deportation numbers under the Obama administration and now we are seeing much of the same. Actually the numbers are lower compared to the first two years of the Obama administration. But Trump is continuing the work of terrorizing immigrants and the communities they are a part of. Immigrants are the target but working class communities are really

feeling the effects of the repressive measures initiated by this administration.

It has targeted California because it has declared itself a sanctuary state.

The government of California, including the attorney general, will now be tested as to what their interpretation is of the term "sanctuary."

DB: Of course, Obama earned the title "Deporter in Chief," but Trump now takes it to the next level because he is not afraid to talk in terms of ethnic cleansing.

NL: When he makes references to El Salvador, Haiti, and the continent of Africa, these are the same communities who now live within the US. The proposal that he is now making on immigration, supposedly to save the day for the Dreamers, is to legalize the status of 1.8 million but at the same time eliminate the ability to legally bring family members to the United States.

Despite all this talk about "illegal immigration" over the years, the underlying motive of these xenophobes has always been to reduce legal immigration to the United States from Latin American and Asian Pacific countries. They are intent on preserving their idea of a white America by reducing the ability of nationalized immigrants to bring family members to the United States.

DB: What is your understanding of the right-wing term "chain immigration"?

NL: They are talking from both sides of their mouths. They say people should wait in line and do it legally, and yet we see they are really trying to reduce legal immigration to the country.

Under current law, legal immigrants to this country have the right to immigrate their parents, their siblings, their spouse and any children they have who were born outside the United States. What they are trying to do is eliminate in Congress the ability of a legal immigrant to immigrate his or her parents or siblings. This would reduce by half the number of immigrants who legally come to the United States.

This has happened under both Republican and Democratic administrations. The majority of undocumented immigrants in the United States today are undocumented because of a migration law that was passed in 1978 during the Carter administration which eliminated the right of US citizens to immediately immigrate their parents until the US citizen reached the age of twenty-one.

I myself fought against that legislation because I knew that it would immediately create a balloon of undocumented parents in the United States.

After massive resistance and lobbying, we were able to get legislation in 1986, during the time of the Reagan administration, that allowed parents to legalize

their status because they had been in the country so long. They were able to obtain legal permanent status.

DB: Instead of chain migration, maybe we should be talking about forced migration.

NL: When we talk about defending immigrants against deportation, we should talk about the right to not immigrate to the United States. What forces so many to immigrate here? Extreme poverty, the inability to obtain employment at a decent wage, social violence, drug cartel violence. This is what is forcing migration to the United States.

Certainly the free trade agreements in Mexico and Central America contributed to the mass emigration from those countries. In Mexico alone, over the course of the NAFTA years from 1994 to the present day, four to five million small farm owners have been thrown off their lands and forced to migrate to America because agribusiness, both in Mexico and the United States, gobbled up those lands and forced production to meet the agricultural needs of the United States. Prior to 1994, Mexico was self-sufficient in its domestic corn production. Today it imports from the United States between 40 and 60 percent of its corn. So those are the push factors that bring migrants to the United States.

I laugh when I hear the former president of Mexico, Vicente Fox, criticize the Trump administration. When Fox was president, he did absolutely nothing to defend those Mexicans who were forced to come to the United States, and he was actually a purveyor of privatization of the petroleum industry to serve the interests of US multinational corporations.

DB: I am looking at a press release from Kevin de Leon's office, where he writes that "The Department of Homeland Security has even admitted that they are considering a move to arrest political leaders such as myself who have led the charge in California to prevent the feds from commandeering state and local resources to tear hard-working families apart."

NL: There is such a thing as state sovereignty and a state's ability to pass laws to protect its residents. At the end of the day, the governor, the president pro tempore, the Latino caucus and other progressive caucuses, the California attorney general—all of them will be tested in the next several days if, in fact, Homeland Security launches the kind of massive detention and deportation that they are threatening against California.

DB: We know that every day about 122 Dreamers are losing their DACA status and are faced with uncertainty about their future. We have seen the Democrats collapse on this issue. Do you expect anything at the federal level?

NL: I really don't. It is possible that the Democrats cave in and give Trump the \$20 billion he wants to build the wall. It looks like he is going to use the Dreamers as hostages to make good on his campaign promise. Our recommendation to the legislators is to not cave in but to fight back.

We want a clean bill, meaning that all DACA recipients should be allowed to obtain permanent resident status without having to concede anything related to the border wall and certainly anything related to the ability of legal residents to immigrate their family members.

There needs to be massive resistance. I know that in Northern California they are talking about organizing a 100,000 person march in February. We need to do that throughout California. We need to resist in the courts, we need to resist in the streets.

Actually, a DACA permit holder stands a better chance of fighting deportation than a person who has nothing. Some argue that if we don't accept what Trump is offering, we will be putting in jeopardy 800,000 young people with DACA status.

The fact of the matter is that there is an injunction in place in the federal courts against the cancellation of the DACA program which is going to take months to work its way through the courts.

My personal and political recommendation is to fight for a clean bill and to throw these people out of Congress and out of the White House. If the complexion of Congress changes in November, that will make it extremely difficult for the administration to move forward with its plans for massive deportation.

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.

The Enduring Shame of Guantanamo

From the Archive: In his State of the Union address Tuesday, President Trump announced that he had signed an executive order to keep the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay open. On this occasion, we republish an article from 2012 by Nat Parry marking Guantanamo's ten-year anniversary.

By Nat Parry ([First published on Jan. 12, 2012](#))

When the Guantanamo prison camp, originally dubbed by the U.S. military Camp X-Ray, opened in January 2002, the United States came under international criticism that was nearly unprecedented in its intensity.

Some of the loudest complaints came from the staunchest U.S. ally, the United Kingdom, where three cabinet ministers Robin Cook, Patricia Hewitt and Jack Straw expressed concern that international agreements about the treatment of prisoners of war were being breached. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, also objected to the camp and called on President George W. Bush's administration to follow the Geneva Conventions.

In a Jan. 19, 2002, column in the British Independent, Robinson argued that because the Afghanistan conflict was of an international nature, "the law of international armed conflict applies." She took issue with the administration's assertion that the prisoners were "unlawful combatants" and thus outside the protections of the Geneva Conventions.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said that despite the Sept. 11 atrocities, "changing our values and our way of life would be terrorism's first victory."

Amnesty International expressed concern about the tactics being used and the secrecy surrounding the camp. "Keeping prisoners incommunicado, sensory deprivation, the use of unnecessary restraint and the humiliation of people through tactics such as shaving them, are all classic techniques employed to 'break' the spirit of individuals ahead of interrogation," the human rights group said.

The International Committee of the Red Cross – in an unusual deviation from its practice of not publicly criticizing detaining governments – said the United States might have violated Geneva Convention rules against making a spectacle of prisoners by distributing pictures of the detainees being subjected to sensory deprivation, which were published worldwide.

British human rights attorney Stephen Solley said the treatment of the suspects was "so far removed from human rights norms that it [was] difficult to comprehend."

Seven years later, just two days into his administration, President Barack Obama's announcement that he would close the Guantanamo camp was greeted with international praise equally intense. An Executive Order Obama signed on Jan. 22, 2009, seemed to unambiguously mandate the closure of Guantanamo within a year:

"The detention facilities at Guantanamo for individuals covered by this order

shall be closed as soon as practicable, and no later than one year from the date of this order. If any individuals covered by this order remain in detention at Guantanamo at the time of closure of those detention facilities, they shall be returned to their home country, released, transferred to a third country, or transferred to another United States detention facility in a manner consistent with law and the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States.”

Michele Cercone, spokesperson for the European Union Justice and Home Affairs Commission, said at the time that the commission “has been very pleased that one of the first actions of Mr. Obama has been to turn the page on this sad episode of Guantanamo.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay also praised Obama’s Executive Order, saying that it was a good day for the rule of law. “The fact that President Obama has placed such a high priority on closing Guantanamo and set in motion a system to safeguard the fundamental rights of the detainees there is extremely encouraging,” she stated.

“The United States has in the past been a staunch supporter of international human rights law, and this is one of the reasons that the regime that was established in Guantanamo has been viewed as so damaging,” the High Commissioner added.

Now at Guantanamo’s ten-year anniversary and nearly three years after President Obama’s Executive Order there is a palpable sense of disappointment and betrayal from the human rights community. The United States is finding itself on the receiving end of now-familiar criticism of its indefinite detention policies, with human rights organizations and intergovernmental bodies renewing their complaints that for the past ten years, the U.S. has flouted international human rights standards in its practices at the notorious prison camp.

“Human Rights Watch opposes the prolonged indefinite detention without trial of terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere,” said HRW in a statement on Jan. 6. The group reminded the U.S. of its obligations to prosecute terrorist suspects and to compensate detainees who have been wrongly imprisoned and mistreated over the past decade:

“The practice [of indefinite detention] violates U.S. obligations under international law. Human Rights Watch has strongly urged the U.S. government to either promptly prosecute the remaining Guantanamo detainees according to international fair trial standards, or safely repatriate them to home or third countries.

"We have also called for investigations of U.S. officials implicated in torture of terrorism suspects and for adequate compensation for detainees who were mistreated. Human Rights Watch will continue to press for compliance with these obligations. Failure to do so does enormous damage to the rule of law both in the US and abroad."

On the eve of Guantanamo's tenth anniversary, Amnesty International said, "Guantanamo has politicized justice internationally by portraying detainees as having no human rights." Amnesty has described the legacy of the Guantanamo Bay prison as a "decade of damage to human rights" not only in the United States, but across the world.

In a report released on Dec. 16, 2011, Amnesty stated:

"The USA speaks the language of human rights fluently on the global stage, but stumbles when it comes to applying human rights standards to itself. The Bush administration promised to put human rights at the centre of its counter-terrorism strategy, but singularly failed to do so. The Obama administration has promised the same thing, but the USA continues to fall short of this commitment, despite what were undoubtedly positive initial steps in the right direction."

"From day one," said Amnesty, "the USA failed to recognize the applicability of human rights law to the Guantanamo detentions."

Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, the Director of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), also expressed dismay over the failure to close the Guantanamo facility.

"Universal human rights standards require that the detention of terrorist suspects shall be accompanied by concrete charges and the persons detained under these charges shall be immediately informed of them and brought before a competent judicial authority," Lenarcic said.

In a press release, ODIHR reminded the United States of its OSCE obligations:

"As a participating State of the OSCE, the United States has committed itself to respect human rights in the fight against terrorism and to ensure the right to a fair trial within a reasonable time before an independent and impartial tribunal. In the OSCE Bucharest Document of 2001, participating States expressed their determination to protect their citizens from security challenges such as terrorism 'while safeguarding the rule of law, individual liberties, and the right to equal justice under law.'"

Lenarcic regretted that the practice of indefinite detention without trial has

been codified into U.S. law with the recent adoption of the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). He called for a swift closure of the Guantanamo detention center and urged the authorities to prosecute promptly the remaining Guantanamo detainees in accordance with international fair trial standards, or release them.

Moazzam Begg, a 43-year-old British Muslim who was wrongly detained at Guantanamo for three years until British authorities negotiated his release in January 2005, is more despondent about the prospects of closing the prison camp.

“Gitmo will never close. That is a fantasy,” Begg recently told CNN. “I’ve stopped wishing for it. Even if it closes its doors, it will be only symbolic. The detainees who are still there will go somewhere else to be held and be treated possibly worse, and still not get their time in court. And Gitmo, in a way, will always be open. It will be in my memory, in my head, just like everyone else who experienced that hell.”

Colonel Morris Davis, a chief prosecutor at Guantanamo Bay during the Bush administration, concurs with Moazzam Begg, saying that Obama “doesn’t have the balls” to close Guantanamo.

Nat Parry is co-author of Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.

Former Ambassador Reflects on Current Events

Former British Ambassador Craig Murray discussed the current situation with Julian Assange, the alleged Russian election hack, Trump’s Israel embassy move and more in an interview with Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. Murray’s books include *Zionism is Bullshit*—censored on Facebook—and *Murder in Samarkand*. He is a self-proclaimed defender and strong supporter of the work of Julian Assange as one of the most significant “Publishers” of our time.

Murray was interviewed by Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein on January 25.

Randy Credico: The last time we spoke, Craig, you were involved in a libel suit which I believe had a positive outcome for you. Even as we spoke, you were in route to London to defend yourself from the suit brought against by a gentleman you called a liar, after he publicly called you an anti-Semite because of your criticism of Israel and the ongoing ethnic cleansing there against the Palestinians. I understand that the suit was dropped just as the case was getting underway. But it cost you a pretty penny before it was over.

Craig Murray: Unfortunately, while I didn't lose the case, I still ended up having to pay my lawyers. Libel suits are incredibly expensive in the UK, which is why they are used by corporations and the wealthy to silence ordinary people. My legal bills came to well over \$100,000. Lucky for me, there were over 5,000 individuals who subscribed to our defense fund and that paid the bill for me. But it is frightening because ordinary people are terrified to write anything critical of the wealthy and powerful.

RC: I was there right after your suit ended. I was covering Stefania Maurizi's suit in the high court to get email transmissions from the Crown Prosecution Service to both Sweden and the US concerning Julian Assange. She made a great case but in the end they sided with the prosecution. Is the system totally rigged there, or is it libelous to say that?

CM: It is fair to say that the establishment stick together. In fact, I believe that the government and the judiciary are closer here than they are in the United States to some extent. There is quite a closed circle of the ruling class. They attend all the same schools and they are closely linked in various ways. So once you take on the establishment, you are taking on the entire establishment.

RC: So they are protecting the US government but they are protecting themselves as well. The UK was involved in a lot of the things that Assange exposed—the war logs and some of the cables. Is the motivation to keep him quiet so that the exposures don't continue?

CM: Yes, and the corporate press is part of the same nexus and control the public's access to judicial proceedings. Wikileaks very much threatens this control of government information. Wikileaks's motto is "we open governments" and that is very true.

Dennis Bernstein: I'd like to talk a little more about Julian Assange's situation. We know that the powers that be try to undermine the spirit as best they can. To date they have been unable to stop Julian from continuing this work for the people. We know he is facing health problems now. How do you assess his condition and what could happen at this point?

CM: I last met Julian in the embassy a little over two weeks ago. I am not a medical person but medical professionals now say he is in serious condition, both medical and psychological, from the effects of his confinement. He has a single room which is about twelve square feet and a smaller room where people from Wikileaks sometimes work with him. The entire Ecuadorian embassy in London is just an apartment.

Julian gets no daylight at all. He doesn't like to go near the windows because of the threats which have been made against him. He gets no outside exercise, which even the worse prison offenders are allowed for a short period every day to get some fresh air and stretch their legs. This kind of confining existence is a real health danger. In addition, there is the indeterminate nature of the whole thing, which is bound to have a severe psychological effect, not having any idea when he is going to be let out.

But having said all that, I have not seen any diminution in his intellectual abilities. In fact, he seems to be even more honed in on the issues of the day. He is extremely well informed on political and social developments and an extremely shrewd analyst. I don't want people to worry about him in that way. But he looks pale and he is obviously not in a healthy state. The dangers of decline are definitely there.

DB: The current Ecuadorian government, which would really like to earn some good favor in the United States, could become a very dangerous entity to Julian Assange.

CM: In general, Ecuador has been fantastic in what they have done for him. Ecuador is a small country and like most countries in Latin America is vulnerable to pressure from the United States. The political situation there has changed and the left is not in the position it was five or six years ago. There is a heavy CIA presence there, both overt and covert. So I don't criticize the Ecuadorian government, they're in a very difficult position.

DB: Facebook has not taken kindly to your recent critique of Zionism. What did they say?

CM: An editor has very kindly taken on the task of collecting earlier articles of mine into a book. They include a speech I gave after one of the big Israeli attacks in Gaza. I actually gave the speech in front of a crowd of 350,000 people in Hyde Park. That's when I first used the phrase "Zionism is bullshit," which became the title of the book.

Facebook took down ads for the book, claiming that they objected to the profanity, which is kind of funny because it is a word that appears quite often

on Facebook. Later they claimed that the book was banned because the title denigrated a religion. Of course, Zionism is not a religion but a political movement. Many religious Jews do not support Zionism. If I don't agree with a political position I should be able to say so as plainly as I wish.

DB: The current US administration plans to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Would that be in keeping with Zionist policy?

CM: Look, my own ancestors were primarily Celtic and we know that 3,000 years ago the Celtic people resided in places like present-day Switzerland. Just because 3,000 years ago some people believed that God gave Jerusalem specifically to the Jewish people, that doesn't mean that you ignore the next 3,000 years and the place should become the capital of Israel based on biblical references. The idea that the rights of the Palestinian people can be ignored because of religious text written down thousands of years ago is absolutely ludicrous.

The Palestinians have had a dreadful time over the last ten years. Not only have they periodically suffered completely disproportionate military attacks but they continue to suffer the appropriation of their land and the destruction of their buildings and farms, with more and more Israeli settlements being built on Palestinian land, to the extent that a two-state solution is no longer viable because so much of what would be the Palestinian state is now Israeli settlements, containing hundreds of thousands of people.

To declare Jerusalem the capital of the Israeli state is going to be a major handicap to any future peace settlement. It is something that the entire international community has resisted doing. It really does set back progress on the Israel/Palestine issue, doing nothing for the cause of peace or for Israeli security. This is being done to gain domestic political advantage in the United States with the Christian Evangelical lobby.

RC: Julian Assange has now been granted citizenship as well as diplomatic status by the Ecuadorian government. But the British government refuses to recognize this diplomatic status.

CM: Now it gets a little technical. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, if you appoint an ambassador, that ambassador has to be approved in advance by the host country. If you appoint a diplomat to the embassy below the level of ambassador, you don't have to seek agreement in advance. All you have to do is notify. And Ecuador notified the British government of its decision to grant Assange diplomatic status.

Again, the Vienna Convention is absolutely clear that from the moment of

notification that person enjoys diplomatic immunity. The host state doesn't have to accept the person, they can declare him or her persona non grata and the person then has to leave the country within a reasonable period of time. But they have diplomatic immunity from the moment of notification until they leave.

The whole point of diplomatic immunity is to prevent foreign states from effectively kidnapping your diplomats in order to extort from them your country's secrets. So the British government should have to allow Assange to leave the country and he should have immunity while he leaves, but they have stated that they would arrest him if he leaves the embassy.

The remedy would be for Ecuador to take the United Kingdom to the International Court of Justice to oblige the UK to follow international law in this regard.

Whether Ecuador is prepared to do that, I don't know. It would require significant legal resources and time and cost a certain amount of diplomatic capital.

Another option would be, were he to be arrested, his lawyers could take his case to the courts in the UK. But we have spoken already of the close ties between the British courts and the government and whether he could succeed is an open question. The fear is that immediately an extradition request would come in from the United States.

DB: The fact is, Julian Assange is a political prisoner who has made an extraordinary practice of monitoring centers of power. They are going to do whatever they can to bring him down. The only real way to save Assange is for the people to be made aware and for them to rise up and prevent the UK government from doing this because this person has performed a great public service on many fronts in many countries.

CM: You are absolutely right. He is being persecuted by governments because of the tremendous journalism he has published. It is ironic that at the moment Hollywood is bringing out a film called *The Post* about the Pentagon Papers and that is being celebrated at the same time that the entire establishment is out to get Julian Assange for publishing in exactly the way The Washington Post did.

Of course, The Washington Post has now given up on that and we no longer have a liberal media. The New York Times and The Washington Post are leading the calls for attacks on whistleblowers. Julian Assange exemplifies the only remaining form of free media outlet.

DB: You write in your recent piece "The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming", "The complete and unmitigated irrationality of the current epidemic of Russia-phobia does nothing to reduce its incredible virulence as it continues to

infect the entire political and media class.” That would include The Washington Post, wouldn’t it?

CM: In fact, the articles that The Washington Post has been spewing out for a year now on Russiagate and the alleged collusion between WikiLeaks and Russia have been quite remarkable to behold. They appear to have given up any journalistic standards in terms of truthful reporting, in terms of allowing people a chance to reply to their allegations, and in terms of doing any real investigation of the facts. The New York Times is probably just as bad on this story. They have both been astonishing in their inaccuracy.

It is difficult to explain what is happening. The political and intelligence communities have seen WikiLeaks as an enemy ever since the Chelsea Manning revelations. And then the political establishment was very alarmed by the challenges to Hillary Clinton, the first of which was the challenge posed by Bernie Sanders. Then WikiLeaks got a hold of emails from the DNC and Podesta which indicated that the entire playing field was being quite deliberately tilted against Sanders to make sure that he didn’t win. This, of course, added to Clinton’s unpopularity. All through the campaign opinion polls showed that Clinton was the only person who could possibly lose to Donald Trump. But the establishment made sure that she got the nomination. Already during the campaign she and her people identified Russia as the scapegoat.

So we have had the coming together of these factors: the hatred of WikiLeaks by the intelligence community, the military’s need for Russia as an enemy to justify the billions and billions in military spending, and the need of the so-called liberal left for a scapegoat for Hillary’s defeat. So you have this kind of perfect storm that has led people to concoct this imaginary scenario where Russia installed the president of the United States in collusion with Julian Assange.

DB: So again, was this a hack or a leak?

CM: It was definitely not a hack, not by Russia or anybody else. It was a leak of information legally downloaded from their servers. I know this because I am quite closely associated with WikiLeaks. But WikiLeaks never reveal their sources because they are totally focused on source protection.

RC: Is there an economic motivation here? Is there a Russiagate industry that has developed?

CM: We shouldn’t underestimate the NSA and their fantastic capabilities. People from inside the agency, such as William Binney and Edward Snowden, all say that if it were a hack the NSA would have the technical ability to trace that data as

it passed through the Internet. They would be able to tell you the exact second the hack occurred and where it went. There is no such data, because it wasn't a hack.

People tend to rationalize doing what makes their employers happy or what they consider to be to their advantage in terms of their career. That is a kind of economic motive, but I think it is largely subconscious. People do what they do to get ahead.

Of course, people at the top have a very definite economic motive. They are trying to maintain corporate control and the control of the political class through a process described by Noam Chomsky [and the late Edward Herman] as "manufacturing consent." But I believe the foot soldiers subconsciously fall in with what they are supposed to do in order to keep their jobs.

RC: You just wrote a piece on Margaret Thatcher and her support for Apartheid in South Africa.

CM: It is interesting how the media airbrush history. One of the things which has been airbrushed out of Margaret Thatcher's history is that she was a strong supporter of the Apartheid system. I have no doubt about this whatsoever because my first job as a foreign officer was at the South Africa desk as a political officer.

The entire two years I was there, we were trying to bring her to understand that Apartheid was evil and had to end. But this went against her strong personal instincts, which were to support Whites-only rule. She successfully opposed any sanctions against Apartheid South Africa. She refused to allow any of her government officials to talk to the ANC or to anybody representing Black people in South Africa.

I have been explaining this to people for many years but people have tended to doubt me because I was going against the accepted narrative. I was very gratified last week that Sir Patrick Wright, the head of the foreign service at that time, published his diaries from that time, where he makes absolutely plain that Thatcher supported Apartheid and that he considered her a racist. I am happy indeed that the truth is starting to get out there.

But the other point is that there are many people in senior positions in the conservative party now—including our minister of defense who just resigned—who at the time were also strong supporters of Apartheid.

DB: Meanwhile, as we all know, Apartheid is alive and well in Israel/Palestine. Let us pray that the kind of forces that rose up to end Apartheid in South Africa will also bring pressure to end the situation in Palestine.

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The War That Never Ends (for the U.S. Military High Command)

A preoccupation with the “win-ability” of the Vietnam War has persisted among U.S. military commanders who doggedly pursue the War on Terror, despite all indications of the disastrous reality of both conflicts, writes U.S. Army Major Danny Sjursen for TomDispatch.

By Danny Sjursen

Vietnam: it’s always there. Looming in the past, informing American futures.

A 50-year-old war, once labeled the longest in our history, is still alive and well and still being refought by one group of Americans: the military high command. And almost half a century later, they’re still losing it and blaming others for doing so.

Of course, the U.S. military and Washington policymakers lost the war in Vietnam in the previous century and perhaps it’s well that they did. The United States really had no business intervening in that anti-colonial civil war in the first place, supporting a South Vietnamese government of questionable legitimacy, and stifling promised nationwide elections on both sides of that country’s artificial border. In doing so, Washington presented an easy villain for a North Vietnamese-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgency, a group known to Americans in those years as the Vietcong.

More than two decades of involvement and, at the war’s peak, half a million American troops never altered the basic weakness of the U.S.-backed regime in Saigon. Despite millions of Asian deaths and 58,000 American ones, South Vietnam’s military could not, in the end, hold the line without American support and finally collapsed under the weight of a conventional North Vietnamese invasion in April 1975.

There’s just one thing. Though a majority of historians (known in academia as the “orthodox” school) subscribe to the basic contours of the above narrative, the vast majority of senior American military officers do not. Instead, they’re still refighting the Vietnam War to a far cheerier outcome through the books

they read, the scholarship they publish, and (most disturbingly) the policies they continue to pursue in the Greater Middle East.

The Big Re-Write

In 1986, future general, Iraq-Afghan War commander, and CIA director David Petraeus penned an article for the military journal *Parameters* that summarized his Princeton doctoral dissertation on the Vietnam War. It was a piece commensurate with then-Major Petraeus's impressive intellect, except for its disastrous conclusions on the lessons of that war. Though he did observe that Vietnam had "cost the military dearly" and that "the frustrations of Vietnam are deeply etched in the minds of those who lead the services," his real fear was that the war had left the military unprepared to wage what were then called "low-intensity conflicts" and are now known as counterinsurgencies. His takeaway: what the country needed wasn't less Vietnams but better-fought ones.

The next time, he concluded fatefully, the military should do a far better job of implementing counterinsurgency forces, equipment, tactics, and doctrine to win such wars.

Two decades later, when the next Vietnam-like quagmire did indeed present itself in Iraq, he and a whole generation of COINdinistas (like-minded officers devoted to his favored counterinsurgency approach to modern warfare) embraced those very conclusions to win the war on terror. The names of some of them – H.R. McMaster and James Mattis, for instance – should ring a bell or two these days. In Iraq and later in Afghanistan, Petraeus and his acolytes would get their chance to translate theory into practice. Americans – and much of the rest of the planet – still live with the results.

Like Petraeus, an entire generation of senior military leaders, commissioned in the years after the Vietnam War and now atop the defense behemoth, remain fixated on that ancient conflict. After all these decades, such "thinking" generals and "soldier-scholars" continue to draw all the wrong lessons from what, thanks in part to them, has now become America's *second* longest war.

Rival Schools

Historian Gary Hess identifies two main schools of revisionist thinking. There are the "Clausewitzians" (named after the nineteenth century Prussian military theorist) who insist that Washington never sufficiently attacked the enemy's true center of gravity in North Vietnam. Beneath the academic language, they essentially agree on one key thing: the U.S. military should have bombed the North into a parking lot.

The second school, including Petraeus, Hess labeled the "hearts-and-minders."

As COINdinitas, they felt the war effort never focused clearly enough on isolating the Vietcong, protecting local villages in the South, building schools, and handing out candy – everything, in short, that might have won (in the phrase of that era) Vietnamese hearts and minds.

Both schools, however, agreed on something basic: that the U.S. military should have won in Vietnam.

The danger presented by either school is clear enough in the twenty-first century. Senior commanders, some now serving in key national security positions, fixated on Vietnam, have translated that conflict's supposed lessons into what now passes for military strategy in Washington. The result has been an ever-expanding war on terror campaign waged ceaselessly from South Asia to West Africa, which has essentially turned out to be perpetual war based on the can-do belief that counterinsurgency and advise-and-assist missions should have worked in Vietnam and can work now.

The Go-Big Option

The leading voice of the Clausewitzian school was U.S. Army Colonel and Korean War/Vietnam War vet Harry Summers, whose 1982 book, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, became an instant classic within the military.

It's easy enough to understand why. Summers argued that civilian policymakers – not the military rank-and-file – had lost the war by focusing hopelessly on the insurgency in South Vietnam rather than on the North Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. More troops, more aggressiveness, even full-scale invasions of communist safe havens in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, would have led to victory.

Summers had a deep emotional investment in his topic. Later, he would argue that the source of post-war pessimistic analyses of the conflict lay in “draft dodgers and war evaders still [struggling] with their consciences.” In his own work, Summers marginalized all Vietnamese actors (as would so many later military historians), failed to adequately deal with the potential consequences, nuclear or otherwise, of the sorts of escalation he advocated, and didn't even bother to ask whether Vietnam was a core national security interest of the United States.

Perhaps he would have done well to reconsider a famous post-war encounter he had with a North Vietnamese officer, a Colonel Tu, whom he assured that “you know you never beat us on the battlefield.”

“That may be so,” replied his former enemy, “but it is also irrelevant.”

Whatever its limitations, his work remains influential in military circles to this day. (I was assigned the book as a West Point cadet!)

A more sophisticated Clausewitzian analysis came from current National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster in a highly acclaimed 1997 book, *Dereliction of Duty*. He argued that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were derelict in failing to give President Lyndon Johnson an honest appraisal of what it would take to win, which meant that “the nation went to war without the benefit of effective military advice.”

He concluded that the war was lost not in the field or by the media or even on antiwar college campuses, but in Washington, D.C., through a failure of nerve by the Pentagon’s generals, which led civilian officials to opt for a deficient strategy.

McMaster is a genuine scholar and a gifted writer, but he still suggested that the Joint Chiefs should have advocated for a more aggressive offensive strategy – a full ground invasion of the North or unrelenting carpet-bombing of that country. In this sense, he was just another “go-big” Clausewitzian who, as historian Ronald Spector pointed out recently, ignored Vietnamese views and failed to acknowledge – an observation of historian Edward Miller – that “the Vietnam War was a Vietnamese war.”

COIN: A Small (Forever) War

Another Vietnam veteran, retired Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Krepinevich, fired the opening salvo for the hearts-and-minders. In *The Army and Vietnam*, published in 1986, he argued that the NLF, not the North Vietnamese Army, was the enemy’s chief center of gravity and that the American military’s failure to emphasize counterinsurgency principles over conventional concepts of war sealed its fate. While such arguments were, in reality, no more impressive than those of the Clausewitzians, they have remained popular with military audiences, as historian Dale Andrade points out, because they offer a “simple explanation for the defeat in Vietnam.”

Krepinevich would write an influential 2005 *Foreign Affairs* piece, “How to Win in Iraq,” in which he applied his Vietnam conclusions to a new strategy of prolonged counterinsurgency in the Middle East, quickly winning over the *New York Times*’s resident conservative columnist, David Brooks, and generating “discussion in the Pentagon, CIA, American Embassy in Baghdad, and the office of the vice president.”

In 1999, retired army officer and Vietnam veteran Lewis Sorley penned the definitive hearts-and-minds tract, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam*. Sorley boldly asserted that, by the spring of 1970, “the fighting wasn’t over, but the war was won.”

According to his comforting tale, the real explanation for failure lay with the “big-war” strategy of U.S. commander General William Westmoreland. The counterinsurgency strategy of his successor, General Creighton Abrams – Sorley’s

knight in shining armor – was (or at least should have been) a war winner.

Critics noted that Sorley overemphasized the marginal differences between the two generals' strategies and produced a remarkably counterfactual work. It didn't matter, however. By 2005, just as the situation in Iraq, a country then locked in a sectarian civil war amid an American occupation, went from bad to worse, Sorley's book found its way into the hands of the head of U.S. Central Command, General John Abizaid, and State Department counselor Philip Zelikow.

By then, according to the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius, it could also "be found on the bookshelves of senior military officers in Baghdad."

Another influential hearts-and-minds devotee was Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl.

(He even made it onto *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.) His *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* followed Krepinevich in claiming that "if [Creighton] Abrams had gotten the call to lead the American effort at the start of the war, America might very well have won it." In 2006, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker "so liked [Nagl's] book that he made it required reading for all four-star generals," while the Iraq War commander of that moment, General George Casey, gave Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld a copy during a visit to Baghdad.

David Petraeus and current Secretary of Defense James Mattis, co-authors in 2006 of FM 3-24, the first (*New York Times*-reviewed) military field manual for counterinsurgency since Vietnam, must also be considered among the pantheon of hearts-and-minders. Nagl wrote a foreword for their manual, while Krepinevich provided a glowing back-cover endorsement.

Such revisionist interpretations would prove tragic in Iraq and Afghanistan, once they had filtered down to the entire officer corps.

Reading All the Wrong Books

In 2009, when former West Point history professor Colonel Gregory Daddis was deployed to Iraq as the command historian for the Multinational Corps – the military's primary tactical headquarters – he noted that corps commander Lieutenant General Charles Jacoby had assigned a professional reading list to his principal subordinates. To his disappointment, Daddis also discovered that the only Vietnam War book included was Sorley's *A Better War*. This should have surprised no one, since his argument – that American soldiers in Vietnam were denied an impending victory by civilian policymakers, a liberal media, and antiwar protestors – was still resonant among the officer corps in year six of the Iraq quagmire. It wasn't the military's fault!

Officers have long distributed professional reading lists for subordinates, intellectual guideposts to the complex challenges ahead. Indeed, there's much to be admired in the concept, but also potential dangers in such lists as they inevitably influence the thinking of an entire generation of future leaders. In the case of Vietnam, the perils are obvious. The generals have been assigning and reading problematic books for years, works that were essentially meant to reinforce professional pride in the midst of a series of unsuccessful and unending wars.

Just after 9/11, for instance, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Richard Myers – who spoke at my West Point graduation – included Summers's *On Strategy* on his list. A few years later, then-Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker added McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty*. The trend continues today. Marine Corps Commandant Robert Neller has kept McMaster and added *Diplomacy* by Henry Kissinger (he of the illegal bombing of both Laos and Cambodia and war criminal fame). Current Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley kept Kissinger and added good old Lewis Sorley. To top it all off, Secretary of Defense Mattis has included yet another Kissinger book and, in a different list, Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*.

Just as important as which books made the lists is what's missing from them: none of these senior commanders include newer scholarship, novels, or journalistic accounts which might raise thorny, uncomfortable questions about whether the Vietnam War was winnable, necessary, or advisable, or incorporate local voices that might highlight the limits of American influence and power.

Serving in the Shadow of Vietnam

Most of the generals leading the war on terror just missed service in the Vietnam War. They graduated from various colleges or West Point in the years immediately following the withdrawal of most U.S. ground troops or thereafter: Petraeus in 1974, future Afghan War commander Stanley McChrystal in 1976, and present National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster in 1984. Secretary of Defense Mattis finished ROTC and graduated from Central Washington University in 1971, while Trump's Chief of Staff John Kelly enlisted at the tail end of the Vietnam War, receiving his commission in 1976.

In other words, the generation of officers now overseeing the still-spreading war on terror entered military service at the end of or after the tragic war in Southeast Asia. That meant they narrowly escaped combat duty in the bloodiest American conflict since World War II and so the professional credibility that went with it. They were mentored and taught by academy tactical officers, ROTC instructors, and commanders who had cut their teeth on that conflict. Vietnam literally dominated the discourse of their era – and it's never ended.

Petraeus, Mattis, McMaster, and the others entered service when military prestige had reached a nadir or was just rebounding. And those reading lists taught the young officers where to lay the blame for that – on civilians in Washington (or in the nation's streets) or on a military high command too weak to assert its authority effectively. They would serve in Vietnam's shadow, the shadow of defeat, and the conclusions they would draw from it would only lead to twenty-first-century disasters.

From Vietnam to the War on Terror to Generational War

All of this misremembering, all of those Vietnam "lessons" inform the U.S. military's ongoing "surges" and "advise-and-assist" approaches to its wars in the Greater Middle East and Africa. Representatives of both Vietnam revisionist schools now guide the development of the Trump administration's version of global strategy. President Trump's in-house Clausewitzians clamor for – and receive – ever more delegated authority to do their damndest and what retired General (and Vietnam vet) Edward Meyer called for back in 1983: "a freer hand in waging war than they had in Vietnam." In other words, more bombs, more troops, and carte blanche to escalate such conflicts to their hearts' content.

Meanwhile, President Trump's hearts-and-minds faction consists of officers who have spent three administrations expanding COIN-influenced missions to approximately 70% of the world's nations. Furthermore, they've recently fought for and been granted a new "mini-surge" in Afghanistan intended to – in disturbingly Vietnam-esque language – "break the deadlock," "reverse the decline," and "end the stalemate" there. Never mind that neither 100,000 U.S. troops (when I was there in 2011) nor 16 full years of combat could, in the term of the trade, "stabilize" Afghanistan. The can-do, revisionist believers atop the national security state have convinced Trump that – despite his original instincts – 4,000 or 5,000 (or 6,000 or 7,000) more troops (and yet more drones, planes, and other equipment) will do the trick. This represents tragedy bordering on farce.

The hearts and minders and Clausewitzians atop the military establishment since 9/11 are never likely to stop citing their versions of the Vietnam War as the key to victory today; that is, they will never stop focusing on a war that was always unwinnable and never worth fighting. None of today's acclaimed military personalities seems willing to consider that Washington couldn't have won in Vietnam because, as former Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill McPeak (who flew 269 combat missions over that country) noted in the recent Ken Burns documentary series, "we were fighting on the wrong side."

Today's leaders don't even pretend that the post-9/11 wars will ever end. In an interview last June, Petraeus – still considered a sagacious guru of the Defense

establishment – disturbingly described the Afghan conflict as “generational.”

Eerily enough, to cite a Vietnam-era precedent, General Creighton Abrams predicted something similar. speaking to the White House as the war in Southeast Asia was winding down. Even as President Richard Nixon slowly withdrew U.S. forces, handing over their duties to the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) – a process known then as “Vietnamization” – the general warned that, despite ARVN improvements, continued U.S. support “would be required indefinitely to maintain an effective force.” Vietnam, too, had its “generational” side (until, of course, it didn’t).

That war and its ill-fated lessons will undoubtedly continue to influence U.S. commanders until a new set of myths, explaining away a new set of failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, take over, possibly thanks to books by veterans of these conflicts about how Washington could have won the war on terror.

It’s not that our generals don’t read. They do. They just doggedly continue to read the wrong books.

In 1986, General Petraeus ended his influential Parameters article with a quote from historian George Herring: “Each historical situation is unique and the use of analogy is at best misleading, at worst, dangerous.” When it comes to Vietnam and a cohort of officers shaped in its shadow (and even now convinced it could have been won), “dangerous” hardly describes the results. They’ve helped bring us generational war and, for today’s young soldiers, ceaseless tragedy.

[Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author, expressed in an unofficial capacity, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.]

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The Struggle Against Honduras’ Stolen

Election

Last year's disputed elections in Honduras continue to present a struggle for grassroots activists in the country, who face harsh police and military crackdowns in response to protests, reports Dennis J. Bernstein in the following interview.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

The latest tragedy of misguided U.S. foreign policy in Central America is the tacit support for another stolen presidential election in Honduras. The new right-wing renegade government there is inflicting terrible violence upon people who refuse to accept the election results from last November's election between extreme right-wing parliamentary dictator, Juan Orlando Hernandez, the current president, and progressive reformer, Salvador Nasralla.

To get a clearer picture as to what is happening on the ground in Honduras—which includes dozens of murders of street activists—I spoke to Sandra Cuffe. Based in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Cuffe has resided for many years in Central America and writes for several online publications.

Cuffe also expressed deep concern for the safety of Edwin Espinal, a noted activist and ally to many movements in Honduras, including COPINH. COPINH is the group founded by the late Berta Caceres, who it is believed was assassinated by right-wing forces affiliated with the Honduran government. Espinal has now been arrested and is being held under difficult circumstances at a Honduran military base.

“The current government has arrested, beaten Espinal many times,” said one friend and co-worker of Espinal. “His body has been beaten and broken repeatedly. Now he is a political prisoner, held in leg chains, for having exercised his right to free speech and free assembly”.

I spoke to Cuffe on January 24 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you remind people what happened in terms of recent elections in Honduras, and give us a sense of the atmospheric pressure right now?

Sandra Cuffe: Last November 26 there were general elections in Honduras. It was a fiercely contested election between Juan Orlando Hernandez, the current president, and Salvador Nasralla, who was the candidate for the oppositional alliance against the dictatorship.

According to the Honduran constitution, re-election for the office of president is not allowed but the right wing has been concentrating power to the point where the executive branch controls basically all branches of government and a supreme court ruling allowed for the president's re-election.

On the other side, the Libre Party grew out of resistance to the 2009 coup d'état that was supported by the United States. For these elections, it formed an alliance with a smaller party, as well as with Salvador Nasralla.

After more than half the votes had been counted, preliminary results had Nasralla in the lead by five points, which was considered irreversible. The computer system then mysteriously crashed and when it came back online that lead began to rapidly disappear.

That was the earliest indication that fraud was involved. The official results took another few weeks to come out. The Organization of American States found serious irregularities in the voting and numerous indications of fraud.

Meanwhile, there were massive protests and all kinds of actions going on across the country. At least 35 people have been killed, with the actual number being probably much higher. Most were killed when security forces opened fire on protests around the country. Hundreds have been wounded and well over a thousand have been detained. Many have been released but some are still being held as political prisoners. The inauguration is set for January 27 so we are now in the middle of a week of action leading up to that.

DB: Please say a little more about what is at stake here and why people are willing to put their lives on the line.

SC: What is at stake is democracy. Since the 2009 coup, people have organized, formed political parties and alliances. A lot of people who hadn't been politically active before are now starting to take action in an attempt to change what is going on.

The ruling National Party has been in power since 2010. They have concentrated power to an extreme degree. There has been a huge rise in militarization, including the creation of a military police which has been responsible for the majority of the deaths of protesters.

Even aside from this current crisis since the election, Honduras has long been one of the most violent countries in the world, one of the most dangerous for environmental defenders as well as for journalists. Healthcare and education are in shambles. Corruption is rampant. So really the future of the country is at stake.

But despite the repression, people are not backing down. There have been massive marches, especially last December in the capital, with tens of thousands of people in the streets. The opposition alliance has its strongest base in the northwest of the country, where resistance has always been strongest. Tire blockades have been used in a lot of places. There was at first some limited dialogue with police, but recently it has mainly been military forces showing up, opening fire or using tear gas.

DB: What has the U.S. government said about the killing of protesters? Do they continue to support the coup?

SC: For decades, Honduras has been a key ally of the U.S. in Central America. There is a huge military base there. It is home to the U.S. Southern Command Joint Task Force Bravo. In the 1980s it was the training ground and launching pad for counterinsurgency operations throughout Central America. The United States is in the background of everything that goes on politically in Honduras.

The U.S. and the OAS disagreed on whether to recognize the election results. Two days after the election and just before soldiers started opening fire on protesters, the U.S. State Department certified the election, which freed up military aid to the Honduran government.

DB: The important activist Edwin Espinal is now in custody. What is going on there now with his case?

SC: Edwin is a longtime activist in Honduras. He was extremely active in the movement in the streets after the coup. His wife was actually killed in the context of the protests. There have been around a thousand detentions. Most of those detained were released soon afterwards, but there are at least a couple dozen people still in jail. The charges are mainly related to property destruction.

In Edwin's case, in response to tear gas attacks, protesters broke the windows of a Marriot Hotel next to the Presidential Palace. Several police stations have been burned down after police opened fire on protesters. Edwin was arrested last Friday and he faces three charges related to property destruction. He is under investigation for terrorism and criminal association. Edwin's case has been placed in a special court system, with his hearings taking place on a military base. There is virtually no public access. This Monday he had his initial hearing.

DB: Has anyone been able to talk to him directly? And how do you think he will be treated while in custody?

SC: People were able to visit him after his arrest when he was being held in a

police cell. They were able to see him very briefly going to and from hearings. However, he has lawyers from a prominent human rights organization so there has been some communication with the outside. Visits are very difficult to arrange. Reading materials are forbidden. In terms of safety, because there have been so many incidents of intimidation and threats by security forces against Edwin dating back to right after the coup, the government has implemented “protective measures” in his case under orders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

DB: Has Edwin’s case received any support from members of the U.S. Congress?

SC: I don’t know the answer to that yet. There is a very active Honduran solidarity network in the US and Canada who have been very involved since the coup.

DB: In terms of U.S. policy toward Honduras, this is actually what we like to see, isn’t it? It is like one big free-trade zone with a few military bases thrown in. We can also expect a flood of more Hondurans and other Central Americans to the U.S.

SC: I know that when you talk to most young people, they no longer see a future for themselves here. They organized and went to the polls and the signs of clear victory were simply wiped out two days later. People are outraged and many of them will leave the country.

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.
