

The Long-Hidden Saudi-9/11 Trail

The U.S. government and mainstream media are playing down the long-hidden 9/11 chapter on official Saudi connections to Al Qaeda's hijackers, hoping most Americans won't read it themselves, as 9/11 widow Kristen Breitweiser observes.

By Kristen Breitweiser

First and foremost, here is what you need to know when you hear any member of our government say the newly released 29-page chapter from the congressional 9/11 report contains no smoking gun – THEY ARE LYING.

Our government's relationship to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is no different than an addict's relationship to heroin. Much like a heroin addict who will lie, cheat and steal to feed his vice, certain members of our government will lie, cheat and steal to continue their dysfunctional and deadly relationship with the KSA – a relationship that is rotting this nation and its leaders from the inside out.

When CIA Director John Brennan states that he believes the 29 pages prove that the government of Saudi Arabia had no involvement in the 9/11 attacks, recognize that John Brennan is not a man living in reality – he is delusional by design, feeding and protecting his Saudi vice.

When Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Anne W. Patterson, testifies – under oath – that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an ally that does everything they can to help us fight against Islamic terrorism, recognize that her deep, steep Saudi pandering serves and protects only her Saudi vice.

Read the 29 pages yourself and know the facts. Do not let any person in our government deny the damning reality of the 29 pages. And as you read the 29 pages remember that they were written during 2002 and 2003. President George W. Bush did not want the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia investigated.

President Bush has deep ties to the KSA and its royal family and only wanted to protect the Kingdom. President Bush wanted to go to war in Iraq – not Saudi Arabia. So, a 29-page chapter that said "Saudi" and "Bandar" instead of "Hussein" and "Iraq" was a huge problem for President Bush. (The solution was to hide the information for 13 years.)

It is well documented that the Joint Inquiry received enormous push-back against its investigation into the Saudis. In fact, former FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged that much of the information implicating the Saudis that the Inquiry investigators uncovered was unknown to him. Why does Mueller say this?

Mostly because Mueller and other FBI officials had purposely tried to keep any incriminating information specifically surrounding the Saudis out of the Inquiry's investigative hands.

To repeat, there was a concerted effort by the FBI and the Bush Administration to keep incriminating Saudi evidence out of the Inquiry's investigation. And for the exception of the 29 pages, they succeeded in their effort.

The Central Saudi Role

Notwithstanding the lack of cooperation from the FBI and the pressure from the Bush Administration to thwart any investigation of the Saudis, the Joint Inquiry was still able to write 29 pages regarding Saudi complicity in the 9/11 attacks. No other nation is given such singular prominence in the Joint Inquiry's Final Report. Not Iraq. Not Iran. Not Syria. Not Sudan. Not even Afghanistan or Pakistan.

The 29 pages have been kept secret and suppressed from the American public for more than 13 years – not for matters of genuine national security – but for matters of convenience, embarrassment and cover-up. Executive Order 13526 makes that a crime.

Neither Director of National Intelligence James Clapper nor President Barack Obama wants to release a statement about *that*. The only thing Clapper and Obama are willing to say about the delayed release of the 29 pages is that they stand by the subsequent investigation of the 9/11 Commission.

This punt by President Obama is repulsive. His deference to the 9/11 Commission – which admitted that it was unable to fully investigate the Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks – reveals Obama's utter lack of interest, engagement or support of the 9/11 families.

Frankly, this behavior re-victimizes the 9/11 families by not acknowledging the truth, blocking our path to justice, and the very vital assignment of accountability to those who should be held responsible.

Most alarmingly, Obama's silence keeps us unsafe because instead of calling for an emergency session of Congress to immediately name the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, President Obama continues to downplay, belittle and ignore the truth leaving us vulnerable to terrorist attacks that are still to this very day being funded by our "ally" – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To be clear, the 9/11 Commission did NOT fully investigate the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Staff Director Philip Zelickow blocked any investigation into the Saudis. Zelickow even went so far as to fire an investigator who had been brought over

from the Joint Inquiry to specifically follow up on the Saudi leads and information uncovered in the Joint Inquiry. I will repeat – the investigator was fired.

In addition, Zelikow re-wrote the 9/11 Commission's entire section regarding the Saudis and their connection to the 9/11 attacks. Former 9/11 Commissioners John Lehman, Bob Kerrey and Tim Roemer have all acknowledged that the Saudis were not adequately investigated by the 9/11 Commission. Thus, for any government official to hang his or her hat on the 9/11 Commission's Final Report when Commissioners themselves have admitted that the Saudis were not fully investigated is absurd and disgraceful.

Ignored Evidence

For example, one glaring piece of information not mentioned in either the 9/11 Commission or the Joint Inquiry's 29 pages is the information regarding Fahad Thumairy and Khallad bin Attash found in both an FBI report and a CIA report that are now declassified.

Both reports indicate that Fahad Thumairy – a Saudi Consulate official – helped bring Khallad bin Attash into the United States in June of 2000 so he could meet with two of the 9/11 hijackers, Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi. Thumairy escorted bin Attash – a known Al Qaeda operative – through INS and Customs at Los Angeles International Airport evading security and any possible alarm bells. Again, this information is found in both a CIA and FBI report.

Four months after Khallad bin Attash met with the two 9/11 hijackers in Los Angeles, the USS Cole was bombed and 17 U.S. sailors were killed. Khallad bin Attash, Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi were all named as co-conspirators in the bombing of the USS Cole. Where is the information regarding bin Attash and Thumairy? Has it ever been investigated?

Had our intelligence agencies capitalized on the known connection between Thumairy and bin Attash, they would have been able to thwart the bombing of the USS Cole. In addition, they would have had access and the ability to weave together nearly all the pieces of the 9/11 attacks – more than nine months before the 9/11 attacks happened. But as history shows, Saudi Consulate official Fahad Thumairy was not investigated and 17 sailors in addition to 3,000 others were killed.

I'm sure that Barack Obama, John Brennan, Anne Patterson, and Philip Zelikow would all consider Thumairy's operational and financial support of Attash, Mihdhar and Hazmi as within the threshold of being an "ally" of the United States. I, and the rest of America, would not.

I know summer is a busy time. I know that next week is the Republican Convention. I know that Congress is out of session for two months. And I know that ISIS attacks continue in Nice, Orlando, San Bernardino, Belgium, Paris and more. Just like I know that Donald Trump picked Mike Pence as his running mate and that there was a coup in Turkey.

For an Administration looking to dump some insanely incriminating evidence and have nobody take notice – doing it on Friday when Congress was leaving for their two-month summer recess was probably the best day anyone could have imagined.

The Long Stonewall

But the world is an unstable, crazy place. And, while I used to think I was safe because my government was looking out for me and making decisions that were in my best interests and that of other citizens, I now know better. For 15 long years, I have fought to get information regarding the killing of my husband from the U.S. government.

I have fought, pleaded and begged for the truth, transparency, justice and accountability because my husband and 3,000 others were brutally slaughtered in broad daylight. And our government has done nothing but block, thwart, impede and obstruct that path to truth, transparency, accountability and justice.

Even going so far as to gaslight us to this very day by denying the plain truth written on the plain paper of the 29 pages. Please read the 29 pages. Look at the facts and evidence. And then watch the venal way various members of our government and media play spin-master on those facts – telling you to deny the very harsh, sobering reality found within those 29 pages. I hope their gaslighting disgusts you as much as it disgusts me.

Note that these 29 pages merely detail the Saudi connection to the 9/11 attacks *in San Diego*. They briefly touch on the Phoenix information, as well. Though more notably, the 29 pages do not include information found in the more than 80,000 documents that are currently being reviewed by a federal judge in Florida – 80,000 documents that not the 9/11 Commission, not the Joint Inquiry, not the White House (from Clinton to Bush to Obama), and not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia want us to know about.

More than anything, please know this: **The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provided operational and financial support to the 9/11 hijackers. That is a fact. And, the U.S. government has been covering up that fact for 15 years – even to this very day. And that is a crime.**

Corruption, greed, and vice, specifically as it pertains to protecting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is not a one-party problem. It spans both Democratic

and Republican administrations. Blame President Bill Clinton, President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama – as well as, all of their officials and appointees.

They are ALL to blame – before and after the fact – for failing to prevent the 9/11 attacks, helping to facilitate the 9/11 attacks through their own abject negligence, using the 9/11 attacks to further ill-begotten gains and goals, and covering-up the 9/11 attacks by not coming clean with the American public for 15 years.

Kristen Breitweiser is a 9/11 widow and activist who – working with other 9/11 widows known collectively as the “Jersey Girls” – pressured the U.S. government to conduct a formal investigation into the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Follow Kristen Breitweiser on Twitter: www.twitter.com/kdbreitweiser. [This article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost. 9/11 widows Monica Gabrielle, Mindy Kleinberg, Lorie Van Auken, and Patty Casazza also sign their names to this blog.]

Ramstein: A Key Link in the Kill Chain

As the U.S. military relies more and more on remote-controlled drones to kill people half a world away, one of the key links in the chain of death is in southwest Germany, the Ramstein Air Base, reports Norman Solomon for The Nation.

By Norman Solomon

The overseas hub for America’s “war on terror” is the massive Ramstein Air Base in southwest Germany. Nearly ignored by U.S. media, Ramstein serves crucial functions for drone warfare and much more. It’s the most important Air Force base abroad, operating as a kind of grand central station for airborne war – whether relaying video images of drone targets in Afghanistan to remote pilots with trigger fingers in Nevada, or airlifting special-ops units on missions to Africa, or transporting munitions for airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Soaking up billions of taxpayer dollars, Ramstein has scarcely lacked for anything from the home country, other than scrutiny.

Known as “Little America” in this mainly rural corner of Germany, the area now includes 57,000 U.S. citizens clustered around Ramstein and a dozen smaller bases. The Defense Department calls it “the largest American community outside of the United States.”

Ramstein serves as the biggest Air Force cargo port beyond U.S. borders,

providing “full spectrum airfield operations” along with “world-class airlift and expeditionary combat support.” The base also touts “superior” services and “exceptional quality of life.” To look at Ramstein and environs is to peer into a faraway mirror for the United States; what’s inside the frame is normality for endless war.

Ramstein’s gigantic Exchange store (largest in the U.S. military) is the centerpiece for an oversize shopping mall, just like back home. A greeting from the Holy Family Catholic Community at Ramstein tells newcomers: “We know that being in the military means having to endure frequent moves to different assignments. This is part of the price we pay by serving our country.”

Five American colleges have campuses on the base. Ellenmarie Zwank Brown, who identifies herself as “an Air Force wife and a physician,” is reassuring in a cheerful guidebook that she wrote for new arrivals: “If you are scared of giving up your American traditions, don’t worry! The military goes out of its way to give military members an American way of life while living in Germany.”

That way of life is contoured around nonstop war. Ramstein is the headquarters for the U.S. Air Force in Europe, and the base is now pivotal for using air power on other continents.

“We touch a good chunk of the world right from Ramstein,” a public-affairs officer, Maj. Tony Wickman, told me during a recent tour of the base. “We think of it as a power-projection platform.”

The scope of that projection is vast, with “areas of responsibility” that include Europe, Russia, and Africa – 104 countries in all. And Ramstein is well-staffed to meet the challenge, with over 7,500 “active duty Airmen” – more than any other U.S. military base in the world except the Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

Serving the transport needs of war efforts in Iraq and Syria (countries hit by 28,675 U.S. bombs and missiles last year) as well as in many other nations, Ramstein is a central pit stop for enormous cargo jets like the C-5 Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster. The Ramstein base currently supports “fifteen different major combat operations,” moving the daily supply chain and conducting urgent airlifts.

Last July, when Ankara gave Washington a green light to use Turkey’s Incirlik Air Base for launching airstrikes in Syria, vital equipment quickly flew from Ramstein to Incirlik so F-16s could start bombing.

But these days a lot of Ramstein’s attention is focused southward. The base maintains a fleet of fourteen newest-model C-130 turboprops, now coming in

mighty handy for secretive U.S. military moves across much of Africa. With its sleek digital avionics, the cockpit of a C-130J looked impressive. But more notable was the plane's spacious cargo bay, where a pilot explained that it can carry up to 44,000 pounds of supplies – or as many as 92 Army Airborne “jumpers,” who can each be saddled with enough weapons and gear to weigh in at 400 pounds. From the air, troops or freight – even steamrollers, road graders, and Humvees – leave the plane's hold with parachutes. Or the agile plane can land on “undeveloped air fields.”

With Ramstein as its home, the C-130J is ideal for flying war matériel and special-operations forces to remote terrain in northern and western Africa. (The Pentagon describes it as “a rugged combat transporter designed to take off and land at austere fields.”)

In mid-2014, the itinerary of a single trip got into a fleeting news story when a teenage stowaway was found dead in a wheel well of a C-130J at Ramstein, after the plane returned from a circuit to Tunisia, Mali, Senegal, and Chad. Stealthy intervention has escalated widely in the two years since journalist Nick Turse found that the U.S. military was already averaging “far more than a mission a day on the continent, conducting operations with almost every African military force, in almost every African country.”

The officers I met at Ramstein in early spring often mentioned Africa. But the base mission of “power projection” hardly stops there.

Implausible Peace

In the American foreign policy lexicon, peace has become implausible, a faded memory, a mythic rationale for excelling at war. An airlift squadron at the Ramstein Air Base, which proudly calls itself the “Fighting Doves,” displays a logo of a muscular bird with dukes up.

On lampposts in a town near Ramstein's gates, I saw campaign posters for Germany's Left Party (*Die Linke*) with a picture of a dove and a headline that could hardly have been more out of sync with the base: *Wie lange wollt lhr den Frieden noch herbei-bomben?* “How much longer do you want to keep achieving peace by bombing?” Such questions lack relevance when war is perceived not as a means to an end, but an end in itself.

More than ever, with relatively few U.S. troops in combat and air war all the rage, the latest military technology is the filter of the American warrior's experience. When Ramstein's 60,800-square-foot Air and Space Operations Center opened in October 2011, the Air Force crowed that it “comes with 40 communication systems, 553 workstations, 1,500 computers, 1,700 monitors, 22,000

connections, and enough fiber optics to stretch from here to the Louvre in Paris.” (Mona Lisa not included.)

A news release focused on “the critical mission of monitoring the airspace above Europe and Africa” and “controlling the skies from the Arctic Circle to the Cape of Needles.” But the Defense Department didn’t mention that the new hyper-tech center would be vital to the USA’s drone war.

Ramstein receives visual images from drones via satellite, then relays the images to sensor operators and pilots at computer terminals in the United States.

“Ramstein is absolutely essential to the US drone program,” says Brandon Bryant, a former Air Force sensor operator who participated in drone attacks on Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia for five years while stationed in New Mexico and Nevada. “All information and data go through Ramstein. Everything. For the whole world.”

Bryant and other sensor operators had Ramstein on speed dial: “Before we could establish a link from our ground-control station in the United States to the drone, we literally would have to call Ramstein up and say ‘Hey, can you connect us to this satellite feed?’ We would just pick up the phone and press the button and it automatically dials in to Ramstein.” Bryant concluded that the entire system for drone strikes was set up “to take away responsibility, so that no one has responsibility for what happens.”

The U.S. government’s far-flung system for extrajudicial killing uses Ramstein as a kind of digital switchboard in a process that fogs accountability and often kills bystanders. A former Air Force drone technician, Cian Westmoreland, told me that many of the technical people staffing Ramstein’s Air and Space Operations Center are apt to be “none the wiser; they would just know a signal is going through.”

Westmoreland was stationed in Afghanistan at the Kandahar Air Field, where he helped build a signal relay station that connected to Ramstein. He never moved a joystick to maneuver a drone and never pushed a button to help fire a missile. Yet, in 2016, Westmoreland speaks sadly of the commendations he received for helping to kill more than 200 people with drone strikes.

“I did my job,” he said, “and now I have to live with that.”

During his work on the drone program, Westmoreland developed “a new kind of understanding of what modern warfare actually is. We’re moving towards more network-centric warfare. So, orders [are] dealt out over a network, and making systems more autonomous, putting less humans in the chain. And a lot of the

positions are going to be maintenance, they're technician jobs, to keep systems up and running."

Those systems strive to reduce the lag time from target zone to computer screen in Nevada. The delay during satellite transmission ("latency" in tech jargon) can last up to six seconds, depending on weather conditions and other factors, but once the signal gets to Ramstein it reaches Nevada almost instantly via fiber-optic cable.

Permission to fire comes from an attack controller who "could be anywhere," as Bryant put it, "just looking at the same video feeds as us pilots and sensors. He just sits in front of a screen too."

As Andrew Cockburn wrote in his recent book *Kill Chain*, "there is a recurrent pattern in which people become transfixed by what is on the screen, seeing what they want to see, especially when the screen – with a resolution equal to the legal definition of blindness for drivers – is representing people and events thousands of miles and several continents away."

Steely Link in a Chain

For all its ultra-tech importance, the Air and Space Operations Center at Ramstein is just a steely link in a kill chain of command, while a kind of assembly-line Taylorism keeps producing the drone war.

"I think that's part of the strength of the secrecy of the program," Bryant said. "It's fragmented." Meanwhile, "We were supposed to function and never ask questions."

Worlds away, the carnage is often lethally haphazard. For example, classified documents obtained by The Intercept shed light on a special ops series of airstrikes from January 2012 to February 2013 in northeast Afghanistan, code-named Operation Haymaker. The attacks killed more than 200 people, while only 35 were the intended targets. Such numbers may be disturbing, yet they don't convey what actually happens in human terms.

Several years ago, Pakistani photographer Noor Behram described the aftermath of a U.S. drone attack: "There are just pieces of flesh lying around after a strike. You can't find bodies. So the locals pick up the flesh and curse America. They say that America is killing us inside our own country, inside our own homes, and only because we are Muslims."

Even without a missile strike, there are the traumatic effects of drones hovering overhead. Former *New York Times* reporter David Rohde recalled the sound during his captivity by the Taliban in 2009 in tribal areas of Pakistan: "The

drones were terrifying. From the ground, it is impossible to determine who or what they are tracking as they circle overhead. The buzz of a distant propeller is a constant reminder of imminent death.”

But such matters are as far removed from Little America in southwest Germany as they are from Big America back home.

The American drone war has long been unpopular in Germany, where polling indicates that two out of three citizens oppose it. So President Obama was eager to offer assurances during a visit to Berlin three years ago, declaring: “We do not use Germany as a launching point for unmanned drones...as part of our counterterrorism activities.” But such statements miss the point, intentionally, and obscure how much the drone war depends on German hospitality.

Attorney Hans-Christian Ströbele, a prominent Green Party member of the Bundestag, told *The Nation* that “the targeted killings with drones are illegal executions at least in countries which aren’t in war with Germany. These illegal executions offend against human rights, international law and the German *Grundgesetz* [Constitution]. If German official institutions permit this and do not stop these actions, they become partly responsible.”

With 10 percent of the Bundestag’s seats, the Greens have the same size bloc as the other opposition party, the Left Party.

“To kill people with a joystick from a safe position thousands of miles away is a disgusting and inhumane form of terror,” Sahra Wagenknecht, co-chair of the Left Party, told me. “A war is no video game – at least not for those who have not the slightest chance to defend themselves.... These extrajudicial killings are war crimes, and the German government should draw the consequences and close down the air base in Ramstein.... In my view, the drone war is a form of state terrorism, which is going to produce thousands of new terrorists.”

A lawsuit filed last year in Germany focuses on a drone attack in eastern Yemen on Aug. 29, 2012, that killed two members of the Bin Ali Jaber family, which had gathered in the village of Khashamir to celebrate a wedding.

“Were it not for the help of Germany and Ramstein, men like my brother-in-law and nephew might still be alive today,” said Faisal bin Ali Jaber, one of the surviving relatives behind the suit. “It is quite simple: Without Germany, US drones would not fly.”

But the German judiciary has rebuffed such civil suits – most recently in late April, when a court in Cologne rejected pleas about a drone strike that killed two people in Somalia, including a herdsman who was not targeted.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has played dumb about drone-related operations in her country. "The German government claims to know nothing at all," Bundestag member Ströbele said. "Either this is a lie, or the government does not want to know."

The general secretary of the Berlin-based European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, Wolfgang Kaleck, sums up the German government's strategy as "See nothing, hear nothing, say nothing." He charges that "Germany is making itself complicit in the deaths of civilians as part of the U.S. drone war."

Anger Over Spying

After an uproar over U.S. National Security Agency spying in Germany caused the Bundestag to set up a special committee of inquiry two years ago, it became clear that surveillance issues are intertwined with Ramstein's role in a drone program that relies on cell-phone numbers to find targets.

The Green Party's representative on the eight-member committee, Konstantin von Notz, sounded both pragmatic and idealistic when I interviewed him this spring at a Berlin cafe. "We assume that there is a close connection between surveillance and Ramstein," he said, "as data collected and shared by German and U.S. intelligence services already led to drone killings coordinated via Ramstein."

Left Party co-chair Wagenknecht was emphatic about the BND, Germany's intelligence agency. "The BND delivers phone numbers of possible drone targets to the NSA and other agencies," she told *The Nation*. "The BND and our foreign minister bear part of the blame. They do not only tolerate war crimes, they assist them."

The United States now has 174 military bases operating inside Germany, more than in any other country. (Japan is second, with 113.) The military presence casts a shadow over German democracy, says historian Josef Foscemoth, a professor at the University of Freiburg.

"As long as there are Allied troops or military bases and facilities on German soil," he wrote in a 2014 article, "there will be Allied surveillance measures carried out on and from German soil, which means, in particular, American surveillance."

For surveillance and an array of other spooky purposes, the U.S. government created what would become the BND at the end of World War II. "We grew it carefully," a retired senior Defense Intelligence Agency official, W. Patrick Lang, said in an interview. "They've always cooperated with us, completely and totally."

Intelligence ties between the two governments remain tightly knotted. “When it comes to the secret services,” Professor Foschepoth told a public forum in Berlin last summer, “there are some old legal foundations where the federal [German] government follows the American interests more than the interests of their own citizens.”

Extending such talk to depict the current U.S. military presence as bad for democracy in Germany is a third rail in German politics. When Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg quoted from Foschepoth’s article at the Berlin forum – and pointedly asked, “Why are American troops here still? Why the bases?” – the panelist from the Green Party, von Notz, vehemently objected to going there.

“I wouldn’t open the discussion or have in the background that this is still an occupation problem or something,” he said. “It’s not a problem of troops somewhere – it’s a problem of lacking democracy, state of law, controlling our secret services today.”

Nine months later, talking with him at Café Einstein on Berlin’s Kurfürstenstrasse, I asked von Notz why he’d pushed back so heatedly against the idea that U.S. military bases are constraining German democracy.

“Germany needs to take full responsibility of what is going on on its territory,” he responded. “The German government can no longer hide behind a U.S.-German relation allegedly characterized by the post-World War II occupation. Germany strictly has to ensure that the U.S. intelligence services comply with the law without ignoring the illegal actions of its own Federal Intelligence Service [the BND].”

Furtive War in Africa

Whatever the state of its democracy, Germany is continuing to enable America’s furtive warfare in Africa. Ramstein’s many roles include serving as home to U.S. Air Forces Africa, where a press officer gave me a handout describing the continent as “key to addressing transnational violent extremist threats.” The military orders come from the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) headquarters in Stuttgart, a two-hour drive from Ramstein.

At first, AFRICOM – which calls itself “a full-spectrum combatant command” – was to be a short-term guest in southwest Germany, some 800 miles from Africa’s closest shores. A State Department cable, marked “Secret” and dated Aug. 1, 2008, said that “no decision has been made on a permanent AFRICOM headquarters location.”

Two months later, just as AFRICOM was going into full-fledged operation, a

confidential cable from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin reported that “the German government strongly supported the US decision to temporarily base” AFRICOM in Germany.

Yet at the outset, as U.S. diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks show, tensions existed with the host country. Germany balked at extending blanket legal immunity under the NATO Status of Forces Agreement to every American civilian employee at the new AFRICOM facility, and the dispute applied to “all US military commands in Germany.”

While the two governments negotiated behind the scenes into late 2008 (one confidential cable from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin complained about the German Foreign Office’s “unhelpful positions”), AFRICOM made itself at home in Stuttgart.

Nearly eight years later, the “temporary” headquarters for AFRICOM shows no sign of budging. “AFRICOM will stay permanent in Stuttgart if Germany won’t protest against it,” said the Green Party’s Ströbele, who has been on the Bundestag’s intelligence committee for almost 20 years.

He told *The Nation*: “We do not know enough about the AFRICOM facility. Nevertheless there is the assumption that this facility is used to organize and to lead U.S. combat missions in Africa. Because of this reason no country in Africa wanted to have this facility.”

Whatever political hazards might lurk for AFRICOM in Germany, the U.S. government finds those risks preferable to headquartering its Africa Command in Africa. And there are more and more interventions to sweep under rugs.

“A network of American drone outposts” now “stretches across east and west Africa,” reports the Center for the Study of the Drone, which is based at Bard College. One of the new locations is northern Cameroon, where a base for Gray Eagle drones (capable of dropping bombs and launching Hellfire missiles) recently went into full operation, accompanied by 300 U.S. troops, including special-operations forces.

In late winter *The New York Times* reported that the United States “is about to break ground on a new \$50 million drone base in Agadez, Niger, that will allow Reaper surveillance aircraft to fly hundreds of miles closer to southern Libya.”

In March the Pentagon triumphantly announced that drones teamed up with manned jets to kill “more than 150 terrorist fighters” at an al-Shabab training camp in Somalia.

As drone attacks have widened, they’ve become a growing provocation to a vocal

minority of German lawmakers. “We deeply regret Germany’s loss of sovereignty, but the government keeps on acting cowardly,” said Sevim Dagdelen, the Left Party’s leader on foreign affairs.

Another member of the party in the Bundestag, Andrej Hunko, told me that “AFRICOM in Stuttgart and the Air Operation Center in Ramstein are very important hubs for drone strikes led by the U.S. military” – but “it is very difficult for German lawmakers to control this issue.”

Hunke and colleagues filed more than a dozen requests for explanation of drone-related policy from the German government, but he says “the answers were always dodgy.”

The Merkel government deflects formal queries about Ramstein and AFRICOM by claiming to have no reliable information – a stance abetted by the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), now in its third year of serving as a big junior partner to Merkel’s right-leaning Christian Democratic Union. While Left Party legislators and some in the Green Party denounce the stonewalling, they have scant leverage; the two parties combined are just one-fifth of the Bundestag.

Merkel’s stone wall is strengthened by the fact that some Green Party leaders have no problem with U.S. bases. (Citing the very left-wing pasts of several key figures in today’s party, one peace activist near Ramstein tartly remarked that “the Green Party changed from red to green to olive green.”)

In the affluent state of Baden-Württemberg, home to AFRICOM headquarters, the state’s Green minister-president Winfried Kretschmann is a military booster. Likewise, the drone program has nothing to fear from Fritz Kuhn, mayor of Stuttgart, the largest city in Germany with a Green mayor. Kuhn declined to answer any of the questions that I submitted in writing about his views on AFRICOM and its operations in his city. “Mayor Kuhn wants to waive the interview,” a spokesman said.

More than publicly acknowledged, the economic benefits of hosting AFRICOM’s headquarters were major factors in the German government’s decision to allow it to open in the first place, a member of the Bundestag told me.

With the U.S. military footprint shrinking in the country, Germany’s political establishment saw the chance to welcome AFRICOM as very good news. Today, AFRICOM says that 1,500 U.S. military and civilian personnel are stationed at its Kelley Barracks command center in Stuttgart.

Ready for World War Three

“Ramstein is a preparation center for the next world war,” Wolfgang Jung said as

we neared the base. War has overshadowed his entire life. Jung was born in 1938, and his childhood memories are vivid with fear and the destruction that came with bombs (from both sides).

He lost two schoolmates. His father ended up on the Russian front and died in a POW camp just after the war's end. As a teenager, Jung saw Ramstein open, and in the decades since then he has become a dogged researcher. The base is not just about drones, he stressed. Far from it.

The entire region is brandishing huge arsenals. Ten miles from Ramstein, the Miesau Army Depot is the U.S. military's biggest storage area for ammunition outside the United States. In late February the depot received what *Stars and Stripes* reported as "the largest Europe-bound ammo shipment in 10 years" – more than 5,000 tons of U.S. Army ammunition that arrived while the Pentagon was "ramping up missions on the Continent, particularly along NATO's eastern flank, in response to concerns about a more aggressive Russia."

In many ways, this heavily militarized stretch of Germany is now a ground-zero powder keg. The consolidated Allied Air Command, "responsible for all Air and Space matters within NATO," has been at the Ramstein base since 2013.

The command includes a center for missile defense, the nexus of the latest U.S. scenario for a missile shield – which the Kremlin views as a threatening system that would make a first strike against Russia more tempting and more likely. Interviewed by the German newspaper *Bild* in January, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he saw "striving for an absolute triumph in the American missile defense plans."

Such matters preoccupy Jung and his wife Felicitas Strieffler, also a lifelong resident of the area. She spoke of Ramstein as a grave menace to the world and a blight on the region. Locals dread sunny days, she said, because roaring warplanes take to cloudless skies for training maneuvers.

On a hillside, after climbing a 60-foot tower – a red sandstone monument built in 1900 to honor Bismarck – we looked out over a panorama dominated by Ramstein's runways, hangars, and aircraft. Strieffler talked about a dream she keeps having: The base will be closed and, after the chemical pollutants are removed, it will become a lake where people can go boating and enjoy the beauties of nature.

Such hopes might seem unrealistic, but a growing number of activists in Germany are working to end Ramstein's drone role and eventually close the base. On June 11, several thousand protesters gathered in the rain to form a "human chain" that stretched for more than five miles near the Ramstein perimeter.

At the Stopp Ramstein Kampagne office in Berlin, a 37-year-old former history student, Pascal Luig, exuded commitment and calm as he told me that “the goal should be the closing of the whole air base.” He added, “Without Ramstein, no [U.S.] war in the Middle East would be possible.”

With no hope of persuading the U.S. government to shut down Ramstein and its other bases in his country, Luig wants a movement strong enough to compel the German government to evict them.

The Pentagon top brass can't be happy about the publicity in Germany connecting Ramstein to the drone war. “They like to keep these things low key, just because there are points of vulnerability,” former drone technician Cian Westmoreland said, noting that “the military is all about redundancies.”

In fact, even while Ramstein's Air and Space Operations Center was going into action nearly five years ago, a similar facility was on the drawing boards for the Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily. According to some sources, the ultimate goal is to replace Ramstein with Sigonella as the main site for relay of drone signals. (Replying to my inquiry, an Air Force spokesman at Ramstein, Maj. Frank Hartnett, wrote in an e-mail: “There are currently no plans to relocate the center's activities.” He did not respond to follow-up questions.)

An investigative journalist working for the Italian newsmagazine *L'Espresso*, Stefania Maurizi, told me in mid-spring that progress toward such a center at Sigonella remained at a snail's pace. But on June 21, she reported that an Italian engineering firm had just won a contract for a building similar to Ramstein's relay center. Construction at Sigonella could be completed by 2018.

As part of the militarization process in Italy – “the Pentagon has turned the Italian peninsula into a launching pad for future wars in Africa, the Middle East and beyond,” author David Vine observes – Sigonella already has some infrastructure for satellite communication. Another asset is that Italy is even more deferential to the American military than Germany is.

“Italy has become the launching pad for the U.S. wars, and in particular for the drone wars, without any public debate,” Maurizi says. “Our responsibilities are huge and the Italian public is kept in the dark.”

And when the Pentagon decides to build big in Italy, it doesn't hurt the momentum that – as Vine documents in his 2015 book *Base Nation* – the lucrative contracts are routinely signed with Italian construction firms controlled by the Mafia.

In any event, no one can doubt that the Defense Department has become utterly enthralled with drones, officially dubbed Remotely Piloted Aircraft.

“Our RPA enterprise” is now “flying combat missions around the globe,” the general running the Air Combat Command, Herbert Carlisle, testified to a Senate subcommittee in March. There was no mistaking his zeal to further expand drone missions, mangled syntax notwithstanding: “They are arming decision makers with intelligence, our warfighters with targets, and our enemies with fear, anxiety and ultimately their timely end.”

General Carlisle said the U.S. military is now flying five times as many drone sorties as a decade ago – a boost that “exemplifies the furious pace at which we have expanded our operations and enterprise.” But he warned that “an insatiable demand for RPA forces has stretched the community thin, especially our Airmen performing the mission.”

Today, almost 8,000 Air Force personnel are “solely dedicated” to Predator and Reaper drone missions. “Of the 15 bases with RPA units,” Carlisle said, “13 of them have a combat mission. This mission is of such value that we plan on consistent increases in aircraft, personnel and results.”

Several weeks after his testimony, Reuters – citing “previously unreported US Air Force data” – revealed that “drones fired more weapons than conventional warplanes for the first time in Afghanistan last year and the ratio is rising.”

Some in-house government appraisals have concluded that the drone war fails because it creates more enemies than it kills. But the “war on terror” is anything but a failure for many corporations or the individuals who spin through the revolving doors of the military-industrial complex.

As a critical node in the Pentagon’s global “intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance” (ISR) system, Ramstein is integral to ongoing boondoggles for contractors like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Booz Allen Hamilton, and General Dynamics. The bottomless pit for taxpayers is a bottomless well for firms catering to the Air Force, with its jargon-larded pursuit of “a distributed ISR operation capable of providing world-wide, near-real-time simultaneous intelligence to multiple theaters of operation through ... robust reachback communications architectures.”

Looking back at the milieu of his work in the drone program, Westmoreland has concluded that “it’s more or less a for-profit venture. When you get out of the military, you expect to get a job in the defense sector, an executive position. And really it’s about racking up as many awards and decorations as you possibly can.”

At the top ranks, Westmoreland sees a conflict of interest: “They have an incentive to keep wars going.” For the military’s leadership, the available

dividends are quite large. For instance, former NSA and CIA director Gen. Michael Hayden – an outspoken advocate of the drone program – received \$240,125 last year as a member of the board at Motorola Solutions. That company has an investment in CyPhy Works, a major developer of drones.

Endless war propels an endless gravy train.

A Human Discourse

Like the other drone whistleblowers interviewed for this article, former tech sergeant Lisa Ling was careful not to reveal any classified information. But when we met at a coffee shop in California, what she said at the outset could be heard as subversive of the U.S. drone program: “I would like to see humanity brought into the political discourse.”

Her two decades in the military included several years of work on assimilating Air National Guard personnel into the drone program. Now she expresses remorse for taking part in a program where “no one person has responsibility.”

The new documentary film *National Bird* includes these words from Ling: “We are in the United States of America and we are participating in an overseas war, a war overseas, and we have no connection to it other than wires and keyboards. Now, if that doesn’t scare the crap out of you, it does out of me. Because if that’s the only connection, why stop?”

After leaving the Air Force, Ling went on a humanitarian mission to Afghanistan, planting trees and distributing seeds to people she’d previously seen only as indistinct pixels. The drone war haunts her. Ling asks how we would feel if armed drones kept hovering in the sky above our own communities, positioned to kill at any moment.

In the Little America where the Ramstein Air Base is the crown military jewel, such questions go unasked. For that matter, we rarely hear them in Big America. Yet those questions must be asked, or the forever war will be.

Norman Solomon is a journalist with ExposeFacts.org, a project of the Institute for Public Accuracy; the author of *War Made Easy*; and a co-founder of RootsAction.org. *The Whistleblower & Source Protection Program at ExposeFacts provides legal representation for the former drone operators quoted in this article, which first appeared in The Nation magazine at <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-most-important-us-air-force-base-youve-never-heard-of/>. [Re-posted with the author’s permission.]*

Iraq War, an Unaccountable Crime

Britain's Chilcot report recalled the Iraq War lies that justified an aggressive war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, but this international crime has largely been sloughed off with almost no accountability, as Eric S. Margolis noted.

By Eric S. Margolis

Last week's Chilcot report on Britain's role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq was as polite and guarded as a proper English tea party. No direct accusations, no talk of war crimes by then Prime Minister Tony Blair or his guiding light, President George W. Bush. But still pretty damning.

Such government reports and commissions, as was wittily noted in the delightful program "Yes, Prime Minister," are designed to obscure rather than reveal the truth and bury awkward facts in mountains of paper. And beneath mountains of lies.

The biggest lie on both sides of the Atlantic was that the invasion and destruction of Iraq was the result of "faulty intelligence." The Bush and Blair camps and the U.S. and British media keep pushing this absurd line.

This writer, who had covered Iraq since 1976, was one of the first to assert that Baghdad had no so-called weapons of mass destruction, and no means of delivering them even if it did. For this I was dropped and black-listed by the leading U.S. TV cable news network and leading U.S. newspapers.

I had no love for the brutal Saddam Hussein, whose secret police threatened to hang me as a spy. But I could not abide the intense war propaganda coming from Washington and London, served up by the servile, mendacious U.S. and British media. The planned invasion of Iraq was not about nuclear weapons or democracy, as Bush claimed.

Two powerful factions in Washington were beating the war drums: ardently pro-Israel neoconservatives who yearned to see an enemy of Israel destroyed, and a cabal of conservative oil men and imperialists around Vice President Dick Cheney who sought to grab Iraq's huge oil reserves at a time they believed oil was running out. They engineered the Iraq War, as blatant and illegal an aggression as Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939.

Britain's smarmy Tony Blair tagged along with the war boosters in hopes that the U.K. could pick up the crumbs from the invasion and reassert its former economic and political power in the Arab world. Blair had long been a favorite of British

neoconservatives. The silver-tongued Blair became point man for the war in preference to the tongue-twisted, stumbling George Bush. But the real warlord was VP Dick Cheney.

There was no “flawed intelligence.” There were intelligence agencies bullied into reporting a fake narrative to suit their political masters. And a lot of fake reports concocted by our Mideast allies like Israel and Kuwait.

After the even mild Chilcot report, Blair’s reputation is in tatters, as it should be. How such an intelligent, worldly man could have allowed himself to be led around by the doltish, swaggering Bush is hard to fathom.

Europe’s leaders and Canada refused to join the Anglo-American aggression. France, which warned Bush of the disaster he would inflict, was slandered and smeared by U.S. Republicans as “cheese-eating surrender monkeys.” In the event, the real monkeys were the Bush and Blair governments.

Saddam Hussain, a former U.S. ally, was deposed and lynched. Iraq, the most advanced Arab nation, was almost totally destroyed. Up to one million Iraqis may have been killed, though the Chilcot report claimed only a risible 150,000.

As Saddam had predicted, the Bush-Blair invasion opened the gates of hell, and out came Al Qaeda and then ISIS. The U.S. and British media, supposedly the bulwark of democracy, rolled over and became an organ of government war propaganda. Blair had the august BBC purged for failing to fully support his drive for war. BBC has never recovered.

Interestingly, last week’s news of the Chilcot investigation was buried deep inside The New York Times on Thursday. The Times was a key partisan of the war. So too the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, and the big TV networks. Without their shameful connivance, the Iraq War might not have happened.

Bush and Blair have the deaths of nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers on their heads, the devastation of Iraq, our \$1 trillion war, the ever-expanding mess in the Mideast, and the violence what we wrongly blame on “terrorism” and so-called “radical Islam.”

The men and women responsible for this biggest disaster in our era should be brought to account. As long as Bush and Blair swan around and collect speaking fees, we have no right to lecture other nations, including Russia and China, on how to run a democracy or rule of law. Bush and Blair should be facing trial for war crime at the Hague Court.

Eric S. Margolis was a contributing editor to the Toronto Sun chain of newspapers, writing mainly about the Middle East, South Asia and Islam. He

contributes to the Huffington Post and appears frequently on Canadian television broadcasts. Copyright Eric S. Margolis 2016. [Re-posted with the author's permission.]

NATO Reaffirms Its Bogus Russia Narrative

Exclusive: President Obama and NATO leaders signed on to the false narrative of a minding-its-own-business West getting sucker-punched by a bunch of Russian meanies, a storyline that suggests insanity or lies, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's unnerving to realize that the NATO alliance – bristling with an unprecedented array of weapons including a vast nuclear arsenal – has lost its collective mind. Perhaps it's more reassuring to think that NATO simply feels compelled to publicly embrace its deceptive "strategic communications" so gullible Western citizens will be kept believing its lies are truth.

But here were the leaders of major Western "democracies" lining up to endorse a Warsaw Summit Communiqué condemning "Russia's aggressive actions" while knowing that these claims were unsupported by their own intelligence agencies.

The leaders – at least the key ones – know that there is no credible intelligence that Russian President Vladimir Putin provoked the Ukraine crisis in 2014 or that he has any plans to invade the Baltic states, despite the fact that nearly every "important person" in Official Washington and other Western capitals declares the opposite of this to be reality.

But there have been a few moments when the truth has surfaced. For instance, in the days leading up to the just-completed NATO summit in Warsaw, General Petr Pavel, chairman of the NATO Military Committee, divulged that the deployment of NATO military battalions in the Baltic states was a political, rather than military, act.

"It is not the aim of NATO to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing," Pavel told a news conference.

What Pavel blurted out was what I have been told by intelligence sources over the past two-plus years – that the endless drumbeat of Western media reports about "Russian aggression" results from a clever demonization campaign against

Putin and a classic Washington “group think” rather than from a careful intelligence analysis.

Ironically, however, just days after the release of the British Chilcot report documenting how a similar propaganda campaign led the world into the disastrous Iraq War – with its deadly consequences still reverberating through a destabilized Mideast and into an unnerved Europe – NATO reenacts the basic failure of that earlier catastrophe, except now upping the ante into a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

The Warsaw communiqué – signed by leaders including President Barack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron – ignores the reality of what happened in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 and thus generates an inside-out narrative.

Instead of reprising the West’s vacuous propaganda themes, Obama and the other leaders could have done something novel and told the truth, but that apparently is outside their operating capabilities. So they all signed on to the dangerous lie.

What Really Happened

The real narrative based on actual facts would have acknowledged that it was the West, not Russia, that instigated the Ukraine crisis by engineering the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich and the imposition of a new Western-oriented regime hostile to Moscow and Ukraine’s ethnic Russians.

In late 2013, it was the European Union that was pushing an economic association agreement with Ukraine, which included the International Monetary Fund’s demands for imposing harsh austerity on Ukraine’s already suffering population. Political and propaganda support for the E.U. plan was financed, in part, by the U.S. government through such agencies as the National Endowment for Democracy and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

When Yanukovich recoiled at the IMF’s terms and opted for a more generous \$15 billion aid package from Putin, the U.S. government threw its public support behind mass demonstrations aimed at overthrowing Yanukovich and replacing him with a new regime that would sign the E.U. agreement and accept the IMF’s demands.

As the crisis deepened in early 2014, Putin was focused on the Sochi Winter Olympics, particularly the threat of terrorist attacks on the games. No evidence has been presented that Putin was secretly trying to foment the Ukraine crisis. Indeed, all the evidence is that Putin was trying to protect the status quo, support the elected president and avert a worse crisis.

It would be insane to suggest that Putin somehow orchestrated the E.U.'s destabilizing attempt to pull Ukraine into the association agreement, that he then stage-managed the anti-Yanukovich violence of the Maidan protests, that he collaborated with neo-Nazi and other ultra-nationalist militias to kill Ukrainian police and chase Yanukovich from Kiev, and that he then arranged for Yanukovich to be replaced by a wildly anti-Russian regime – all while pretending to do the opposite of all these things.

In the real world, the narrative was quite different: Moscow supported Yanukovich's efforts to reach a political compromise, including a European-brokered agreement for early elections and reduced presidential powers. Yet, despite those concessions, neo-Nazi militias surged to the front of the U.S.-backed protests on Feb. 22, 2014, forcing Yanukovich and many of his officials to run for their lives. The U.S. State Department quickly recognized the coup regime as "legitimate" as did other NATO allies.

On a personal note, I am sometimes criticized by conspiracy theorists for not accepting their fact-free claims about nefarious schemes supposedly dreamed up by U.S. officials, but frankly as baseless as some of those wacky stories can be, they sound sensible when compared with the West's loony conspiracy theory about Putin choreographing the Ukraine coup.

Yet, that baseless conspiracy theory roped in supposedly serious thinkers, such as New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, who conjured up the notion that Putin stirred up this trouble so he could pull off a land grab and/or distract Russians from their economic problems.

"Delusions of easy winnings still happen," Krugman wrote in a 2014 [column](#). "It's only a guess, but it seems likely that Vladimir Putin thought that he could overthrow Ukraine's government, or at least seize a large chunk of its territory, on the cheap, a bit of deniable aid to the rebels, and it would fall into his lap. ...

"Recently Justin Fox of the Harvard Business Review [suggested](#) that the roots of the Ukraine crisis may lie in the faltering performance of the Russian economy. As he noted, Mr. Putin's hold on power partly reflects a long run of rapid economic growth. But Russian growth has been sputtering, and you could argue that the Putin regime needed a distraction."

Midwifing This Thing

Or, rather than "a guess," Krugman could have looked at the actual facts, such as the work of neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland conspiring to organize a coup that would put her hand-picked Ukrainians

in charge of Russia's neighbor. Several weeks before the putsch, Nuland was caught plotting the "regime change" in an intercepted phone call with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt.

Regarding who should replace Yanukovich, Nuland's choice was Arseniy "Yats is the guy" Yatsenyuk. The phone call went on to muse about how they could "glue this thing" and "midwife this thing." After the coup was glued or midwived on Feb. 22, 2014, Yatsenyuk emerged as the new prime minister and then shepherded through the IMF austerity plan.

Since the coup regime in Kiev also took provocative steps against the ethnic Russians, such as the parliament voting to ban Russian as an official language and allowing neo-Nazi extremists to slaughter anti-coup protesters, ethnic Russian resistance arose in the east and south. That shouldn't have been much of a surprise since eastern Ukraine had been Yanukovich's political base and stood to lose the most from Ukraine's economic orientation toward Europe and reduced economic ties to Russia.

Yet, instead of recognizing the understandable concerns of the eastern Ukrainians, the Western media portrayed the ethnic Russians as simply Putin's pawns with no minds of their own. The U.S.-backed regime in Kiev launched what was called an "Anti-Terrorist Operation" against them, spearheaded by the neo-Nazi militias.

In Crimea – another area heavily populated with ethnic Russians and with a long history of association with Russia – voters opted by 96 percent in a referendum to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a process supported by Russian troops stationed in Crimea under a prior agreement with Ukraine's government.

There was no Russian "invasion," as The New York Times and other mainstream U.S. news outlets claimed. The Russian troops were already in Crimea assigned to Russia's historic Black Sea naval base at Sevastopol. Putin agreed to Crimea's annexation partly out of fear that the naval base would otherwise fall into NATO's hands and pose a strategic threat to Russia.

But the key point regarding the crazy Western conspiracy theory about Putin provoking the crisis so he could seize territory or distract Russians from economic troubles is that Putin only annexed Crimea because of the ouster of Yanukovich and the installation of a Russia-hating regime in Kiev. If Yanukovich had not been overthrown, there is no reason to think that Putin would have done anything regarding Crimea or Ukraine.

Yet, once the false narrative got rolling, there was no stopping it. The New York Times, The Washington Post and other leading Western publications played

the same role that they did during the run-up to the Iraq invasion, accepting the U.S. government's propaganda as fact and marginalizing the few independent journalists who dared go against the grain.

Though Obama, Merkel and other key leaders know how deceptive the Western propaganda has been, they have become captives to their governments' own lies. For them to deviate substantially from the Official Story would open them to harsh criticism from the powerful neoconservatives and their allied media outlets.

Even a slight contradiction to NATO's "strategic communications" brought down harsh criticism on German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier after he said: "What we shouldn't do now is inflame the situation further through saber-rattling and warmongering. ... Whoever believes that a symbolic tank parade on the alliance's eastern border will bring security is mistaken."

Excoriating Russia

So, at the Warsaw conference, the false NATO narrative had to be reaffirmed – and it was. The communiqué declared, "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. ...

"Russia's destabilising actions and policies include: the ongoing illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, which we do not and will not recognise and which we call on Russia to reverse; the violation of sovereign borders by force; the deliberate destabilisation of eastern Ukraine; large-scale snap exercises contrary to the spirit of the Vienna Document, and provocative military activities near NATO borders, including in the Baltic and Black Sea regions and the Eastern Mediterranean; its irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric, military concept and underlying posture; and its repeated violations of NATO Allied airspace.

"In addition, Russia's military intervention, significant military presence and support for the regime in Syria, and its use of its military presence in the Black Sea to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean have posed further risks and challenges for the security of Allies and others."

In the up-is-down world that NATO and other Western agencies now inhabit, Russia's military maneuvers within its own borders in reaction to NATO maneuvers along Russia's borders are "provocative." So, too, is Russia's support for the

internationally recognized government of Syria, which is under attack from Islamic terrorists and other armed rebels supported by the West's Mideast allies, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and NATO member Turkey.

In other words, it is entirely all right for NATO and its members to invade countries at will, including Iraq, Libya and Syria, and subvert others as happened in Ukraine and is still happening in Syria. But it is impermissible for any government outside of NATO to respond or even defend itself. To do so amounts to a provocation against NATO – and such hypocrisy is accepted by the West's mainstream news media as the way that the world was meant to be.

And those of us who dare point out the lies and double standards must be “Moscow stooges,” just as those of us who dared question the Iraq WMD tales were dismissed as “Saddam apologists” in 2003.

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](#)).

Chicago Police Adopt Israeli Tactics

From the Archive: Recent cases of white police killing unarmed black men raise concern that some U.S. police are applying counter-terrorism tactics, including some learned at Israeli academies, retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce wrote in 2015.

By Todd E. Pierce (Originally published on Dec. 11, 2015)

After more than a year of stonewalling and what some might call obstructing justice, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel issued an apology for the horrific execution of Laquan McDonald by Chicago police officer Jason van Dyke. Laquan McDonald was the black 17-year-old who was shot 16 times by the police officer on Oct. 20, 2014. The [video](#) showing the shooting was only released by Chicago officials when they were ordered to do so by a judge in late November 2015.

But apology or not, the underlying substantive issue is that the summary execution of McDonald was the sort of atrocity that one would expect to see in what the U.S. once called “police states.” In fact, one can imagine a death squad execution in El Salvador in the 1980s looking very similar on video to McDonald's slaying.

“Police state” is a term which has fallen into disuse since 9/11 with the adoption of so many similar practices by the so-called “democracies” in their domestic policies. The term generally was applied to Fascist or Communist governments and described a country where the police and the military exercised martial law over citizens or military occupation powers that uses military force to control a civilian population.

Sometimes these arbitrary powers were enforced by summary executions, depending on how much the authorities could get away with in their “extreme measures.” This was the practice in countries such as Nazi Germany; Pinochet’s Chile; El Salvador and Guatemala during the Cold War; to a lesser degree, apartheid South Africa; and military occupied territories such as Tibet, Israeli-occupied Palestine, and Eastern Europe under the Soviet Union.

But Chicago isn’t under martial law or military occupation, is it? Nor is it an apartheid state, with apartheid enforced by domestic martial law and military force, is it? To a normal civilian-oriented mind, one would think it is not under military occupation or martial law.

Seeking Israeli Training

Yet, under Mayor Emanuel, a former Israeli Defense Force (IDF) volunteer, and Garry McCarthy, the now former Chicago Police Superintendent (Emanuel fired him Dec. 1, 2015), it seems that parts of Chicago were treated as if they were occupied territory under police or paramilitary rule.

That is, under arbitrary martial law, just like the repressive martial law regime of the IDF in the occupied territory of Palestine. Martial law or occupation law is arbitrary as it is not law, but is the manifestation of the occupying military commander’s “will.”

How could this be in the civilian government of Chicago? In part, because Police Superintendent McCarthy and the City of Chicago sought out and received training by Israeli occupation forces in “counter-terrorism” policing, that is, “pacifying” a population through aggressive intelligence gathering and the application of military force. Counter-insurgency is the term used for when this doctrine is applied by military forces.

This collaboration between Israel and U.S. police agencies, including Chicago, emerged after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. Since then, by one count, at least 300 high-ranking sheriffs and police from cities both large and small have received counter-terrorism training in Israel. For instance, in January 2003, 33 senior U.S. law enforcement officials from Chicago and other major American cities flew to Israel for sessions on

“Law Enforcement in the Era of Global Terror.”

[One of the Israeli-trained police officials was Dallas Police Chief David Brown, who oversaw the police response to last Friday’s killing of five police officers and the decision to use a remote-controlled bomb to kill the shooting suspect.]

In 2009, Israel’s Midwest Consulate General co-sponsored “an intensive seminar” in Israel for senior Chicago police officials “on intelligence-led policing techniques.”

Chicago Police Superintendent McCarthy was a key participant in this Israeli training. The Israel Trade & Economic Office of the U.S. Midwest Region invited police officials to “Join Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy & the Midwest Delegation to the Israel Homeland Security International Conference 2012, and be a part of an international gathering of public security officials and private technology companies.”

In 2012, these “security officials” got to “experience demonstrations of breakthrough technologies from Israel” and “tour security infrastructure at the Old City of Jerusalem,” a city under Israeli military occupation. It wasn’t made clear if the “demonstrations of breakthrough technologies from Israel” would extend to live subjects in occupied Jerusalem.

In November 2014, Chicago’s McCarthy “led a delegation of senior law enforcement officials to Israel” as part of a training mission “to engage directly with their Israeli counterparts to discuss best practices, unique strategies, and new technologies in a range of law enforcement areas,” according to the same Israeli trade office.

“The visit also aimed to build a foundation for enhanced collaboration between the Chicago Police Department and the State of Israel.” Included in the delegation was the Executive Director of Cook County’s Homeland Security and Emergency Management Office, the Chief of Staff of the Chicago Police Department, as well as police officials from other large American cities. [The itinerary of the delegation is explained more here.]

In other words, over more than a decade, senior Chicago police officials have been studying Israel’s militarized police practices for how best to maintain a repressive military control over an occupied population living under permanent, strict martial, or occupation, law.

An Occupation Mentality

Why this matters is that Israel doesn’t have a domestic civilian policing model

but instead applies a counter-insurgency policing model intended for a population under military occupation, or otherwise considered as hostile under martial law.

This policing model is being sold by Israel's government to gullible or authoritarian-leaning U.S. police officials as a legitimate domestic policing model when, in fact, it is a military model of the sort used by militaristic, authoritarian regimes, customarily referred to as "fascist."

What many people fail to understand about Israel and the IDF is that since 1967, now going on half a century, the Palestinian civilians who "fell into [Israeli] hands" when the IDF conquered Palestinian territory have been kept in strict and harsh military captivity of the sort the U.S. condemned when the former Soviet Union did the same to its captive peoples.

This pattern continues even though the Israeli occupation has been repeatedly declared illegal under international law. Chicago police being trained by Israeli security police and occupation forces is analogous to, and merits the same condemnation as, a U.S. city sending its officials to receive "police" training from Soviet security police who maintained military occupation of Eastern Europe in the 1950s-1960s. Or to North Korea today.

But in this case, there is also the issue of colluding with Israeli occupation authorities in an illegal occupation. These U.S. police officials are put in what should be the awkward position of aiding and abetting illegality.

Of course, one killing by a Chicago police officer, though similar to some of the killings by the IDF of civilians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and far below the scale of killing of the periodic "mowing the grass" that Israel undertakes in Gaza every couple of years, does not mean that illegal military occupation tactics are being practiced in Chicago. Or does it?

Secret Interrogations

In isolation, no. But while Chicago police have always had the reputation of being simply a rival gang to the many other gangs in Chicago's history, under Rahm Emanuel's regime, it has come to resemble an occupying military force down to a "secret interrogation facility," as reported by Britain's Guardian newspaper in August 2015: "At least 3,500 Americans have been detained inside a Chicago police warehouse described by some of its arrestees as a secretive interrogation facility, newly uncovered records reveal."

The Chicago Police Department maintained that the warehouse was not a secret facility "so much as an undercover police base operating in plain sight." But, as the Guardian reported, people were shackled and held for hours or even

days without access to attorneys in violation of the U.S. Constitution, but the sort of detention permitted of Palestinians under IDF occupation.

A Chicago civil rights activist said he was abducted by masked officers, shackled and held on false charges, "with no food, no water, no access to the outside world" at the behest of "covert operations." In other words, he simply disappeared.

Another former "detainee," Charles Jones, was told in the interrogation room that he would be allowed a phone call once booked and processed. But he said his requests for legal counsel were repeatedly denied during the six-to-eight hours he was held at Homan Square.

"The only reason you're brought to Homan and Fillmore is to extract information," Jones said, referring to the cross streets of the facility.

"The police probably feel they need those covert operations because that's the only way to get the intel they need instead of doing the good work the hard work. . . . It's easy to just go grab someone, throw 'em somewhere no food, no water, no access to the outside world, intimidating and threatening 'em," he said.

That is similar to intelligence-driven techniques used in counter-insurgency warfare. Several ex-Homan Square detainees told the Guardian that their detentions "were out of proportion to their alleged crimes, if any but calibrated to pressure them into becoming informants." This, in fact, is just like what U.S. forces did in occupied Iraq and Israeli forces do in Occupied Palestine. Indeed, that is what occupying armies do.

According to The Guardian, while the police data is incomplete, the disclosures "suggest an intensification of Homan Square usage under Emanuel. Approximately 70% of the Homan Square detentions the Chicago police acknowledge thus far have occurred under the current mayor."

At the time of The Guardian article, then-Police Superintendent McCarthy was attending a meeting on violence and policing in Washington and was unavailable for comment.

After The Guardian's initial Homan Square exposé in February 2015, protests were held and local politicians called for investigations. But Rahm Emanuel was not among the concerned officials even though he was running for re-election in part on a platform of police reform. Instead, Emanuel took ownership of the unorthodox operation and "defended his police," claiming, "we follow all the rules" at Homan Square and calling the reporting "not true."

Israeli Comparisons

To Mayor Emanuel and former Superintendent McCarthy, it seemed, affluent sections of Chicago's North Side are to Chicago's South and West sides what Tel Aviv is to Occupied Palestine's Jerusalem and Ramallah.

Emanuel and McCarthy seemed to have imported the Israeli military occupation ideology that just as Palestine must be kept "under the heavy heel of Israeli military occupation," so must Chicago's poorer areas be kept under the heavy heel of the Chicago police, acting as a paramilitary occupation force.

That Emanuel bears responsibility for all that has taken place in regard to the McDonald execution is shown in his role in making the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA), the civilian agency that investigates allegations of excessive force by police, irrelevant.

The Chicago Tribune published an examination that found that of the 409 police shootings since IPRA was created in September 2007, only two allegations against police officers were deemed credible. (Emanuel has been mayor since May 16, 2011.)

In December 2015, in announcing that former federal prosecutor Sharon Fairley would take charge of the IPRA after the resignation of her predecessor, neither Emanuel nor Fairley addressed how IPRA would improve "its woeful track record in investigating shootings," as the Chicago Tribune described it.

Instead, Fairley stated: "the mission of IPRA will remain the same: thorough, fair and timely investigation of police officer misconduct." Absurdly, that seems to be a statement asserting that nothing would change, allowing the police to continue operating with a sense of entitlement as they run roughshod over a population they are supposed to protect.

According to the Chicago Tribune, Chicago police officials under Emanuel stopped participating in meetings with the IPRA to discuss officer shootings, "a change that came with the knowledge of the mayor's office." Will that remain the same?

U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch was asked whether the federal investigation would extend to the mayor's and state's attorney's offices. Notwithstanding Emanuel's alleged role in shutting down police participation with the IPRA, Lynch said the investigation would focus on the Police Department's practices.

That's not all that remarkable when one considers that the U.S. Justice Department and President Barack Obama declared they would take no action on the issue of "war on terror" torture by U.S. government officials involving the CIA and the military. As President Obama's former Chief of Staff, Emanuel seems to

fall under a similar protective shield of impunity.

What is remarkable is that the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus “called for Lynch to expand her probe to include IPRA and the state’s attorney’s office, but it left out the mayor’s office.” That is remarkable because Mayor Emanuel appears to be the person who gave impunity for civil rights violations to Chicago police officers to the degree that they felt legally immune in summarily executing Laquan McDonald.

A Family History

If Mayor Rahm Emanuel seems to have brought a Fascist sensibility to Chicago and the police force, it can be said it’s part of a family tradition. According to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Emanuel “is the son of a Jerusalem-born pediatrician who was a member of the Irgun (Etzel or IZL), a militant Zionist group that operated in Palestine between 1931 and 1948.”

In addition, according to Emanuel’s father, Benjamin, his son “is the namesake of Rahamim, a Lehi combatant who was killed” and was obviously a close friend or seen as a martyr. Both Lehi and the Irgun were terrorist organizations, not only in the eyes of the British and the Arabs in pre-Israel Palestine, but in the eyes of their fellow Jews, whom they also attacked.

Furthermore, the clandestine terror squads considered themselves Fascist organizations, not only in their tactics but in their ideology which had aligned them with Mussolini’s Italy and other inter-war European Fascist parties.

In *The Road to Power: Herut Party in Israel*, author Yonathan Shapiro describes Irgun as the military wing of the Betar Movement. The two groups jointly published a paper, *Die Tat*. Shapiro writes: “Betar activists were swept up by the radical-right nationalism then at its height in Europe.”

This was shown in the Betar press in Poland, where the Yiddish-language Betar-Irgun paper *Die Tat* was sympathetic to radical-right parties. The paper ran a series of articles in late 1938 and early 1939 entitled “The Third Europe,” which Shapiro says “was the overall name given to radical-right movements such as the Nazis in Germany, the Fascists in Italy, the Iron Guard in Romania, and the Franco camp in Spain, and so forth.”

One article in the series explained that Hitler’s attempted putsch in 1923 derailed “the German leadership from its track of havlagah – the same term that Zionist leaders used for their policy of moderation in their dealings with the Arab nationalist movement in Palestine.” The implication was that the Jewish radical right had to do something similar to break the Jewish leaders from moderation in Palestine.

Another *Die Tat* writer who was based in Tel Aviv argued that anti-Semitism wasn't "an integral part of Naziism, which in the final analysis was a version of Fascism," of which he approved. In an editorial entitled, "Hitler and Judaism," a few weeks later, "the paper wrote that it did not reject Hitler's views, not even on the race issue. It only objected to the campaign that 'in practice' he was waging against the Jewish people, and its desire to establish an independent state."

Lessons of Terror

In 1942, Menachem Begin arrived in "Eretz-Israel," as Irgun members referred to Palestine. He was "offered command of the Irgun and leadership of Betar." Begin refused leadership of Betar on the grounds that Ze'ev Jabotinsky, though dead, remained head of Betar, and Jabotinsky as the irreplaceable leader of Betar "came to symbolize the idea of the absolute leader."

Begin, the future founder of Likud and prime minister of Israel, was his "pupil and successor," who shared the view of other Fascist parties that "believed in the principle of the omnipotent leader." These were the Fascist ideas that Rahm Emanuel's father imbibed and celebrated in his youth, and shared with his Lehi friend, Rahamim.

The distinction between the Irgun and Lehi was that the Irgun later called a truce with the British during World War II when it finally became apparent to them that Hitler represented a threat to Zionist interests, whereas Lehi saw Great Britain as much or more of the enemy than Hitler. Lehi continued terrorist attacks against Britain throughout the war.

Whatever the elder Emanuel's political thoughts are today, he seemed to retain his youthful Fascist-style contempt for Arabs as he commented when Rahm was named President Obama's Chief of Staff: "Obviously he'll influence the president to be pro-Israel. Why wouldn't he? What is he, an Arab? He's not going to be mopping floors at the White House," as reported in the New York Times.

None of this is to suggest that Rahm Emanuel shares any of the Fascist ideas of his father's youthful associates in the Irgun or of his father in his youth. But if Rahm Emanuel is going to preside over secret interrogation and detention centers as the Mayor of Chicago and is responsible for a police force learning and using Fascist-style police tactics, people may begin to notice a resemblance to the youthful Benjamin Emanuel and the ideology his Irgun associates.

Emanuel's Style

True to form in some people's eyes after the court-ordered release of the video revealing the murder of Laquan McDonald Mayor Emanuel didn't actually take

responsibility for the cover-up except to acknowledge the obvious with his statement that it “happened on my watch.” He didn’t explain how the murder was swept under the carpet for over a year so, as some allege, it wouldn’t interfere with his reelection.

NPR reported, “Emanuel acknowledged there is an underlying ‘trust problem’ that Chicago needs to address,” and “the city now needs to begin the process of healing and restoring trust and confidence in the police department. ... Emanuel says supervision and leadership in the police department failed, and he promises to address ‘the thin blue line’ and ‘the code of silence,’ in which police officers ignore, deny and cover up the bad actions of a colleague.”

However, as mayor, Emanuel bore ultimate responsibility for “supervision and leadership” of the police department and it wasn’t the “thin blue line” that maintained the “code of silence” for over a year. It was the Mayor’s Office.

Also, with Israel making its counter-insurgency police training a major export to U.S. police forces and with American cities such as Chicago eager to adopt that training, it is little wonder that minorities increasingly feel they are under repressive military-style occupation in their communities. They have good reason to feel that way since the police are getting training from a country that is expert at keeping a conquered people under an open-ended military occupation.

By contrast, the police of Scotland have offered a very different strategy to a delegation of top American police officials by demonstrating “the art of firearm-free policing.” As The New York Times reported, “Most British police officers are unarmed, a distinction particularly pronounced ... in Scotland, where 98 percent of the country’s officers do not carry guns. Rather than escalating a situation with weapons, easing it through talk is an essential policing tool.”

The American police officials appeared dumbfounded by the concept of operating without weapons and pressed their Scottish counterparts with questions about how many Scottish police officers have been wounded or killed in the line of duty.

Bernard Higgins, an assistant chief constable who is Scotland’s use-of-force expert, responded that his officers do take punches often but the last one killed died in 1994 from a stabbing. “There is poverty, crime and a ‘pathological hatred of officers wearing our uniform’ in pockets of Scotland, he said, but constables live where they work and embrace their role as ‘guardians of the community,’ not warriors from a policing subculture,” according to the Times.

Higgins added, “We police from an absolute position of embracing democracy.”

Todd E. Pierce retired as a Major in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps in November 2012. His most recent assignment was defense counsel in the Office of Chief Defense Counsel, Office of Military Commissions. In the course of that assignment, he researched and reviewed the complete records of military commissions held during the Civil War and stored at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Clinton's Disregard of Secrecy Laws

While admitting a "mistake," Hillary Clinton was largely unrepentant about the FBI calling her "extremely careless" in safeguarding national security data, another sign of a troubling double standard, says ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

There is a new poster child for the U.S. government's double standard in dealing with violations of public policy and public trust – former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who will receive no punishment for her wanton disregard of U.S. laws and national security.

Clinton merely received a blistering rebuke from FBI Director James Comey, who charged her with "extremely careless" behavior in using private email servers to send and receive classified information as well as using her personal cell phone in dealing with sensitive materials while traveling outside the United States.

Some of these communications referred to CIA operatives, which is a violation of a 1982 Intelligence Identities Protection Act to protect those individuals working overseas under cover.

A former CIA officer, John Kiriakou, received a 30-month jail sentence in 2014 for giving a journalist the name of a CIA operative, although the name never appeared in the media. Kiriakou's sentence was praised by CIA Director David Petraeus, who faced his own charges for providing sensitive materials to his biographer, who was also his mistress.

In denying facts in that case, Petraeus lied to FBI investigators, who wanted to confront the general with felony charges. The Department of Justice reduced the matter to a single misdemeanor, and Petraeus received a modest fine that could be covered with a few of his speaking fees.

The treatment of Clinton is reminiscent of the handling of cases involving former CIA Director John Deutch and former national security adviser Samuel Berger. Deutch placed the most sensitive CIA operational materials on his home computer, which was also used to access pornographic sites. Deutch was assessed a fine of \$5,000, but received a pardon from President Bill Clinton before prosecutors could file the papers in federal court.

Berger, who served in Clinton's administration, stuffed his pants with classified documents from the National Archives, and also received a modest fine. President George W. Bush's Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez kept sensitive documents about the NSA's surveillance program at his home, but received no punishment.

Another Double Standard

There is a similar double standard in dealing with the writings of CIA officials. Critical accounts get great scrutiny; praise for CIA actions is rewarded with easy approval.

A classic case involved the memoir of Jose A. Rodriguez, Jr., who destroyed over 90 CIA torture tapes and wrote a book that denied any torture and abuse took place. The Department of Justice concluded that it would not pursue criminal charges for the destruction of the videotapes, although it was clearly an act to obstruct justice.

A senior career lawyer at CIA, John Rizzo, who took part in decision-making for torture and abuse, received clearance for a book that defended CIA interrogation at its secret prisons or "black sites."

In addition to the velvet glove approach for Rodriguez and Rizzo, the authors of the torture memoranda at the Department of Justice – John Yoo and Jay Bybee – received no punishment for providing legal cover for some but not all of the CIA's torture techniques.

Even Yoo, now a faculty member at the University of California's law school in Berkeley, conceded that CIA officers went beyond the letter of the authorization and should be held accountable. Meanwhile, Kiriakou, the first CIA officer to reveal the torture and abuse program, was convicted of disclosing classified information and sentenced.

A CIA colleague from the 1970s, Frank Snepp, wrote an important book on the chaotic U.S. withdrawal South Vietnam with unclassified information detailing the decisions and actions that left behind loyal Vietnamese. Snepp had to forfeit his considerable royalties because the book wasn't submitted for the agency's security review.

More recently, however, former CIA Director Leon Panetta presented his memoir to his publisher in 2013 without getting clearance from the CIA and only at the last minute – before the book’s distribution – did it receive a cursory review.

Former Director George Tenet received special treatment with his memoir, getting deputy director Michael Morell to intervene to reverse Publications Review Board decisions to redact sensitive classified materials from the director’s book.

All of these decisions point to a flawed and corrupt system that permits transgressions at the highest level of government, while the government pursues those at a lower level.

President Barack Obama’s legacy will include the fact that he irresponsibly used the Espionage Act of 1917 more often than all previous presidents over the past 100 years, and contributed to the demise of the Office of the Inspector General throughout the government, particularly at the CIA.

One of the key causes of the current hostility and cynicism toward politicians and the process of politics is the double standard at the highest levels of government.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA, National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism*, and the forthcoming *The Path to Dissent: A Whistleblower at CIA* (City Lights Publishers, 2015). Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org, where this story first appeared.

Russia Pushes Back on NATO Expansion

As NATO presses up to Russia’s borders – with secret schemes to influence and absorb unwilling populations – Russia has begun to push back, explaining the origins of the new Cold War, as Natylie Baldwin describes.

By Natylie Baldwin

Can Russian President Vladimir Putin turn the tables on NATO and the European Union in the Balkan states that are not yet members of the Atlanticist project? According to Filip Kovacevic, a political science professor who specializes in Russia and Eastern Europe, Putin has a plan. Some details were provided in an exclusive [report](#) in May on the nascent project by Russia to counter NATO

expansion into the remaining Balkan countries that have not yet been swept into the Western alliance.

The plan has its origins in the grassroots movement that arose in the aftermath of the first Cold War, which called for non-alignment and cooperation with both East and West. Kovacevic describes the movement as follows:

“Their members were generally young people who were enthusiastic, honest and genuinely committed to the public good, but were plagued by the lack of funding and faced with frequent media blackout and open discrimination. Nonetheless, their programs articulated the most promising and humane geopolitical vision for the Balkans. They conceptualized the Balkans as a territorial bridge between the West and the East rather than as the place of persistent confrontation, or the ‘line of fire’ as formulated by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in 2015. They wanted the Balkans to become a force for peace and human dignity in the world. Their vision still remains the best option for the Balkans people.”

This desire for non-alignment is understandable as a continuation of the policy of Tito’s Yugoslavia during the Cold War – the nation that several of the modern day Balkan states were a constituent part of. However, according to Kovacevic, these groups were easily overwhelmed, in terms of both financial and propaganda resources, in the 1990s by pro-NATO forces in the West.

In addition to providing resources to build up pro-NATO sentiment in the media and NGO sectors of these countries, financial resources and pressure was used to sway a large number of politicians to favor NATO membership, often in opposition to the general population’s views. Some of the unsavory forms of incentive or pressure include what amounts to blackmail and bribery, Kovacevic told me in an email interview:

“This is a long-term process. In the U.S. intelligence community it is called ‘seeding.’ The intelligence scholar Roy Godson defines it as ‘identifying potential agents of influence’ at an early stage and then acting to advance their careers. This is typically done covertly, but there have been the historical examples of overt support. ...

“In the Balkans, the key role in the process of ‘seeding’ was accomplished by various institutes, conferences, retreats, grants, etc. For instance, I was told by a confidential source who participated in the same U.S.-NATO program, the long-time foreign minister and one-time prime minister of Montenegro, Igor Luksic, was a product of such a process. Luksic was chosen as a very young man to attend various conferences and retreats in Brussels and Washington and, after that, his political career really took off. All the while, he promoted the NATO agenda in Montenegro, even though this went against the will of the majority of

the population.

“Another example is Ranko Krivokapic who was the speaker of the Montenegrin Parliament for over a decade. He traveled on official business to the U.S. a few times every year and boasted to others that he had a lot of friends in the State Department and other institutions of the U.S. government. There are examples like these in Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, etc. All over the Balkans.”

There is also the fact the European Union has dovetailed its security arrangements to such an extent with NATO that new members are now virtually brought into the NATO structures by default. For example, Mahdi D. Nazemroaya, author of *The Globalization of NATO*, reports that the E.U.’s Security Strategy was absorbed into NATO during its annual summit in 2006. The emphasis of the summit was on securing energy resources with the goal of ‘co-managing the resources of the EU’s periphery from North Africa to the Caucuses.’ Also implied was the goal of redefining the E.U.’s security borders in synch with both Franco-German and Anglo-American economic and geopolitical interests.

Moreover, British Russia scholar Richard Sakwa, has pointed out that the security integration of the E.U. with NATO was further intensified with the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007:

“As for the comprehensive character, this is something that has been gaining in intensity in recent years as the foreign and security dimension of the E.U. has effectively merged with the Atlantic security community. The E.U.’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) since the Treaty of Lisbon (the “Reform Treaty”) of 13 December 2007, which came into effect in 2009, is now in substance part of an Atlantic system. Acceding countries are now required to align their defense and security policy with that of NATO, resulting in the effective ‘militarization’ of the E.U.”

At this point, the forces seeking a non-aligned bridge role for the Balkan states are still very much around, but have suffered marginalization due to lack of resources to take on the powerful and now entrenched pro-NATO political forces. However, with increasing discontent with the weak economic prospects in certain Balkan states, combined with increasing instability in the E.U., it is believed that there is an opening for growth of the movement.

Economic Conditions in the Balkans

The Balkan states comprise Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Greece.

In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became E.U. members (three years after joining NATO). Romania’s GDP has barely kept up with its 2008 rate and has a general

unemployment rate of 6.4 percent, which sounds reasonable until you look at the youth unemployment rate of 21 percent, which doesn't bode well.

Bulgaria, on the other hand, is not part of the Eurozone and has not adopted the euro as its currency. Its economic prospects since joining the E.U. have not been impressive either. In the midst of the financial crisis of 2009, its GDP contracted by 5.5 percent, with a current unemployment rate of 7 percent and youth unemployment at 17 percent. Bulgaria is also recognized as one of the union's most corrupt countries.

Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania are all in the process of E.U. integration, with a supposed approval rate of 80-90 percent among the respective populations of these countries (except for Serbia), despite the virtual rape of Greece and the lackluster performance of Romania and Bulgaria.

It should be noted that all three Balkan nations that are actual E.U. members have higher emigration than immigration rates, another indication that accession to the E.U. doesn't necessarily translate into a prosperous future for the average person, particularly the young.

There is also the instability highlighted by the British people's vote to leave the E.U., spurred by disgust with austerity measures imposed by unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels along with an influx of immigrants – one-third from these poorer E.U. nations – which adversely affect lower-wage natives.

Even if the E.U. had a better track record of effectiveness in terms of improving economic conditions for the masses, it would have a very tall order with some of the prospective Balkan states. Macedonia, for example, has an unemployment rate between 24 and 25 percent as of January 2016, although it has improved from the 2005 high of 37 percent. Despite this improvement, Macedonia still has one of the lowest GDPs in Europe and 72 percent of its citizens claimed they manage their household income only with "difficulty" or "great difficulty" in 2012.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is still feeling the effects of the war of 1992 to 1995 that included major physical destruction of infrastructure and the bottoming out of its GDP. It currently suffers an unemployment rate of 42-43 percent.

Kosovo, a state that owes its existence to a NATO intervention, has 33 percent unemployment, a high crime rate and increasing political violence due to ethnic tensions and a growing ultra-nationalist movement. The Council of Europe compared the government of Kosovo to a mafia state in a 2010 report which revealed trafficking in human organs as well as drugs and weapons throughout

Eastern Europe, even implicating the then-prime minister in the operation.

Russia's Opening

Kovacevic states that the Atlanticist project of E.U. austerity economics and the enabling of Washington's destabilizing wars via NATO is starting to chip away at its popularity among Balkan populations. He also says Putin is prepared to take advantage of this opening and, since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, has turned his attention "to the Balkans with political force and funding not seen since the days of tsar Nicholas II."

This attention has manifested in the Lovcen Declaration, which was signed on May 6, by members of Russia's largest political party, United Russia, and the opposition Democratic People's Party in Montenegro in the village of Njegusi. Kovacevic explains:

"One of the most powerful political figures in Montenegro, the metropolitan Amfilohije, the chief bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, was present at the signing and gave his blessing. Though in the past Amfilohije has been known to support the authoritarian and pro-NATO prime minister Milo Djukanovi? around the election time, he has always publicly opposed NATO membership and has given fiery speeches on its 'evil nature' to the point of accusing NATO for continuing Hitler's anti-Slavic project.

"Even more importantly, Amfilohije's involvement with the Lovcen declaration reveals one of the fundamental components of Putin's overall geopolitical plan – the nurturing and intensification of the religious Christian Orthodox connection between the Russians and the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans. This includes not [only] the Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians, but also the Greeks and Bulgarians whose states are in NATO and whose religious 'awakening' can easily subvert NATO from the inside."

Criticism and minimization of the project have set the tone in Western media, to the extent that it has been covered at all, particularly in relation to utilizing an opposition party for significant influence. But Kovacevic argues that such a dismissive attitude is disingenuous:

"[T]he very same method has been used by the U.S. and NATO intelligence services to control the governments of East-Central European states since the collapse of communism. Countless small parties with just a handful of parliamentary deputies were formed with the money coming from the various 'black budgets' with the task of entering the governing coalition and then steering the entire government in the direction charted by their foreign founders and mentors.

"These parties have had minimal public legitimacy, but have made a great

political impact with their 'blackmail' potential. As they also don't cost very much, the CIA, the MI6, and the BND regularly create them for every new election cycle.

"Now the Russians (primarily, the SVR and the GRU) are using the same rulebook for their own geopolitical interests. In addition, however, Putin's grand design for the Balkans embodied in the ANS is also likely to prove durable not only because it builds on the traditional cultural and religious ties linking Russia and the Balkans, but also because it rides on the wave of the enormous present popular dissatisfaction with the neoliberal Atlanticist political and economic status quo."

The fact that this declaration was signed in Montenegro is most relevant due to the fact that the country has been officially invited to join NATO, whose subsequent membership is treated in the West as a *fait accompli*. However, accession requires consensus approval by all current NATO members – one member could veto the move before completion of the process as happened with Macedonia when Greece vetoed their membership aspirations in 2008 when an invitation was to be offered at the Bucharest Summit – as well as approval by the population of Montenegro.

Joining any alliance treaty is arguably something that affects national sovereignty, which requires a referendum as Kovacevic, who is Montenegrin, explains:

"The corrupt government of Milo Djukanovic is trying to avoid a national referendum because it knows that it does not have a majority support for NATO. If given a choice, the people of Montenegro would reject the protocol. The Constitution requires a referendum for all matters that affect national sovereignty, but Djukanovic is arguing falsely that NATO membership leaves Montenegrin sovereignty intact."

Kovacevic predicts that a show-down over NATO membership could create instability in the country: *"[I]f he [Djukanovic] tries to push this decision through the Parliament (which he no doubt will), wide-scale strikes and demonstrations may take place all over the country. Whoever is pushing Montenegro in NATO is dangerously destabilizing the country in mid-to-long term."*

If that happens, Washington may find for the first time in recent memory that forcing instability on a smaller country may ultimately accrue benefits to another great power, helping to facilitate a shift in geopolitics that it didn't bargain on. As Nazemroaya comments in his book:

“The [NATO] alliance is increasingly being viewed as a geopolitical extension of America, an arm of the Pentagon, and a synonym for an evolving American Empire. ... Ultimately, NATO is slated to become an institutionalized military force. ... Nevertheless, for every action there is a reaction and NATO’s actions have given rise to opposing trends. The Atlantic Alliance is increasingly coming into contact with the zone of Eurasia that is in the process of emerging with its own ideas and alliance. What this will lead to next is the question of the century.”

Natylie Baldwin is co-author of *Ukraine: Zbig’s Grand Chessboard & How the West Was Checkmated*, available from Tayen Lane Publishing. In October of 2015, she traveled to 6 cities in the Russian Federation and has written several articles based on her conversations and interviews with a cross-section of Russians. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in various publications including Consortium News, Russia Insider, OpEd News, The New York Journal of Books, The Common Line, Santa Fe Sun Monthly, Dissident Voice, Energy Bulletin, Newtopia Magazine, and the Lakeshore. She blogs at natyliesbaldwin.com.

US Still Ducks Iraq Accountability

With the Chilcot report, Great Britain somewhat came to grips with its role in the criminal invasion of Iraq, but neocon-controlled Washington still refuses to give the American people any honest accounting, explains ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The United States and Britain each have suffered from the blunder of invading Iraq in 2003 – and have made many others suffer as well, not least of all the Iraqis. But the release in Britain of the mammoth [Chilcot report](#) is a reminder of how differently the two allies have treated their coming to terms with the blunder.

That difference had been apparent even before this week. An earlier British inquiry, the Butler report, had explicitly pointed out, for example, the improper mingling of intelligence analysis and policy – which, although such mingling occurred on this side of the Atlantic as well, has never been directly and officially acknowledged in the same way in the United States.

Now the Chilcot report, in its extremely thorough examination of all aspects of the decision to go to war and of what followed, has made the trans-Atlantic difference in retrospection even greater.

Oh, sure, there have been some official after-the-fact inquiries in the United States related to the Iraq War. They have served a cathartic function and also have served to divert attention and blame away from those – Democrats as well as Republicans – who supported the invasion at the time.

The Senate Intelligence Committee and a White House-appointed commission both examined in minute detail intelligence work about weapons of mass destruction. But the so-called WMD issue was not the driver of the war.

As super-war-hawk Paul Wolfowitz later admitted in an unguarded comment, it was just an issue that people could agree on as a rationale for launching the war. And even a firm conclusion that weapons programs exist in the hands of a nasty regime does not constitute a case for launching a major offensive war. (Anyone up for war in North Korea?)

It was the highly costly, destructive, destabilizing aftermath of overthrowing Saddam Hussein that made launching the war a blunder. The war would have been highly costly, destructive, and destabilizing even if every word that the Bush administration said about WMD had been true.

And conversely, if the war had ushered in the sort of blossoming of democracy and stability in Iraq that its most fervent promoters envisioned, the war would not be widely considered today a blunder and we would not be seeing 2.6 million-word reports of commissions of inquiry, WMD or no WMD.

Among the Chilcot report's very pertinent lines of inquiry that have had no counterpart in any American inquiry has been how peaceful channels for resolving differences with the Iraqi regime were never adequately explored. Actually, applying the same inquiry in the United States would require blunter language than that used by Chilcot.

The chief promoters of the war in the Bush administration did not *want* to resolve peacefully issues of WMD or any other issues. One of their fears in the months leading up to the invasion was that the Iraqi regime would say yes to all international demands and the case for war would be deflated.

The Predicted Chaos

As for the destructive aftermath of Saddam's ouster, the Chilcot panel said, "We do not agree" – with Tony Blair, that is – "that hindsight is required. The risks of internal strife in Iraq, active Iranian pursuit of its interests, regional instability and Al Qaeda activity in Iraq were each explicitly identified before the invasion."

In the United States, the intelligence community had produced major assessments

before the war anticipating much of the post-invasion mess, but the policy-makers ignored those assessments. Redacted versions of those assessments can be read today in a tardily released “report” of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which was supposed to look into war-related issues other than the much-beaten WMD intelligence issue but got so tied up in partisan knots that what it finally released could hardly be called a report at all. (I have told this sorry story in detail [elsewhere](#).)

As for the decision-making process leading to launching the war, the Chilcot report goes into much detail, down to what word-smithing the prime minister’s senior aides recommended for messages going to the U.S. government. Here in the United States there can be exhaustive inquiries into decision-making processes when there is a political appetite for it. Right now, for example, Republicans in Congress are trying to do that regarding a decision by the FBI director involving some matter involving emails.

But there has been no inquiry at all into what was one of the most extraordinary aspects of the decision to launch a major offensive war in Iraq: that there was no policy process at all leading to that decision. All the meetings and memos and discussions in the Bush administration about Iraq were about selling or implementing the decision to go to war, not about making that decision in the first place.

What accounts for this big difference in how the two countries have handled this tragic episode in their history? One reason probably is that the political forces in the United States that promoted the war have remained, despite their ghastly blunder, powerful. Neoconservatives continued to dominate foreign policy thinking in the Republican Party (although more recently Donald Trump – who claims, without a record to back him up, to have opposed the war – has shaken things up). In Britain, by contrast, Blair is almost alone in defending his decision to go to war, lamely echoing Wolfowitz’s lines about how the world is better off without Saddam Hussein.

A related reason is that partisanship in the United States has become more poisonous and ruthless than it is in the United Kingdom. It seems that everything is fair game to try to knock down opponents, no matter how much the knocking down distorts history and thus pollutes or negates any effort to come to terms with that history.

Republican efforts to propagate the myth that Barack Obama, by implementing a troop withdrawal agreement negotiated by the Bush administration, somehow snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory in Iraq – notwithstanding the still-ongoing civil war there, and the patent failure of earlier military efforts to achieve their objective of political reconciliation among Iraqis – have fed the

notion that maybe the decision to go to war wasn't really a mistake and it was just later implementation that was mishandled.

Second Thoughts?

The release of the Chilcot report ought to be the occasion for Americans to reflect on another asymmetry between the United States and Britain regarding the Iraq War: that it was the U.S. administration, not any British government, that initiated this whole horrible idea. The United Kingdom got involved because Blair was Bush's poodle, who was so concerned about keeping U.S.-U.K. relations harmonious that he wrote to George W. Bush, "I will be with you, whatever."

Americans ought to think about the responsibilities of global leadership, and about how easy it is to abuse a position of power in which even a significant and proud country like the United Kingdom will fall in line that way. Dragging Britain into the Iraq mess was such an abuse of power. It was a betrayal of one of America's most important and staunchest allies. It gives many, including not just in Britain but elsewhere, reason to be less inclined to follow the U.S. lead in the future.

Dragging Britain into the Iraq mess probably has had other deleterious effects in Britain as well. Blair's role in the Iraq War has come to be perceived as one of the biggest aspects of his legacy, and that has helped to reduce support for Blairite New Labourism. This helped to make the feckless left-winger Jeremy Corbyn leader of the Labour Party. And that in turn was an ingredient in the outcome of last month's Brexit vote.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post](#) at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Gaza: Living and Dying with Drones

While U.S. political leaders claim to uphold universal human rights, nearly all are selective in sympathizing with Israel in its lopsided war against the Palestinians as reflected in the 2014 slaughter in Gaza, recalls Ann Wright.

By Ann Wright

Two years ago, on July 7, 2014, the Israeli government launched a horrific 51-day air, land and sea attack on the people of Gaza. Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)

fired missiles, rockets, artillery and tank shells relentlessly on 1.8 million Palestinians squashed by Israeli land and sea blockades into a narrow strip 25 miles long and 5 miles wide, one of the most densely populated places in the world.

Of the 2,219 or so Palestinians killed (estimates vary), some 1,545 were civilians and nearly 500 of them were slaughtered by Israeli assassin drones, a style of warfare that has become the norm for both the United States and Israel. Drones fly above Gaza 24 hours a day watching the movements of every Palestinian and ready to fire rockets at those chosen to die by the Israeli Defense Force and its political masters.

This pattern goes back well before 2014. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights documents that, from 2008 until October 2013, out of 2,269 Palestinians killed by Israel, 911 were killed by drones, most during the 2008-2009 Operation Cast Lead. In the 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense, 143 out of 171 Palestinians killed by Israel were by drone attack.

In the 2014 Israeli attack on Gaza, the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights documents 497 Palestinian civilians killed by drones. At the end of the 51 days, besides the 2,219 overall death toll, 1,545 were civilians, including 556 children. Among the 10,600 or so wounded were 2,647 children, according to the Mezan Center.

There was devastation, too, to Gaza's infrastructure. The Mezan Center listed 8,381 houses destroyed and more than 23,000 damaged. The devastation extended to schools (138 damaged or destroyed) and hospitals and health facilities (26 damaged). According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 273,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had been displaced of whom 236,375 (over 11 percent of the Gazan population) were taking shelter in 88 United Nations schools.

On the other side, Palestinian militias shot homemade rockets killing 66 Israeli soldiers, five Israeli civilians, including one child, and one Thai citizen in Israel.

The 51-day Israeli attack on Gaza should not be characterized as a war between opposing forces but rather as a massive one-sided attack on Palestinians made at the choosing of Israel with its overwhelming military air, sea and land forces backed up with endless military supplies and equipment from the United States, including the missile system called the "Iron Dome."

Now two years after the Israeli attack on Gaza, the tensions in the West Bank are exploding. Beginning in October 2015, a few West Bank Palestinian youth have

forsaken non-violent confrontation with Israeli military and have taken up knives instead of rocks in the latest intifada against Israeli occupation and oppression, against the continued building of illegal settlements on Palestinian lands and against the imprisonment of hundreds of Palestinian youth.

The use of knives against IDF soldiers has expanded to deaths of Israeli civilians as well, including a 13-year-old girl in her home. Thirty-four Israelis, two U.S. citizens, an Eritrean and a Sudanese have been killed in the knife, gun or car ramming attacks. Meanwhile, 214 Palestinians have been killed by IDF soldiers during this period.

The potential for Israeli response/vengeance to these knife attacks is great and would probably not be directed to just the West Bank but also toward Gaza.

As with other conflicts, the stories of death and of survival of civilians trapped in merciless bombings and fighting should compel leaders to work to end conflicts, but seldom do.

Drones at Dinner

A new book, published on July 5, chronicles the 2014 IDF attack on Gaza and focuses on the psychological and physical destruction suffered by the people of Gaza by one particular weapon system – the assassin drone that killed 497 civilians during the 2014 attack.

Palestinian writer Atef Abu Saif recounts the day-by-day life of a family and a community under fire from an enemy in the sky, beginning on July 7, 2014. The book entitled *Drone Eats With Me – A Gaza Diary* is a graphic description of life under fire and particularly with the assassin drone lurking in the sky 24 hours a day waiting for its next victim.

“The drone keeps us company all night long. It’s whirring, whirring, whirring, whirring is incessant – as if it wants to remind us it’s there, it’s not going anywhere. It hangs just a little way above our heads.”

After the drone crosses off another victim, “the noise of this new explosion subsides it’s replaced by the inevitable whir of a drone, sounding so close it could be right beside us. It’s like it wants to join us for the evening and has pulled up an invisible chair.”

Atef describes his life during the 51-day attack: “Our fates are all in the hands of a drone operator in a military base somewhere just over the Israeli border. The operator looks at Gaza the way an unruly boy looks at the screen of a video game. He presses a button and might destroy an entire street. He might decide to terminate the life of someone walking along the pavement, or he might

uproot a tree in an orchard that hasn't yet borne fruit. The operator practices his aim at his own discretion, energized by the trust and power that has been put in his hands by his superiors."

Atef says many entities known and unknown join his family at mealtime: "The food is ready. I wake the children and bring them in. We all sit around five dishes: white cheese, hummus, orange jam, yellow cheese, and olives.

"Darkness eats with us.

"Fear and anxiety eat with us.

"The unknown eats with us.

"The F16 eats with us.

"The drone, and its operator somewhere out in Israel, eats with us.

"Our hands shiver, our eyes stare at the plates on the floor."

While the Israeli drone eats with the families in Gaza, U.S. drones eat with the families in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Somalia and Libya.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the US Army and retired as a Colonel. She also served as a US diplomat for 16 years and resigned in March 2003 in opposition to President Bush's war on Iraq. She is a coordinator for the US campaign for the Women's Boat to Gaza. She is the co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.

Of Lethal Drones and Police Shootings

There are chilling parallels between President Obama's overseas drone program and how police treat America's non-white citizens, with the slightest suspicion escalating into official violence and even death, writes Kathy Kelly.

By Kathy Kelly

Two major news stories here in the U.S., both chilling, point out how readily U.S. authorities will murder people based on race and the slightest possibility of a threat to those in places of power.

On July 5, Baton Rouge police killed Anton Sterling in a Louisiana parking lot. Sterling was a 37-year-old black father of five selling CDs outside of a local store. As captured on widely seen cell-phone video, two officers tased him, held him with their hands and knees down on the ground and then shot him multiple

times at close range.

The officers pulled a gun out of Sterling's pocket after they had killed him but witnesses say Sterling was not holding the gun and his hands were never near his pockets. The situation might have escalated further but clearly little concern was shown for the sanctity of a human life deemed a threat to officers.

In the witness-recorded video one, officer promises, "If you f—ing move, I swear to God!"

Police departments in the U.S. often arrest and all too often kill citizens on U.S. streets based on "racial profiling." Young men of certain demographics are targeted based on their "patterns of behavior" for confrontations in which officers' safety trumps any concern for the safety of suspects, and which easily ramps up to killing.

And so it is abroad. The week's other chilling news involved the long-promised release of U.S. government data on drone strikes and civilian deaths. The report covered four countries with which the U.S. is not at war. From 2009 through 2015 in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Libya, the U.S. admits to its drone strikes having killed between 64 and 116 civilians, although these numbers are only a small fraction of even the most conservative estimates on such deaths made by credible independent reporters and researchers over the same period.

With U.S. definitions of a "combatant" constantly in flux, many of the 2,372 to 2,581 "combatants" that the government reports killed over the same period will have certainly been civilian casualties. Few eyes in the U.S. watch for cell-phone video from these countries, and so the executing officers' versions of events are often all that matters.

In June 2011, CIA Director John Brennan stated there hadn't been "a single collateral death" caused by drone strikes over the previous eighteen months. Ample reportage showed this statistic was a flat lie.

Classified Policies

International law expert Marjorie Cohn notes that what little we know of President Obama's 2013 policy guidelines (still classified) for decreasing civilian deaths is inconsistent even on the point of a known target having been present. Many strikes are targeted at areas of suspicious activity with no idea of who is present.

As former CIA officer Philip Giraldi notes, a March 2015 Physicians for Social Responsibility report claims that more (perhaps far more) than 1.3 million people were killed during the first ten years of the "Global War on Terror" in

Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Adding Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen, he finds the current total might easily exceed 2 million with some estimates credibly going to 4 million or beyond. He fears the data released on July 1 will end up normalizing the drone program, writing:

“The past 15 years have institutionalized and validated the killing process. President Clinton or Trump will be able to do more of the same, as the procedures involved are ‘completely legal’ and likely soon to be authorized under an executive order.”

The July 1 data minimizes civilian deaths by limiting itself to countries with which the U.S. is not at war. But the United States’ drone arsenal is precisely designed to project violence into areas miles from any battlefield where arrest, not assassination, would before have been considered both feasible and morally indispensable in dealing with suspects accused of a crime.

U.S. figures do not count untold numbers of civilians learning to fear the sky, in formerly peaceful areas, for weapons that might be fired without warning. The drones take away the very idea of trials and evidence, of the rule of law, making the whole world a battlefield. In the U.S. neighborhoods where people like Alton Sterling most risk summary execution, residents cannot be faulted for concluding that the U.S. government and society don’t mind treating their homes as warzones; that lives of innocent people caught up in these brutal wars do not matter provided the safety and property of the people outside, and of the people sent in to quell disorder, are rigorously protected.

My friends and sometime hosts in Afghanistan, the Afghan Peace Volunteers, run a school for street kids and a seamstress program to distribute thick blankets in the winter. They seek to apply Mohandas Gandhi’s discipline of letting a determination to keep the peace show them the difficult work needed to replace battlefields with community.

Their resources are small and they live in a dangerous city at a perilous time. Their work does little, to say the least, to ensure their safety. They aim to put the safety of their most desperate neighbors first.

It makes no one safer to make our cities and the world a battlefield. The frenzied concern for our safety and comfort driving so much of our war on the Middle East has made our lives far more dangerous.

What Brings Peace?

Can we ask ourselves: which has ever brought a peaceful future nearer to people

in Afghan or U.S. neighborhoods – weaponized military and surveillance systems or the efforts of concerned neighbors seeking justice?

Gigantic multinational “defense” systems gobble up resources, while programs intended for social well-being are cut back. The U.S. withholds anything like the quantity of resources needed for the task of healing the battle scars that the U.S. and NATO have inflicted on so much of the Muslim world. If our fear is endless, how will these wars ever end?

We have to face the fact that when the U.S. acts as self-appointed “global policeman,” what it does to poor nations resembles what those two officers did to Alton Sterling. We must temper selfish and unreasonable fears for our own safety with the knowledge that others also want safe and stable lives.

We must build community by lessening inequality. We must swear off making the world our battlefield and be appalled to hear the U.S. government seem to tell the world “I will kill you if you f–ing move.”

Kathy Kelly (kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org).
