

# The Killing of History

PBS' "The Vietnam War" may show some of the conflict's horrors but still soft-pedals the horrific war crimes that America inflicted on Vietnam, fitting with a corporate-dependent documentary project, writes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

One of the most hyped "events" of American television, "The Vietnam War," has started on the PBS network. The directors are Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Acclaimed for his documentaries on the Civil War, the Great Depression and the history of jazz, Burns says of his Vietnam films, "They will inspire our country to begin to talk and think about the Vietnam War in an entirely new way."

In a society often bereft of historical memory and in thrall to the propaganda of its "exceptionalism," Burns's "entirely new" Vietnam War is presented as an "epic, historic work." Its lavish advertising campaign promotes its biggest backer, Bank of America, which in 1971 was burned down by students in Santa Barbara, California, as a symbol of the hated war in Vietnam.

Burns says he is grateful to "the entire Bank of America family" which "has long supported our country's veterans." Bank of America was a corporate prop to an invasion that killed perhaps as many as four million Vietnamese and ravaged and poisoned a once bountiful land. More than 58,000 American soldiers were killed, and around the same number are estimated to have taken their own lives.

I watched the first episode in New York. It leaves you in no doubt of its intentions right from the start. The narrator says the war "was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War misunderstandings."

The dishonesty of this statement is not surprising. The cynical fabrication of "false flags" that led to the invasion of Vietnam is a matter of record – the Gulf of Tonkin "incident" in 1964, which Burns promotes as true, was just one. The lies litter a multitude of official documents, notably the *Pentagon Papers*, which the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg released in 1971.

There was no good faith. The faith was rotten and cancerous. For me – as it must be for many Americans – it is difficult to watch the film's jumble of "red peril" maps, unexplained interviewees, ineptly cut archive and maudlin American battlefield sequences. In the series' press release in Britain – the BBC will show it – there is no mention of Vietnamese dead, only Americans.

"We are all searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy," Novick is

quoted as saying. How very post-modern.

All this will be familiar to those who have observed how the American media and popular culture behemoth has revised and served up the great crime of the second half of the Twentieth Century: from “The Green Berets” and “The Deer Hunter” to “Rambo” and, in so doing, has legitimized subsequent wars of aggression. The revisionism never stops and the blood never dries. The invader is pitied and purged of guilt, while “searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy.” Cue Bob Dylan: “*Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?*”

### **What ‘Decency’ and ‘Good Faith’?**

I thought about the “decency” and “good faith” when recalling my own first experiences as a young reporter in Vietnam: watching hypnotically as the skin fell off napalmed peasant children like old parchment, and the ladders of bombs that left trees petrified and festooned with human flesh. General William Westmoreland, the American commander, referred to people as “termites.”

In the early 1970s, I went to Quang Ngai province, where in the village of My Lai, between 347 and 500 men, women and infants were murdered by American troops (Burns prefers “killings”). At the time, this was presented as an aberration: an “American tragedy” (*Newsweek*). In this one province, it was estimated that 50,000 people had been slaughtered during the era of American “free fire zones.” Mass homicide. This was not news.

To the north, in Quang Tri province, more bombs were dropped than in all of Germany during the Second World War. Since 1975, unexploded ordnance has caused more than 40,000 deaths in mostly “South Vietnam,” the country America claimed to “save” and, with France, conceived as a singularly imperial ruse.

The “meaning” of the Vietnam War is no different from the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the leveling of every city in North Korea. The aim was described by Colonel Edward Lansdale, the famous CIA man on whom Graham Greene based his central character in *The Quiet American*.

Quoting Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea*, Lansdale said, “There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbours resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert.”

Nothing has changed. When Donald Trump addressed the United Nations on Sept. 19 – a body established to spare humanity the “scourge of war” – he declared he was “ready, willing and able” to “totally destroy” North Korea and its 25 million people. His audience gasped, but Trump’s language was not unusual. His rival for

the presidency, Hillary Clinton, had boasted she was prepared to “totally obliterate” Iran, a nation of more than 80 million people. This is the American Way; only the euphemisms are missing now.

Returning to the U.S., I am struck by the silence and the absence of an opposition – on the streets, in journalism and the arts, as if dissent once tolerated in the “mainstream” has regressed to a dissidence: a metaphoric underground.

### **Missing What Trump Means**

There is plenty of sound and fury at Trump the odious one, the “fascist,” but almost none at Trump as the symptom and caricature of an enduring system of conquest and extremism. Where are the ghosts of the great anti-war demonstrations that took over Washington in the 1970s? Where is the equivalent of the Freeze Movement that filled the streets of Manhattan in the 1980s, demanding that President Reagan withdraw battlefield nuclear weapons from Europe?

The sheer energy and moral persistence of these great movements largely succeeded; by 1987 Reagan had negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) that effectively ended the Cold War.

Today, according to secret NATO documents obtained by the German newspaper, *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, this vital treaty is likely to be abandoned as “nuclear targeting planning is increased.” The German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has warned against “repeating the worst mistakes of the Cold War. ... All the good treaties on disarmament and arms control from Gorbachev and Reagan are in acute peril. Europe is threatened again with becoming a military training ground for nuclear weapons. We must raise our voice against this.”

But not in America. The thousands who turned out for Sen. Bernie Sanders’s “revolution” in last year’s presidential campaign are collectively mute on these dangers. That most of America’s violence across the world has been perpetrated not by Republicans, or mutants like Trump, but by liberal Democrats, remains a taboo.

Barack Obama provided the apotheosis, with seven simultaneous wars, a presidential record, including the destruction of Libya as a modern state. Obama’s overthrow of Ukraine’s elected government has had the desired effect: the massing of American-led NATO forces on Russia’s western borderland through which the Nazis invaded in 1941.

Obama’s “pivot to Asia” in 2011 signaled the transfer of the majority of America’s naval and air forces to Asia and the Pacific for no purpose other than

to confront and provoke China. The Nobel Peace Laureate's worldwide campaign of assassinations is arguably the most extensive campaign of terrorism since 9/11.

What is known in the U.S. as "the Left" has effectively allied with the darkest recesses of institutional power, notably the Pentagon and the CIA, to prevent a peace deal between Trump and Vladimir Putin and to reinstate Russia as an enemy, on the basis of no evidence of its alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election.

The true scandal is the insidious assumption of power by sinister war-making vested interests for which no American voted. The rapid ascendancy of the Pentagon and the surveillance agencies under Obama represented an historic shift of power in Washington. Daniel Ellsberg rightly called it a coup. The three generals running Trump are its witness.

All of this fails to penetrate those "liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics," as Luciana Bohne noted memorably. Commodified and market-tested, "diversity" is the new liberal brand, not the class people serve regardless of their gender and skin color: not the responsibility of all to stop a barbaric war to end all wars.

"How did it fucking come to this?" says Michael Moore in his Broadway show, *Terms of My Surrender*, a vaudeville for the disaffected set against a backdrop of Trump as Big Brother.

I admired Moore's film, *Roger & Me*, about the economic and social devastation of his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and *Sicko*, his investigation into the corruption of healthcare in America.

The night I saw his show, his happy-clappy audience cheered his reassurance that "we are the majority!" and calls to "impeach Trump, a liar and a fascist!" His message seemed to be that had you held your nose and voted for Hillary Clinton, life would be predictable again.

He may be right. Instead of merely abusing the world, as Trump does, Clinton, the Great Obliterator, might have attacked Iran and lobbed missiles at Putin, whom she likened to Hitler: a particular profanity given the 27 million Russians who died in Hitler's invasion.

"Listen up," said Moore, "putting aside what our governments do, Americans are really loved by the world!"

There was a silence.

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## How Merkel's Win May Hide Rising Discontent

**Exclusive:** With German Chancellor Merkel expected to win reelection on Sunday, the European elites may celebrate having turned back a populist surge, but their neo-liberal policies continue to fuel discontent, says Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

The citizens of Germany will head to the polls this Sunday, in the last of a series of elections in major European countries this year. Before the voting began, there were fears that populist, anti-system parties could actually win in some cases, in the wake of the victory of last year's Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. That hasn't happened, as Marine Le Pen of the National Front was defeated in a run-off in France, and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party failed to break through in Holland.

Germany is also expected to weather the populist storm, with Chancellor Angela Merkel set to be re-elected. Her Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) now holds a comfortable lead over its main competitor, the Social Democrats (SPD), with the other opposition parties far behind. That will give Merkel, a reserved but effective politician who grew up in Communist East Germany, the chance to approach Helmut Kohl's record as the country's longest serving leader.

Due to the parliamentary system, which allows numerous smaller parties to send representatives to Berlin, neither of the large parties can win outright, which means that Merkel will need to form a coalition. Her preference would be to take on her party's historical ally, the Free Democrats, but it is possible she will be forced to continue with a "grand coalition" agreement between the CDU and SPD to share power in the name of stability, while keeping out the parties seen as more extreme.

The most feared of the smaller groupings is the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a "populist" party that has grown rapidly in recent years, drawing on economic and social discontent in the mold of other anti-system parties around Europe. The AfD is expected to draw slightly more than 10 percent of the vote, well below the totals for Marine Le Pen in France (21 percent in the first round) or the

Five-Star Movement in Italy (25 percent in 2013), and closer to the level of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party in Holland (13 percent in the March elections).

Nevertheless, the AfD's growth has caused consternation around Europe, as the governing elites struggle to explain why even in the country with the continent's strongest economy, where unemployment is low, and productivity and budget surpluses are high, there has been a rapid increase in populist fervor.

The standard explanation, of course, is xenophobia and racism. Indeed the AfD plays to nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment, and has increasingly identified itself with right-wing issues. As immigration from the Middle East and Africa has soared in recent years, European countries have struggled with accepting and integrating the new arrivals, causing considerable social tensions.

Germany was at the center of this crisis in 2015, when Merkel went against the grain of public opinion and announced that her country would accept hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers in order to do its part for those less fortunate, in particular refugees from the war in Syria.

It didn't take long for that policy to change though, as less than a year later Germany was decisive in reaching a deal with President Erdogan of Turkey that ended up limiting immigration by closing the land route towards Europe through the Balkans. The result has been a shift of migrant flows to the sea routes from Northern Africa primarily to Italy and Greece, accompanied by a notable change in attitudes among the respective populations.

### **Economic Inequality**

As with most populist movements throughout the Western world, the issues of immigration and race tell only a part of the story. The Brexit vote was fueled by a reaction against neo-liberal economic policies, effectively summed up by the headline of an article in the English newspaper The Guardian shortly after the referendum in June 2016: "If you've got money, you vote in... if you haven't got money, you vote out." Decades of economic decline had produced the desire to stick it to the governing elites, and the Brexit vote provided an excellent opportunity to do so.

In addition, there has even been academic research demonstrating the obvious, that racial attitudes are influenced by economic hardship, which provides fertile ground for the growth of extremist parties.

The same can be said for the United States, of course, as Donald Trump's victory was based in large part on his appeal to voters who feel left behind by globalization, and left out by a political system that has favored those at the

top. Racist and anti-immigrant sentiment is clearly present, but Trump's decisive margin came from sectors of the population such as union workers in the Rust Belt, not pro-Confederates in the South.

As for Germany, the question is where the impetus comes for the rise of anti-system political forces, beyond the standard explanation involving immigration and right-wing social issues. With the country considered to be doing so well economically, the narrative doesn't seem to fit as well.

A clear-eyed analysis, however, makes it clear that the conditions for a revolt of the voters based on economic hardship are present there as well. First there is the eastern part of the country, the former "German Democratic Republic" which belonged to the Communist bloc dominated by the Soviet Union. Despite the claims of great success in the years following German reunification, the reality is that much of the industry in the East was cannibalized by western companies, and a large segment of the population lives on welfare.

The economy of the former Communist country was obviously inefficient and required modernization, but the approach taken by the West was to shut down and sell off whatever was available, leaving the East in a perpetual state of inferiority.

Annual reports published by the German government show that significant disparities persist between the two areas of the country, with higher unemployment, lower wages and less investment in the East. The ownership and control of Germany's considerable industrial capacity also remains principally in the West.

### **Exploiting the Unemployed**

A second major factor is the system of labor market and welfare reforms introduced in Germany in the 2000s. The most famous is the "Hartz IV" law, which provides unemployment subsidies of just 280 euros (\$330) a month, and forces people to accept whatever jobs they are offered, even at only 1-2 euros an hour.

German companies have done very well with this system, that allows them to exploit extremely cheap and flexible labor. Critics point to this as one – although certainly not the only – factor contributing to the great success of German industry in Europe.

For the six million citizens trapped in the system though, things aren't so great. There are entire areas called "Hartz IV neighborhoods," indicating widespread socio-economic difficulties among the local population. If we add the high level of "working poor," a category that has reached 9 percent of the population in Germany, it becomes clear where the populist movements can look

for votes on economic issues.

What scares the elites in Europe is that political parties that criticize European Union economic policies will eventually break through, thanks to support among these segments of the population. The E.U. is in fact rightly associated with the monetarist and neo-liberal policies that have contributed to producing greater inequality and thus causing hardship for many across Europe.

In the end, Holland, France and Germany will succeed in keeping the populist parties out of government this year. (Italy will vote in 2018, and the 5-Star Movement is still challenging for the top spot.) The risk is that the European elites may take this as an opportunity to continue with their neo-liberal policies of recent years, which will ultimately only make the situation worse.

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## Trump, a Boorish Interventionist

President Trump's decision to go before the U.N. and unmask himself as a belligerent interventionist dashed any remaining hopes that he would choose a substantively different course from his predecessors, says Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

My political positions have very frequently been countercurrent. When American liberals were calling for Donald Trump's head at the outset of his presidency, when Sen. Chuck Schumer and Rep. Nancy Pelosi were preaching all-out obstructionism to thwart his policies, I was urging progressives to lay down their pitchforks and try to deal constructively with the new administration for the good of the nation.

Now, in the past several weeks, in a belated show of bipartisanship, Democratic Party leaders have finally found a negotiating partner in Donald Trump, starting with a government funding bill and agreement to raise the national debt and extending to promises to protect the “Dreamers” in the sphere of immigration policy. More deals are said to be underway. In theory, that is all to the good.



However, in the meantime, this President demonstrated fulsomely in his speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations that it is high time for him to go. And that is not because of his widely discussed volatility, impulsiveness and narcissism. It is because of his irremediable stupidity, primitivism and thuggery that are leading this country on a path to commit unspeakable horrors abroad.

To be sure, Trump's shocking debut at the U.N. comes as the culmination of a lengthy decline in civilized behavior by our national leaders over the past two decades. The swagger and bloated self-importance of George W. Bush were a preview although performed with less self-assuredness than Trump's bluster.

After 9/11 in 2001 but before the fateful invasion of Iraq in 2003, Bush would make one or another outrageous, lying statement about international affairs, such as the "weapons of mass destruction" he alleged were retained by Saddam Hussein. Then he would pause and look into the camera with hesitation, as if wondering whether his whoppers would be swallowed by the public. Satisfied that he had gotten away with it, he would resume his rant.

That hint of self-doubt or fear of discovery disappeared over the years even as adversity on the battlefield underscored his fateful errors and even after the mismanaged economy spun apart in 2008. Bush limped to the end of his second term none the wiser.

### **The Insouciant Obama**

Our far more intellectual President Barack Obama, with his term on the Harvard Law Review as seeming proof of mental and cultural distinction, never did learn to behave in a truly statesmanlike manner although he generally framed his actions in more refined rhetoric.

From start to finish, Obama conducted himself with insouciance. His well-meaning arm over the shoulder of Queen Elizabeth, which the Brits saw as disrespect for court decorum, and his chewing gum while standing before the public eye were noted by mainstream commentators. But they never noted when he slipped beyond the occasional *faux pas* to openly insulting behavior towards leaders of important nations.

One such case occurred when Obama stood by the side of Chinese President Xi in the White House Rose Garden for a press briefing, and said that he would be watching closely to see that the Chinese implemented the actions that had been agreed upon.

Then there was Obama likening Putin to a misbehaving schoolboy, skulking at the back of the classroom. Or Obama's description of the whole country, Russia, as a

fading regional power that produced nothing that anyone wanted. This was gratuitously insulting and degrading behavior by the leader of the world's mightiest country.

But all of these verbal misdeeds of the recent past were nothing compared to what Donald Trump delivered on Tuesday during the 42-minute speech marking his debut before the U.N. General Assembly. Trump's vicious remarks directed at Iran and Venezuela may have been in line with the "Axis of Evil" speeches of George W. Bush. But Trump's threat to "totally destroy" North Korea, a country of 25 million people, if it so much as "threatened" the United States and its allies went beyond incivility.

The name Adolf Hitler is often tossed about carelessly in American political discourse. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton applied the Hitler comparison to Russian President Vladimir Putin when she sought to vilify him in a way that U.S. presidents avoided even in the darkest days of the Cold War in describing Soviet leaders. (In Russia, which suffered the brunt of Hitler's aggression in World War II, the Hitler insult is taken even more seriously than it is in the United States.)

However, by threatening to annihilate an entire nation from the podium of the world's greatest forum for peace-making, Trump cast himself as a modern-day Hitler.

Those of us who once saw hope in Donald Trump's promises of normalized relations with the world's other nuclear superpower were initially confused and disappointed when he appointed U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who adopted run-of-the-mill neoconservative talking points, and also brought onboard military advisers with histories of supporting neocon policies, such as Defense Secretary James Mattis and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster.

But now there is no room left for confusion or indulgence. No one can blame Mattis or Haley or McMaster. This time it was Trump himself who spoke outrageously, who delivered what some media outlets properly called a "tirade" and others, more timidly, spoke of as "bellicose."

### **Thought-Through Nonsense**

What marked this speech from the long series of uncontrolled, self-indulgent tweets on foreign and domestic affairs from this President was that it was a scripted speech in which every word had been weighed beforehand for its likely interpretation and public impact.

It was the speech of a thug, the words of an aggressor.

On the day of the speech, major U.S. media contented themselves with quoting Trump's more remarkable statements, starting with his threat to annihilate North Korea and his schoolyard taunt calling Kim Jong Un "Rocket Man." On day two, the editorial boards made more subtle observations.

*The New York Times*, for example, allowed itself to point to the contradiction between Trump's celebration of sovereign nation states – with their own traditions and practices – and his call for regime change with respect to the three states singled out as "rogues" supposedly threatening the world order

In other words, Trump's speech hinged on the notion that there should be "sovereignty" for countries that the United States favors and not for countries that the U.S. disfavors. The same fundamental contradiction was inherent in all U.S. foreign policy over the past 25 years, a case of some farm animals being more equal than other farm animals, as George Orwell observed in *Animal Farm*.

However, with Trump's predecessors, this ugly reality was masked by a stress on universal values, such as democracy promotion or protection of human rights. Trump opted for a self-contradictory definition of "sovereignty," i.e., that it means the United States has the sovereign right to overthrow any government of its choosing and even to wipe out an entire population. Whether Trump knew it or not, he was attacking the very foundation of the United Nations which was formed in the ashes of World War II to prevent future wars of aggression, to move the world's population away from the law of the jungle.

Perhaps one could argue that at least Trump was being somewhat honest about the arrogance of U.S. power. He was pulling away the fig leaf of those nice-sounding phrases that had concealed Washington's raw use of military power in support of the view that the U.S. should be the world's judge, jury and executioner.

But Trump also showed that he had deceived his followers who heard – and took heart from – his criticism of both Bush and Obama for their foreign interventionism and endless wars. In contrast to those promises, Trump's U.N. speech revealed an even more aggressive interventionism combined with a crude and boastful bluster.

Though Trump may have thought he was just tossing some more red meat to his "base," he also disqualified himself in the eyes of many people who had hoped against hope that he might have meant what he said about respecting the sovereignty of other nations and would pull back U.S. military forces around the world.

Trump's shocking performance before the United Nations also has added fuel to the political engine seeking his removal from office, even if the suspicions

about “collusion” with Russia during the 2016 election turn out to be bogus. Many thoughtful Americans will now say that the ends will justify almost any means.

If that day comes, I wish Donald Trump a comfortable retirement on a bar stool at a Trump Tower lounge where he and his bombastic remarks belong.

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## PBS’ ‘Vietnam War’ Tells Some Truths

**Exclusive:** The PBS 10-part Vietnam War series offers valuable insights into the horrific conflict but still treads lightly on U.S. leaders’ guilt as they lied and connived to start and extend the slaughter, as war correspondent Don North describes.

By Don North (Correction: An earlier version incorrectly stated that the PBS series did not address the issue of Nixon’s sabotage of Johnson’s 1968 peace talks. The topic is mentioned.)

Vietnamese-American author Viet Thanh Nguyen observed in his 2016 book, *Nothing Ever Dies*, that “All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory.” That is surely true of the Vietnam War, which – although it ended four decades ago – continues as a battle of memory, history and truth.

And, the stakes are still high since honest narratives about important past events can shape the future, even national destinies, and – perhaps most importantly – whether there will be more wars or possibly peace.

When PBS announced that it was broadcasting a 10-part, 18-hour series, entitled “The Vietnam War,” I wasn’t sure what to expect. As a network news correspondent who covered the war for five years through many of its bloodiest chapters, I have had mixed feelings about some of the other attempts to recount and explain the war.

Many of the previous efforts were colored by the political pressures of the moment, especially from policymakers and journalists who had career stakes in

how assessments of the failed war would make them look. So, with some trepidation, I watched the entire 10-part series and read the companion book by writer Geoffrey C. Ward over the past week. To my pleasant surprise, I found many reasons to applaud the effort and my criticisms were relatively minor.

In my view, the PBS series, directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, represents the most honest and thorough account available to the general public. Over those 18 hours, the series reveals so much duplicity and mendacity that this real history makes even the most cynical movies about the war, such as "Apocalypse Now," and "The Deer Hunter," look tame by comparison.

I think that all Americans and Vietnamese who experienced the years of that war will find watching the series at least an educational experience, at best an inspiring one, and for some of us – who witnessed, fought or protested the war – a profoundly emotional experience as well. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has recognized the series may bring up such stressful memories for combat veterans that it has offered a crisis line for counseling at 1-800-273-8255.

### **A Clear Narrative**

The cement that holds together the interviews of some 80 participants is a clear narration written by Ward and performed by Peter Coyote without the "voice of God" style used in so many documentaries. Ward's prologue to the first program is a sort of mission statement for the series, which I would criticize mostly because it still contains a residue of the longstanding desire to put a well-meaning gloss on the war's justifications even when the evidence points elsewhere:

"America's involvement in Vietnam began in secrecy. It ended thirty years later in failure witnessed by the entire world. It was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence, and cold war miscalculation. And it was prolonged because it seemed easier to muddle through than to admit it had been caused by tragic decisions, made by five American presidents, belonging to both political parties ... For those Americans who fought in it, and for those who fought against it back home – as well we those who merely glimpsed it on the nightly news – the Vietnam War was a decade of agony, the most divisive period since the Civil War."

Yet, when you hear some of the secret telephone recordings of White House conversations by President Lyndon Johnson, Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, you're not left with the impression that there was so much "good faith" by "decent people."

For instance, one phone conversation between Johnson and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy reflected how Johnson really felt about Vietnam, contrary to the optimistic assessments that he was selling to the public and belying his assurances that the blood and treasure were worth the cost.

Johnson: I don't know what in hell ... it looks like we're getting into another Korea. I don't think it's worth fighting for and I don't think we can get out. And it's just the biggest damn mess.

Bundy: It is an awful mess.

Johnson: What in hell is Vietnam worth to me? What is it worth to the country?

### **Past the Talking Points**

The PBS series interviews some 80 people on camera, including about 20 Vietnamese from both North and South. Drawing heavily from writers and poets, the series presents intelligent thoughts from all sides of the conflict. Novick, who is reported to have conducted most of the interviews, succeeded in getting people to go beyond the usual talking points.

When I returned to Vietnam shortly after the war to interview Vietnamese participants, there was always a government "minder" present. The results were hours of hearing Communist party dogma of little news value. That control seems to have broken down.

Foremost among the Vietnamese interviewed in the PBS series is Bao Ninh, a former North Vietnamese soldier and author of *The Sorrow of War*, a brutal and emotional novel about the war in the jungle and his bitter re-entry into society.

Bao remembers, "At the recruiting station they had singers and poets, working up the spirit of those signing up. There were two types of people – those full of anti-American spirit. And those like me. We were told to go and went." Of 500 recruits in his brigade sent to fight in the South in 1969, he is one of ten who survived.

Duong Van Mai, now Duong Van Mai Elliot, was the daughter of a high official in the French colonial administration in Hanoi before fleeing south with her family after North and South were split. Mai later studied at Georgetown University and became an American. She is author of *Sacred Willows: Four Generations of a Vietnamese Family*.

One of the most articulate and compelling American witnesses is former U.S. Marine John Musgrave, so badly wounded in Vietnam that doctors rated him as

expected to die. We follow Musgrave from his early training through battle, dropping out, alcoholism and war protesting, a veteran who still struggles with effects of his wounds.

Another Marine, Roger Harris, who pops up in almost every program, served in the deadly Con Thien base adjacent to the Demilitarized Zone. Harris recalls: "You go over there with one mind-set and then you adapt. You adapt to the atrocities of war. You adapt to the killing and dying, whatever. ... When I first arrived I questioned some of the Marines. I was made to realize this is war – and this is what we do."

Karl Marlantis, a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, dropped out of school to join the U.S. Marines and led a platoon near the DMZ. Marlantis wrote *Matterhorn*, a Vietnam War classic. His frequent interview segments are articulate and thoughtful as when he discusses his anger: "I can understand policy errors that kill a lot of people by mistake, but my bitterness is with the lying. Robert McNamara knew by 1965 the war was unwinnable and covering up killing people for your own ego and that's what makes me mad."

Secretary of Defense McNamara is often portrayed as a villain, but a very poignant interview is included with McNamara's son Craig who recalls his appeal to his father to provide him with information for a college debate supporting the war. He never receives it and concludes his father didn't believe in it himself.

### **Lack of Accountability**

Tim O'Brian, another writer and author of *The Things They Carried*, served in the U.S. Army's Americal Division and was familiar with the village the troops called "Pinkville," which became the scene of a massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai. O'Brian is critical that no soldiers involved in the massacre were ever sent to prison.

Lt. Commander Everett Alvarez, flying from the carrier USS Constellation, was the first American pilot to be shot down over North Vietnam and the first POW.

"When we approached the target coming down from altitude," recalled Alvarez, "it was obvious they could pick us up on their radar. I was a bit scared. But once we went in and they started firing at us, the fear went away. My plane, an A-4 Skyhawk, was like a ballet in the sky, and I was just performing. And then I got hit."

Alvarez spent eight years as a POW in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." In 1990 on a visit to Hanoi, I found that ironically a new Hilton Hotel had been built over what remained of the prison. Walking into the hotel bar, I was hailed by a

middle-age man sitting on a barstool.

“Hey, you’re an American aren’t you?” he said. “Let me buy you a drink. I’m sitting over what used to be my prison cell for eight years.”

The anti-war movement merits substantial time throughout the series and features many articulate protesters. Bill Zimmerman carries the protesters narrative from 1963 when he was a senior at the University of Chicago and member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) working for civil rights in Mississippi.

“We had watched the civil rights movement in the South to stand up against injustice, allow yourself to be beaten up or hit by a policeman,” he recalled. “Then one day we saw on TV a picture of a burning monk in Saigon. I asked myself what were we doing in Vietnam. Ending the war in Vietnam became my constant pre-occupation.”

The anti-war movement is not always portrayed in a favorable light, particularly in later years when bombings occurred and violent demonstrations became frequent. The hostility of many Americans toward the protesters is also captured in an interview with Jan Howard of Tennessee who describes her reaction to a student demonstrator asking her if she would join an anti-war march:

“I said ... my son is dead. One of the reasons he died was so you’d have the right to do this, so go ahead and demonstrate. Have at it. No, I won’t be joining you. But I tell you what, if you ever ring my doorbell again I’ll blow your damned head off with a .357 Magnum.”

### **Upsetting Hanoi**

The series succeeds in cutting through the fog of the often secretive North Vietnamese leadership. Although the series includes interesting footage and photos of Ho Chi Minh, considered the father of modern Vietnam, and General Vo Nguyen Giap, the hero of Dien Bien Phu, the battle which effectively ended French colonial rule, the real power later shifted to Le Duan, a hard-line Communist of the Politburo and mastermind of the Tet offensive.

Newsweek reports that powerful figures in the Hanoi government are not happy with the series to such an extent that they ousted foreign ministry press officers who helped Burns and Novick set up interviews. The leaders’ primary complaint is reported to be that the series exposed the dissension and rivalries throughout the war at the top levels of the Hanoi regime.

They are also annoyed that several Vietnamese who were interviewed spoke frankly about the massacre of civilians in Hue during the Tet offensive. In the past,



the North Vietnamese blamed the deaths on American bombs and artillery. (Although PBS devoted considerable time and expense to create a Vietnamese-language version of the series, no one expects the government to allow it to be shown in Vietnam.)

Despite how ambitious the 18-hour series is, there were a few subjects and individuals conspicuous by their absence. For instance, you see Colonel Edward Lansdale meeting with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon but no mention of Lansdale's years running a psy-war program against the North Vietnamese.

Also, missing is a thorough examination of Nixon's decision to have 30,000 American soldiers and 50,000 South Vietnamese troops storm across the Cambodian border in April 1970, an invasion that contributed to the Khmer Rouge's overthrow of the Cambodian government and the unleashing of one more Vietnam War-related tragedy, the deaths of as many as two million Cambodians from 1975 to 1979. Nixon's decision to expand the war merited only 2 minutes and 50 seconds in episode six.

But even in an 18-hour series, editorial judgments must be made about what works toward telling the necessary narrative and what doesn't make the cut (though I would disagree with some of those choices). I also found it confusing when Burns succumbed to some film school techniques, such as "foreshadowing" in episode one entitled "Déjà Vu" that juxtaposed black-and-white archival footage of the failed French colonial occupation of Vietnam with later color film of American troops on patrol.

But a powerful element of the series is the impact of photographs and film from both sides of the conflict. Most film in Vietnam was shot silent, so the sound of bombs and gunshots was mixed in along with popular music. Vietnam, after all, was the first war fought to a rock 'n roll beat. [Full disclosure: I provided some photographs for the series.]

There is no identification of the photographers who at great risk took many of the photos. Apparently, the producers thought jamming the screen with constant credits for photos and film would be distracting. But the classic photos, many of which have become icons of the war, are readily recognized as the work of Horst Faas, Larry Burrows, Eddie Adams, Tim Page, Don McCullin, Henri Huet and Nick Ut, among many others.

The war claimed the lives of 135 photojournalists. A special tribute to Vietnam photojournalists is included in the closing credits.

## **Publicity Campaign**

For the past month, directors Burns and Novick have spearheaded a massive publicity campaign to promote the series. Last week, the Kennedy Center Opera House was filled for an advance screening of program highlights followed by a panel discussion. Before the screening, Burns asked anyone who served in the military during the war to stand and be recognized with applause. He then asked anyone who protested Vietnam to stand. At that point, two of the war's most famous veterans, Sen. John McCain and former Secretary of State John Kerry, joined in applauding the anti-war demonstrators, too.

It was a moment that set the tone of reconciliation and harmony the series producers said they had hoped for in documenting one of the most divisive chapters in American history. In the ensuing panel discussion, the 81-year-old McCain, who was a bomber pilot shot down over Hanoi and held as a POW for more than five years, said, "Maybe we can look back on Vietnam and make sure we don't make the same mistakes again. We can learn lessons today because the world is in such turmoil: Tell the American people the truth!"

Winston Churchill once said, "The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward." That would surely be true for any careful study of the Vietnam War, an unwinnable war fought against a country that Americans knew virtually nothing about and in which the U.S. had no vital interests. It was a lesson in how arrogance, ignorance, ideology and political cowardice can be a deadly mix.

The war took the lives of more than 58,000 American soldiers. Although Vietnamese casualty estimates vary widely, the Vietnamese government tallied more than 1 million soldiers dead along with 2 million civilians.

In 2001, I interviewed historian Arthur Schlesinger at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba and asked him if we were learning from our history. "History is an argument without end," Schlesinger told me. "No historian would use the word definitive because new times bring new preoccupations and we historians realize we are prisoners of our own experience. As Oscar Wilde used to say 'One duty we owe to history is to re-write it.'"

As upsetting as the Vietnam War series may be, it holds out hope that we might still learn from history.

**Don North is a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world. He is the author of *Inappropriate Conduct*, the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.**

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# How the UN Covers for US Aggression

For decades the American Right has decried the U.N. for encroaching on American sovereignty, but the truth is that the U.N. is a chief U.S. accomplice in violating the sovereignty of other nations, notes J.P. Sottile.

By J.P. Sottile

President Trump opened his big United Nations week ... and his famous mouth ... with a predictable plug for one of his properties and some playful glad-handing with French President Emmanuel Macron. Trump also scolded the U.N.'s unwieldy scrum for "not living up to its potential." He made a passing reference to the U.N.'s wasteful use of American money. And he called for "reform" of the much-maligned international forum.

It was a stolid prelude to what will no doubt be "must-see" TV when he speaks to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday about North Korea and Iran. And it was a far cry from the way America's leading "America Firster" spent the campaign lamenting how unfair the U.N. is to the poor schlemiel we call Uncle Sam.

He is likely to use his speech to throw a little bit of that same red meat to his base, but his call for reform falls well short of what his supporters want ... which is an abrupt end of U.S. involvement in the international body. They are motivated by a grab-bag of reasons that point to the U.N. being a threat to their guns, their bank accounts and their God-given freedom.

Oddly enough, these conspiratorial narratives have been around for decades and they mostly center on a grand plan by U.N. elites to abscond American sovereignty and dissolve the U.S. into a U.N.-led world government. And the evidence of this is the way the U.N. harasses and restricts Uncle Sam while siphoning-off America's wealth. At least, that's what some think.

Most ominously, many object to the way U.N. funds are being used to quietly deploy gun-grabbing U.N. soldiers in advance of the big takeover. But like so much of Trump's intoxicating irredentism ... this is a grievance more likely rooted in a three-day meth bender in a Tallahassee trailer park than it is from shocking evidence gathered from well-traveled observation. It's paranoia. But really, it's worse than that.

Why? Because the U.N. has basically been the complete opposite of what its angriest critics claim. It is not out to get the U.S. Rather, it has largely been America's tool since its inception and, in particular, it has repeatedly covered Uncle Sam's overly-exposed butt as he (a.k.a. "the royal we") has gone

around the world on a three decade-long military bender since the end of the Cold War.

Yes, the Gulf War was U.N. approved and the whole world got behind it because (April Glaspie's backstory notwithstanding) the *prima facie* case was strong and it was a fairly clear-cut example of unwarranted aggression. That was an easy call.

## **Global Violence**

But since then, the calls have been nothing short of murky as the U.S. has bombed and droned and deployed and invaded and covertly-acted and regime-changed all around the globe. And the unspoken truth is that the United Nations has been America's all-too silent partner as Uncle Sam traipsed around the planet with a loaded gun, remote control assassination machines and paper-thin rationales for intervention.

Although the U.N. occasionally puts a bug up Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu's ass on the issue of the slow-motion ethnic cleansing in the West Bank ... what other issue is there where the U.N. has taken a real stand against the U.S. or U.S. policy objectives?

Where is the U.N.'s punishment for being lied to by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell? And where is the punishment for destroying a bystander nation under false pretenses? Where is the punishment for Abu Ghraib or Gitmo?

Where is the punishment for America's summary execution of "suspected militants" around the Muslim world simply because they are of "military age" and in the wrong place at the right time ... and for the CIA, it is always the right time to kill a suspect no matter how wrong the place may be. And where is the condemnation of America's destabilizing role as the world's leading supermarket of military hardware?

How about mounting civilian casualties from an ever-widening bombing campaign? The U.N. can say the killings are "unacceptable," but does it really matter if there is no sanction? There haven't been any sanctions after children were killed in a "U.S.-backed raid" in Somalia. Go figure, right?

Or what about America's complicity in the catastrophe of Yemen? Where are those sanctions? And what exactly has the U.N. done to punish any number of extra-legal maneuver by a succession of American presidents over the course of the "Global War on Terror"? The simple answer is nothing.

Instead, the Secretary General is largely beholden to the disproportionate influence of the United States. The Security Council's agenda is basically set

by the United States ... and that's particularly true since the Soviet Union collapsed. At the same time, the U.N.'s occasionally contentious debates do little more than offer the imprimatur of international approbation or well-noted disdain despite the functionally inconsequential nature of those debates.

### **A Fig Leaf for Empire**

Either way it is a win for Uncle Sam because the presence of a neutered United Nations provides the United States with a fig leaf just big enough to cover the dangly parts of America's otherwise naked empire.

The money that does go from the U.S. Treasury into the minutia around the margins ... like UNESCO programs and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and all the other little crumbs that get thrown around the world ... these are payoffs. This is what the world gets for mostly keeping its mouth shut in the face of America's globe-spanning empire. The tiny amount of aid that trickles down past the bureaucracy ... much like the bureaucracy itself ... is not an example of America "getting played" by wasteful foreigners with hidden agendas. This is America paying to play the world like organ grinder with a hurdy-gurdy monkey.

Frankly, the "28.5% of the overall peacekeeping bill" that Trump calls "unfair" (about \$2.2 billion of the \$3.3 billion the U.S. gives to the UN annually) is a pittance ... particularly if you want the unchecked right to tell Persians what they can and cannot do in the Persian Gulf, to tell the Chinese what they can and cannot build in the South China Sea, and to tell every other power on the face of the earth why they cannot have the same nuclear capability America not only has ... but is currently "upgrading" to the tune of \$1.5 trillion.

Even more amazingly, the U.S. wants to deny these nations the only real insurance policy against U.S.-led regime change. And why is that? Because there ain't a Curveball's chance in Hell that the U.N. will ever be able to stop Uncle Sam from marching where he wants, when he wants and for whatever reason he wants to cook-up. That's a historically provable fact.

The only real check on U.S. power is the ability of an asymmetrical power to go nuclear. And let's admit it, they are ALL asymmetrical powers when compared to America's gargantuan, trillion-dollar national security beast. And this is why the U.N.'s "partnership" with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the only U.N.-associated agency that really matters. They can't do much, but they can throw a wrench into another WMD snipe hunt ... like they are doing now with the Iran Nuclear Deal.

But like it was tested by Team Bush, the IAEA is going to be tested again as

Trump and Netanyahu make their bogus case ... without a hint of irony ... that Iran is the world's greatest threat. But that's really just par for a course that's riddled with falsified flags haphazardly stuck into the shallow holes of a back nine that's actually been built by and for a club-wielding Uncle Sam.

### **A Cult of Grievance**

And therein lies the truly pernicious part of the Trumped-up case against the U.N. ... because, like so much of America's growing cult of grievance, it reflects an ever-widening gap between America's stated ideals and its self-serving behavior around the world.

As we are learning almost daily, Americans tried to square that circle by electing a profligate liar who fully embodies America's insatiable desire to take credit, particularly where none is due ... and to outsource the blame to scapegoats like the U.N., particularly when the only alternative is a long look into the mirror.

And in the case of the U.N., that projected guilt is in spite of the fact that it is often tasked with quietly cleaning up some of the collateral damage wrought by their main accuser. They just have to do so without any real power or the funds to do the job. That's the simple truth you won't hear in Trump's speech ... or any speech, for that matter.

It's the fact that the U.N.'s meager amount of "wasteful spending" doesn't even begin to cover the cost of doing business when your business depends on paying the world to look the other way while you get away with murder.

**JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, radio co-host, documentary filmmaker and former broadcast news producer in Washington, D.C. He blogs at [Newsvandal.com](http://newsvandal.com) or you can follow him on Twitter, <http://twitter/newsvandal>.**

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## Harvard's Cowardice on Chelsea Manning

**Exclusive:** In an abject display of intellectual cowardice, Harvard's Kennedy School withdrew a fellowship from Chelsea Manning after hearing protests from accomplices in the war crimes she exposed, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government has shown that it is no profile in courage by withdrawing a visiting fellowship that had been awarded

to Chelsea Manning, who served seven years in prison for revealing U.S. war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Kennedy School caved in to pressure from people who shared in responsibility for those and other crimes, including former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell, who resigned his own fellowship in protest and denounced Manning as “a convicted felon and leaker of classified information.”

Of course, it is also true that Martin Luther King Jr. was jailed for criminal violations pertaining to his protests against “legal” injustices – as was South Africa’s Nelson Mandela. Manning represented perhaps America’s quintessential prisoner of conscience of this decade, someone who was severely punished for exposing wrongdoing.

After serving in Iraq as an Army intelligence analyst and witnessing the often-cavalier attitude toward killing Afghans and Iraqis, Manning decided to release thousands of classified documents, including what WikiLeaks labeled the “Collateral Murder” video of a U.S. helicopter gunship mowing down Iraqis and two Reuters journalists on a Baghdad street. Manning’s decision was an act of moral courage at a time when American Officialdom was violating a host of international laws with impunity.

Indeed, what was almost as troubling as the war crimes themselves was that virtually no one from the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama was punished for their criminal actions, especially for committing what the Nuremberg Tribunals deemed the “supreme international crime,” the crime of “aggressive war.”

Bush was allowed to retire to a quiet life as an artist; many of his senior national security officials have gone on to comfy jobs in the corporate and academic worlds; and Obama has already begun to hit the lucrative lecture circuit. But Manning served seven hard years in prison and has now been further humiliated by Harvard’s cowardice.

In the explanation of the hasty late-night decision to withdraw Manning’s fellowship, the school’s dean Douglas Elmendorf wrote, “I see more clearly now that many people view a visiting fellow title as an honorific, so we should weigh that consideration when offering invitations.”

### **Dubious Honorees**

So, it’s fine to honor the likes of Michael Morell (or for that matter other luminaries such as former Fox News host Bill O’Reilly, the current MSNBC duo of Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski, and President Trump’s laughingstock ex-press secretary Sean Spicer) but not a person who demonstrated true moral

courage and suffered greatly to expose grave crimes of state.

By the way, Morell was regarded by many of his ex-CIA compatriots as a classic example of a bureaucratic climber with no moral balance.

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote in 2011 that “Like many senior CIA officials in recent years, Morell’s record is checkered, at best. He held key jobs in intelligence analysis over the past decade as the CIA often served as a handmaiden to the war propagandists.

“As for Michael Morell, as with many other successful CIA careerists, his strongest suit seemed to be pleasing his boss and not antagonizing the White House. ... Forgive me if my thinking about loyalty to the facts seems ‘obsolete’ or ‘quaint’ or if it seems unfair to expect CIA analysts to put their careers on the line when politicians and ideologues are misleading the nation to war but those were the principles that analysts of my generation tried to uphold.”

And, last year after leaving government, Morell put on a display of tough-guyism that presumably was meant to win him his coveted job of CIA director under the expected presidency of Hillary Clinton.

On the Charlie Rose show, Morell continued his disdain for international law by calling for the murder of Iranians and Russians inside Syria.

In an interview on Aug. 8, 2016, Morell said he wanted to “make the Iranians pay a price in Syria. ... make the Russians pay a price in Syria.”

Rose: “We make them pay the price by killing Russians?”

Morell: “Yeah.”

Rose: “And killing Iranians?”

Morell: “Yes ... You don’t tell the world about it. ... But you make sure they know it in Moscow and Tehran.”

Morell also advocated U.S. military bombing of Syrian government targets as part of achieving “regime change” in Syria.

The fact that everything that Morell was proposing violated international law didn’t seem to faze Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. The idea of killing Russians and Iranians inside Syria could be construed as terrorism but even that doesn’t raise eyebrows these days, although if some senior Russian or Iranian went on TV to propose killing Americans in, say, Iraq or Afghanistan, to send Washington a message, that would surely draw righteous condemnation.



The notion that the United States has the right to attack the sovereign nation of Syria with the goal of overthrowing its government has been at the heart of the kinds of war crimes that Chelsea Manning helped expose.

Morell, however, appears to have simply inculcated the lawless attitude that prevailed in both the Bush and Obama administrations, in which the U.S. government was a law unto itself, deciding when and where its forces would bomb and kill.

By “honoring” the likes of Morell and “dishonoring” the likes of Manning, Harvard’s Kennedy School has sent a clear message regarding how it sees the role of the U.S. government in the world. The school is signaling that it embraces the moral hypocrisy at the core of this attitude and is demonstrating that it can be trusted to train future U.S. government leaders in how to operate outside the norms of civilized behavior.

[For more on Manning’s contributions to civilization, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?”](#)]

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## The Push for a Medicare-for-All Plan

America’s complex and inefficient healthcare system ends up being both very expensive and limited in its coverage, a problem that Sen. Bernie Sanders is targeting in his Medicare-for-all plan, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Sen. Bernie Sanders has unveiled a new single-payer healthcare plan which would provide all Americans with government-sponsored health coverage. Sanders’s plan, supported by some 16 Democrats in the Senate, calls for an overhaul of the healthcare system with what would essentially be a tweaked and revitalized version of Medicare-for-all.

“Today we say that a function of a rational healthcare system is to provide quality care to all in a cost-effective way,” declared Sanders, an independent from Vermont, “and not to continue a system which allows insurance companies and

drug companies to make hundreds of billions in profits each year and makes healthcare industry CEO's extremely wealthy."

Flanked by supporting senators in making his Wednesday announcement, Sanders also noted that a Medicare-for-all program would end "the complexity of a system which adds enormous stress at a time when people need it the least."

I spoke on Sept. 13 to Russell Mokhiber, founder of The Corporate Crime Reporter and of [SinglePayerAction.org](https://www.singlepayeraction.org). Mokhiber has long been an advocate of the single-payer option. He is also someone who watches closely the deadly nature of corporate greed.

Dennis Bernstein: Please give us your initial reaction. Bernie has a number of senators who say they believe in single-payer. Several presidential hopefuls are among those who jumped on the Sanders Single-Payer bandwagon. You think their playing early presidential politics with single-payer, or are they true believers? Do they support Sander's vision?

Russell Mokhiber: That is what they are saying, and it is obviously because of the grassroots prairie fire that has been lit by single-payer activists over the years. It is truly out of our hands now.

Usually when you go to these meetings with your member of congress, the single-payer activists would be the only ones raising the issue. Now we are standing in line screaming at our congress people, demanding it, because the situation on the ground has become so bad.

Nine years ago, when the insurance industry-written Obamacare was introduced, there were 23 people testifying. They refused to listen to any of us who wanted to put single-payer on the table. In fact, they had us arrested. Six months ago, Bernie's healthcare person told us that there wasn't going to be a single-payer bill because they didn't want to risk a Democratic Senate in 2018 and they thought that single-payer would hurt them. But once they saw the grassroots pressure, they totally flipped. Just a month ago, Bernie had in this bill co-pays and deductibles.

So this is all about the grassroots pressure. Obviously it has now become a hot political issue. Someone like Kamala Harris would never have touched this just a couple weeks ago. Senator Richard Blumenthal from the insurance state of Connecticut has signed on!

Do we believe that they will push single-payer if we take our foot off the gas? No. We believe the Democratic Party is structurally incapable of being a people's party. The only way they are going to respond is if the people keep their foot on the gas. This seems very similar to California in 2006 when the

Democrats passed single-payer in California knowing that Governor Schwarzenegger was going to veto it.

We are very encouraged by this response but we really want to see this happen, not just political posturing. We are concerned that the Democrats will use this to gain power and then push it aside for something like a public option or to secure the position of the insurance industry in the current system.

I was at a conference this week called by Cornel West and the Green Party to address the fact that the Democratic Party is structurally incapable of being a people's party. My colleague Bruce Dixon at Black Agenda Report said a few years ago that Bernie is like a sheepdog into the Democratic Party. He is shepherding the left back into the party. My hope is that, if this is what is going on, at least we will get out of it single-payer for all Americans.

DB: Russell, just take a moment to describe what you see as the difference between Obamacare and a single-payer system.

RM: Obamacare was written by insurance industry lobbyists to preserve the position of the insurance industry within the system. This meant that we would continue to have 30 million Americans uninsured, as we have right now, that most people who have insurance are underinsured, they still go bankrupt even with insurance, that thousands of people die every year because of lack of health insurance.

The only way to change the situation is to pursue a single-payer system, meaning you get rid of all the private insurance payers and you have just one: Medicare for all with no co-pays and no deductibles. When every American is born, he or she gets a birth certificate and a Medicare card. You are covered through the tax system.

So yes, we are going to be taxed, but the amount we pay in taxes will be significantly less than the amount we currently pay in premiums, deductibles and co-pays. That money that we save by getting rid of all the administrative waste will ensure that everyone is covered, state of the art.

The amazing thing about this press conference today wasn't what the senators were saying. For the most part, they were just posturing, maybe with the exception of Bernie. It was the people who spoke before the senators.

A doctor from Canada testified that 97% of Canadians love their single-payer system. She described how, when she was pregnant, there were no bills, no co-payments. There was a businessman from Pennsylvania who started a group of businesses for single-payer, because the reality is that businesses are going crazy trying to cover all their employees and many employees are afraid to leave

their jobs because then they will lose their insurance.

It is no longer linked to employment, you are covered from cradle to grave, you have your choice of doctor and hospital. When you need medical care, you go to the best place in your area, there is no in-network or out-of-network.

DB: That is essentially what it breaks down to for most civilized countries—or even not so civilized countries—in this world. How do you explain that the two Democratic leaders—Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi—are mum on single-payer, or worse?

RM: I think it is part of the feud within the Democratic Party. Coincidentally, Hillary is traveling the country right now with her new book, *What Happened*. She is obviously very critical of Bernie Sanders and what he did during the election.

There is a battle going on right now for the soul of the Democratic Party. I am very concerned about the single-payer movement because the Democrats appear to be using this to take the Senate in 2018 and the White House and then back off on single-payer.

DB: This industry is not going to go down easy. They spend a great deal of money to keep this system in place. These Congresspeople aren't just voting their consciences here.

RM: The great thing about single payer is that it will drop the cost of healthcare because a single-payer is going to refuse to pay these exorbitant rates for pharmaceuticals, they are going to insist on paying what the rest of the world pays.

The medical industrial complex is in it for a bottom line profit motive. Twenty years ago in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, a surgeon wrote that medical care is very similar to any other good in America: doctors provide it and you buy it.

So there is a debate now about whether healthcare should be considered a commodity or a right. The Democrats are now getting the message that it is a human right and that the people are demanding it. But as you point out, very powerful forces are bent on defeating it.

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

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# The NYT's Yellow Journalism on Russia

**Exclusive:** The New York Times' descent into yellow journalism over Russia recalls the sensationalism of Hearst and Pulitzer leading to the Spanish-American War, but the risks to humanity are much greater now, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Reading The New York Times these days is like getting a daily dose of the "Two Minutes Hate" as envisioned in George Orwell's *1984*, except applied to America's new/old enemy Russia. Even routine international behavior, such as Russia using fictitious names for potential adversaries during a military drill, is transformed into something weird and evil.

In the snide and alarmist style that the Times now always applies to Russia, reporter Andrew Higgins wrote – referring to a fictitious war-game "enemy" – "The country does not exist, so it has neither an army nor any real citizens, though it has acquired a feisty following of would-be patriots online. Starting on Thursday, however, the fictional state, Veishnoriya, a distillation of the Kremlin's darkest fears about the West, becomes the target of the combined military might of Russia and its ally Belarus."

This snarky front-page story in Thursday's print editions also played into the Times' larger narrative about Russia as a disseminator of "fake news." You see the Russkies are even inventing "fictional" enemies to bully. Hah-hah-hah! The article was entitled, "Russia's War Games With Fake Enemies Cause Real Alarm."

Of course, the U.S. and its allies also conduct war games against fictitious enemies, but you wouldn't know that from reading the Times. For instance, U.S. war games in 2015 substituted five made-up states – Ariana, Atropia, Donovia, Gorgas and Limaria – for nations near the Caucasus mountains along the borders of Russia and Iran.

In earlier war games, the U.S. used both fictitious names and colors in place of actual countries. For instance, in 1981, the Reagan administration conducted "Ocean Venture" with that war-game scenario focused on a group of islands called "Amber and the Amberdines," obvious stand-ins for Grenada and the Grenadines, with "Orange" used to represent Cuba.

In those cases, the maneuvers by the powerful U.S. military were clearly intended to intimidate far weaker countries. Yet, the U.S. mainstream media did not treat those war rehearsals for what they were, implicit aggression, but

rather mocked protests from the obvious targets as paranoia since we all know the U.S. would never violate international law and invade some weak country! (As it turned out, Ocean Venture '81 was a dress rehearsal for the actual U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983.)

Yet, as far as the Times and its many imitators in the major media are concerned, there's one standard for "us" and another for Russia and other countries that "we" don't like.

### **Yellow Journalism**

But the Times' behavior over the past several years suggests something even more sinister than biased reporting. The "newspaper of record" has slid into yellow journalism, the practice of two earlier New York newspapers – William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World – that in the 1890s manipulated facts about the crisis in Cuba to push the United States into war with Spain, a conflict that many historians say marked the beginning of America's global empire.

Except in today's instance, The New York Times is prepping the American people for what could become World War III. The daily message is that you must learn to hate Russia and its President Vladimir Putin so much that, first, you should support vast new spending on America's Military-Industrial Complex and, second, you'll be ginned up for nuclear war if it comes to that.

At this stage, the Times doesn't even try for a cosmetic appearance of objective journalism. Look at how the Times has twisted the history of the Ukraine crisis, treating it simply as a case of "Russian aggression" or a "Russian invasion." The Times routinely ignores what actually happened in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 when the U.S. government aided and abetted a violent coup that overthrew Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich after he had been demonized in the Western media.

Even as neo-Nazi and ultranationalist protesters hurled Molotov cocktails at police, Yanukovich signaled a willingness to compromise and ordered his police to avoid worsening violence. But compromise wasn't good enough for U.S. neocons – such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland; Sen. John McCain; and National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman. They had invested too much in moving Ukraine away from Russia.

Nuland put the U.S. spending at \$5 billion and was caught discussing with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who should be in the new government and how to "glue" or "midwife this thing"; McCain appeared on stage urging on far-right militants; and Gershman was overseeing scores of NED projects inside Ukraine, which he had

deemed the “biggest prize” and an important step in achieving an even bigger regime change in Russia, or as he put it: “Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents. ... Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

### **The Putsch**

So, on Feb. 20, 2014, instead of seeking peace, a sniper firing from a building controlled by anti-Yanukovych forces killed both police and protesters, touching off a day of carnage. Immediately, the Western media blamed Yanukovych.

Shaken by the violence, Yanukovych again tried to pacify matters by reaching a compromise – guaranteed by France, Germany and Poland – to relinquish some of his powers and move up an election so he could be voted out of office peacefully. He also pulled back the police.

At that juncture, the neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists spearheaded a violent putsch on Feb. 22, 2014, forcing Yanukovych and other officials to flee for their lives. Ignoring the agreement guaranteed by the three European nations, Nuland and the U.S. State Department quickly deemed the coup regime “legitimate.”

However, ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which represented Yanukovych’s electoral base, resisted the coup and turned to Russia for protection. Contrary to the Times’ narrative, there was no “Russian invasion” of Crimea because Russian troops were already there as part of an agreement for its Sevastopol naval base. That’s why you’ve never seen photos of Russian troops crashing across Ukraine’s borders in tanks or splashing ashore in Crimea with an amphibious landing or descending by parachute. They were already inside Crimea.

The Crimean autonomous government also voted to undertake a referendum on whether to leave the failed Ukrainian state and to rejoin Russia, which had governed Crimea since the Eighteenth Century. In that referendum, Crimean citizens voted by some 96 percent to exit Ukraine and seek reunion with Russia, a democratic and voluntary process that the Times always calls “annexation.”

The Times and much of the U.S. mainstream media refuses even to acknowledge that there is another side to the Ukraine story. Anyone who mentions this reality is deemed a “Kremlin stooge” in much the same way that people who questioned the mainstream certainty about Iraq’s WMD in 2002-03 were called “Saddam apologists.”

But what is particularly remarkable about the endless Russia-bashing is that – because it started under President Obama – it sucked in many American liberals

and even some progressives. That process grew even worse when the contempt for Russia merged with the Left's revulsion over Donald Trump's election.

Many liberals came to view the dubious claims of Russian "meddling" in the 2016 election as the golden ticket to remove Trump from the White House. So, amid that frenzy, all standards of proof were jettisoned to make Russia-gate the new Watergate.

The Times, The Washington Post and pretty much the entire U.S. news media joined the "resistance" to Trump's presidency and embraced the neocon "regime change" goal for Putin's Russia. Very few people care about the enormous risks that this "strategy" entails.

For one, even if the U.S. government were to succeed in destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia sufficiently to force out President Putin, the neocon dream of another malleable Boris Yeltsin in the Kremlin is far less likely than the emergence of an extreme Russian nationalist who might be ready to push the nuclear button rather than accept further humiliation of Mother Russia.

The truth is that the world has much less to fear from the calculating Vladimir Putin than from the guy who might follow a deposed Vladimir Putin amid economic desperation and political chaos in Russia. But the possibility of nuclear Armageddon doesn't seem to bother the neocon/liberal-interventionist New York Times. Nor apparently does the principle of fair and honest journalism.

The Times and rest of the mainstream media are just having too much fun hating Russia and Putin to worry about the possible extermination of life on planet Earth.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## The Neglected Legend of Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta, a largely unsung hero in the fight for farmworkers' rights, is the subject of the new movie, *Dolores*, that recounts her life as a feminist and union organizer, reports Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina.

By Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina



Peter Bratt's new film *Dolores*, about the life and times of United Farm Workers Co-Founder Dolores Huerta, shows the work of a woman who was way ahead of her time and whose work is right on time for the struggles that working people and all common folks are facing in the age of Donald Trump.

The filmmaker reminds us in a synopsis of the film, "Dolores Huerta is among the most important, yet least known, activists in American history. An equal partner in co-founding the first farm workers unions with Cesar Chavez. ...

"Dolores tirelessly led the fight for racial and labor justice alongside Chavez, becoming one of the most defiant feminists of the twentieth century – and she continues the fight to this day, at 87."

I interviewed Dolores Huerta and filmmaker-director Peter Bratt on September 5. Joining me for the Flashpoints Radio interview was the show's Senior Producer, Miguel Gavilan Molina, an old friend of Huerta, who learned about the United Farm Workers as a child farm worker in "the fields of toil." The film is currently showing in selected theaters across the country.

Dennis Bernstein: Dolores Huerta, [...] I know you want to be out at that rally today [Sept. 5] protesting. We have just seen that President Trump has rescinded DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals], a terrible decision that hurts these kids and their families in so many different ways.

On the same day we hear that some Dreamers were actually killed trying to save people in Houston, a city with roughly 600,000 undocumented people who don't know whether to seek shelter or hide from the people who are supposed to provide that shelter.

DH: What they are saying is that they are going to shoot it over to Congress, in an interesting ploy. Jeff Sessions said that Obama had overextended his authority and had not gone to Congress to get the necessary authority. But actually, throughout history, presidents have made decisions about immigration without going to Congress.

In the next election, every single Congressperson in the House of Representatives has to run for office and because of actions like the recent pardoning of Arpaio, many Latinos are going to be organizing to take out Republicans. So maybe they are going to try to buy favors with the Dreamers.

DB: Sessions talks about the rule of law but here is a man who has literally made a career of trying to prevent people from voting.

DH: Well, if we all get involved we can take a lot of these Republicans out. We have to build our own wall, a wall of resistance. We have to get justice not

only for the Dreamers but for the entire undocumented community.

DB: Amidst all of this, there was a victory in Arizona when a federal judge decided that the ethnic studies program there was a successful, important program that the kids in Tucson deserved to have. The racists there used you as an excuse for cancelling the program.

DH: I think we have to introduce ethnic studies programs into our kindergartens. People are not aware of the contributions to this country made by people of color. Unless we erase the ignorance and the bigotry and the misogyny and the homophobia, we are going to continue to be a country in distress. Children of color are made to feel like second-class citizens while white children feel this sense of entitlement because they have been taught that their ancestors did it all.

DB: They accuse you of hating white people.

DH: We don't hate anybody. We are a movement of love and justice and we are trying to reach those with hatred in their hearts so that they can join us in making a better world.

DB: Miguel, how did you first meet Dolores?

Miguel Gavilan Molina: Marching. When I was twelve years old, my *tio* and a couple of his *compadres* drove down in 1966 to Delano. I didn't know what was going on but I saw that red flag and I saw hundreds of brown Mexicans and no one was looking at the ground! Nobody was beat down from the weight of being poor, of being out there in the fields of misery.

I learned that, first of all, we were human beings, not just farm animals with no rights. I remember working in the fields and running, whenever airplanes flew over. But after that day, we didn't do that anymore. And then every time I heard that Dolores was going to be in the area, I brought our car club to the marches—to Sacramento, to San Francisco, to San Jose.

Dolores was the grandmother of the Chicano movement, she empowered all of us. She gave a voice to Chicanismo and also empowered *la mujer*. My mother was empowered by seeing, for the first time, a brown woman, a Mexicana, speaking for all of us.

DB: Did you think of yourself as a woman out there fighting? Was it daunting? Did people try to stop you?

DH: Fred Ross, Sr., who organized Cesar [Chavez] and myself, taught us that if you can talk to a few people at a time, you are reminding them that they have

power to change things in their lives. When you bring them together at house meetings, they look at each other and say, "hey, we do have that power."

DB: In the movie, Cesar Chavez was asked why he chose you to work with him and his answer was "faith, drive, skills, knowledge and willingness to sacrifice." What was it that drove you?

DH: When people understand that this political world is their world also, they realize that they can participate in that world, can make changes that affect them and their family.

DB: How could you be a mother, an organizer, an activist, a writer of legislation, all at the same time?

DH: You find out what kind of help you need. Like Fred Ross would tell us all the time, you don't have to have all of the answers because along the journey the answers will come to you.

MGM: Going back to the battle for ethnic studies in Arizona, you made a statement that brought the situation to a national level. You said, "Our existence is our resistance."

DH: I was lucky to be born in the state of New Mexico. My grandfather would tell me the stories about how they took that land from Mexico and how they were treated because they were Hispanics. People want to build a wall? Let's use the 1848 map.

MGM: One of the things covered in the film, which really put the Chicano movement on a national scale, was the grape boycott. It brought awareness to Mexican-Americans as the cultivators and harvesters of the food that feeds the nation, but it also revealed corporate conspiracy with military forces to use violence against a peaceful, nonviolent movement.

We know that there were legendary arguments between you and Cesar Chavez, particularly when the union began complaining that they were breaking the strike by using workers brought directly from Mexico. On the one hand, Cesar didn't want Mexican workers...

DH: Actually, that is not true. From day one, the United Farm Workers has always been the largest organization of undocumented workers. In 1963, when the Bracero Program ended, they legalized tens of thousands of the Mexican braceros—without the help of Congress, by the way. Cesar and I set to work legalizing as many of these workers as we could, going with our typewriters out in the fields.

When we passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, we made sure that

undocumented workers were covered by the law and all union benefits were made available to the undocumented. Then we passed the Amnesty Bill, which gave two million farm workers their residency.

MGM: Out in the fields you witnessed police violence. You yourself were the victim of police violence during an action in San Francisco in 1988. Would you say that today brown lives matter?

DH: Of course they do. In Bakersfield, California, where we are organizing at the moment, they have the highest rate of police killings in the country. We're fighting the school district in Kern County and the school-to-prison pipeline. We just reached a settlement with the Kern County school district which forces them to change their policies and procedures. The way we work is we organize the parents, we organize the people, so that they can do it for themselves.

DB: I think one of the untold stories of the United Farm Workers is that you were on the cutting edge of the environmental movement, highlighting how chemistry was hurting both the farm workers and the consumers of food. But that battle continues. We are still doing stories about spraying [pesticides] near schools where the kids of farm workers are trying to learn.

Peter Bratt: And it is not just the farmworkers. There is Flint, Michigan, where a mostly African-American population was being poisoned by the water. There is Standing Rock, where oil is being piped through a poor and indigenous community.

DH: We have to put all the issues of environmental poisoning under the Department of Health and Human Services. Take it out of the EPA, take it out of Agriculture. In Bakersfield recently the farmers were being poisoned by a chemical that Trump just took off the restricted list.

DB: Peter Bratt, why did you decide to make this film? You have been working on it for five years.

PB: I wish I could take the credit for making this film, but it was really my brother Carlos Santana. He had the foresight and the wisdom to see the necessity of Dolores' story. There is an urgency today and a lot we can take from her work over the last seven decades.

As we were crisscrossing the country, digging through archives, the Black Lives Matter struggle had already started. I was looking at footage and thinking, my God, this was Black Lives Matter thirty years ago!

DB: What were some of the epiphanies you had making the film?

PB: Just the fact that Dolores lived at the intersection of racial justice,

feminism, and environmental justice. Today we talk of intersectionality, of bringing movements together. But people like Cesar and Dolores, Angela Davis and Martin Luther King, they lived it, it grew out of necessity.

DB: Dolores, I want to talk to you about Robert Kennedy. He makes two significant appearances in the film. One was when he appeared at the hunger strike and the second when he was assassinated in Los Angeles. Can you talk about Kennedy's contribution to the work you were doing at that time?

DH: Over the years he was a great supporter. He helped us raise money for our clinics in Delano. We were working on his campaign and we had a lot of hope that we were going to have someone out there fighting for us. The last thing he said before he was killed was that we have a responsibility to our fellow citizens. June of next year will be fifty years since he was assassinated. We have no choice but to go forward. We don't have the luxury of cynicism or disengagement. There are too many people out there depending on us.

DB: You founded the Dolores Huerta Foundation in part to further the ability of women to be a part of the struggle.

DH: Right now we are active in nine different communities, in seven different school districts, trying to make sure that state funds are spent the way they were supposed to be spent, for low-income people, for second-language people. Many of the people we have organized are now sitting on school boards, water boards, city councils.

MGM: Peter, the film that first brought you national acclaim was *Follow Me Home*, which was about the story of Native Americans. You followed this up with a movie that focused on Chicanismo, *La Mission*. And now you've made *Dolores*. I know, Peter, how difficult it is for a Latin American film director to get any kind of support from the industry. What was the biggest obstacle you came up against?

PB: Films like this are not financed in Hollywood. With *La Mission*, it took us four years just to raise the money. With *Follow Me Home*, we actually had to do self-distribution, we hand-carried that film across the country. It is tough as an independent filmmaker but if you also choose as your subject matter Latinos or Chicanos, it is even tougher. You have to love your subject, it has to have deep meaning for you, because it consumes your life and the lives of those around you.

MGM: I'd like to ask you, Dolores, how has the border affected you and your personal life?

DH: We know that hundreds of people have died because of the wall. After all, crossing a border is not a crime. You are not hurting anybody when you cross a

border without documents. They have turned it into a crime by deporting people. It is just part of the whole incarceration movement.

These people contribute so much to our society, why do we make them into criminals? It is political. Tom DeLay once said that the reason they don't want to legalize these people is because they vote for the Democrats.

DB: Today [Sept. 5] it was announced that the DACA program has been rescinded. We are already seeing protests across the country.

MGM: As Carlos Santana said a few years ago, concerning this issue of immigration, we are all Mexicans. Here in California, everybody is coming together, they are saying, "We are all DACA students." It is making clear that this movement is not just a Mexican thing, it is a human rights issue. It is a question of racial justice.

DH: We have to remind people about SB-54 [the California Values Act], to send an email to the governor's office asking him to sign this into law. Sheriffs are putting a lot of pressure on Governor [Jerry] Brown to water down the bill.

MGM: Well, there is a problem with that, Dolores, and that is that one of the strongest unions here in California, the Correctional Officers and Police Union, has been putting a lot of pressure on Brown. I am not very comfortable with Jerry. It took a lot of pressure last year to get him to sign some of those bills.

DB: Let's talk about the Foundation and your mission to inspire young women to get engaged. Talk about some of the women you have already worked with and how you plan to make sure that the work continues.

DH: Basically, we create leadership in the communities and the majority of them turn out to be women who are actually doing the work out there. It is a no-fail way to create leadership that Fred Ross, Sr. taught us.

The only problem is that people don't quite understand that this takes time. It takes time for the leaders to emerge. We go into communities and give them the tools to form organizations.

One woman with very limited English, together with her husband, got a bond issue passed to build a new gymnasium at their middle school. Then she got elected to the school board and got the principal fired for wanting to end the breakfast program. Later she found out that the person they had hired to manage the water district was guilty of embezzlement so she got rid of him. These people are hotel workers, construction workers, farm workers, but they get elected to these boards and start doing the work of governing for the people.

In addition, we support voting efforts and civic engagement. We have an LGBT project because we know that there is a lot of discrimination, especially against transgender youth and adults. We also have a health program, to get people to exercise and eat more nutritious foods. The reason we can take on so many projects is that we build a base of a hundred or so people and then they all form different committees and take on the issues.

DB: It is incredibly frustrating if you are a woman and you have worked so hard on a project and just when it is about to see the light of day some man walks in and takes the credit.

DH: As Coretta Scott King said, we will never have peace in the world until women take power. If you see a board and there are no women on that board, they are going to make poor decisions. We saw that with these senators who were trying to repeal the healthcare bill. There were two Republican women who said there was no way they could vote for that. And who did the media give credit to? John McCain.

DB: It takes courage to get up and speak in front of people.

DH: One of the things we tell all our people is that they are going to have to speak in front of school boards, city councils. We have them practice and write down notes about what they are going to say, and that is how they eventually overcome their fears.

DB: A poetry teacher of mine once wrote, "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." Indeed, that is the case with our guest today, Dolores Huerta.

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

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## The Military's Warning on Global Warming

The U.S. military, which gets called on to cope with unrest tied to global warming, is taking the climate threat seriously as opposed to civilian politicians who are pandering to special interests, says ethicist Daniel C. Maguire.

By Daniel C. Maguire

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The really neat American idea was that the military's zest for battle would be restrained by the measured judgment of a civilian-led government. But the spreading perception internationally is that President Trump's generals are the last-ditch guarantors of common sense in a deranged White House.

Let's admit it. The military can be right. Secretary of State Colin Powell, a retired general, warned President George W. Bush privately against the crazy invasion of Iraq though he later betrayed his own good sense and joined the criminal conspiracy.

What the military recognizes and the civilian government does not, is that the biggest security threat, the biggest security threat our species has faced in 10,000 years, is global warming. The military doesn't call it a hoax. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review calls climate change "an accelerant of instability" and a "threat multiplier."

In October 2015 a diverse group of experts, including three former Defense Secretaries, said that climate change is "shaping a world that is more unstable, resource-constrained, violent, and disaster-prone."

Africa is a case in point. Andrew Holland writing in *Scientific American* writes: "In northern Nigeria deforestation, overgrazing and increased heat from global warming have turned what was once productive farmland and savanna into an extension of the Sahara Desert. Lake Chad has lost more than 90 percent of its original size from drought, mismanagement and waste."

The population of already overcrowded Africa is likely to double by 2050 leading to explosive conditions already in evidence.

It is precisely from the chaos of this toxic mix that radical groups like Boko Haram have sprouted. The military knows this. The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA said that climate change fueled Syria's civil war. Deep and long droughts, influenced by climate change, drove hundreds of thousands of people from their farms into cities like Aleppo and Raqqa making fertile breeding ground for ISIS, Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups.

The New York Times reports that as pasture land has dried up in places like Kenya violent and murderous battles are being fought just to get grass for the animals. Climate change is a driving factor in all of this. It is a "threat multiplier" and the threats do not stay within the borders of the poorest most affected nations. Despair also goes global and explodes in our streets and in the streets of Europe and elsewhere.

## **A Primer for Denialists**



President Trump calls anthropogenic global warming “a hoax,” drops out of the historic Paris climate accord and guts the Environmental Protection Agency. Maybe his generals could don their uniforms, sit Trump down and give him a little primer on this epochal threat to planetary security. Here is the primer.

We have had 378 months of above average temperatures. That’s no hoax. Scientists say Arctic ice is in “a death spiral.” That’s no hoax. People fish off Bangladesh in what was once a busy market before rising seas claimed it. That’s no hoax.

Temperatures rose in Iraq and Kuwait to 129 F in July 2016 and to 112 F in parts of France and Italy in August 2017. That’s no hoax.

“For every degree Celsius that temperature rises, agricultural scientists calculate, wheat yields drop 10 percent in the Earth’s hotter midriff,” as Alan Weisman reports in his tellingly entitled book *Countdown*. That’s no hoax.

Environmental refugees no longer come only from Island states like the Maldives and Tuvalu and from Bangladesh. They come from Houston and Florida and will be coming from inundated cities on our coasts.

On top of all that we are awakening the sleeping giant in the earth. As volcanologist Bill McGuire says changing climate triggers earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes, unleashing forces that make our destructive power seem puny. And that is coming and that is no hoax. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, energized by the heated waters of the sea, are portents of a “new normal.” The records they are breaking are not a hoax.

Climate scientist Clive Hamilton reports that “the reluctant conclusion of the most eminent climate scientist is that the world is now on a path to a very unpleasant future and it is too late to stop it.” He describes the scientists’ mood as one of “barely suppressed panic.” He says this in his book ominously entitled *Requiem for a Species*.

Stephen Hawking has so little hope for humanity on this planet that he says our long-term future must be in space. (One can question his idea that we should take our failures and export them into space!) The root of the problem he says is humanity’s “selfish and aggressive instinct.”

In other words, according to Hawking, it is not a scientific problem: it’s a moral problem. An ethical problem for an ethically skewed species. These expressions of near despair are not uttered as a hoax.

**Any Hope Anywhere?**

Fear is our greatest need: denial our most ingrained and fearsome talent. Acute fear can stoke action. We got scared of small pox and an international effort ended it. We got really scared with the shrinkage of the ozone over Antarctica and we responded internationally. In World War II, the United States transformed its entire economy and its industrial production in a matter of months. The problem is we are not afraid of an incipient apocalypse even as our TV's blaringly report on it.

We have nothing to fear but the absence of fear. We need fear. Green fear. In a kind of homeopathic medicine, we should add green greed to the mix. Creative experiments in many countries are showing that there is money to be made by harnessing renewable natural energy.

Job one for generals is detecting danger and sounding needed alarms. Maybe the generals can be our ecological Paul Revere's. Maybe.

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