

Israelis Continue to Open Fire on Gaza Protestors: An Eyewitness Account

An Interview with Gaza-based Palestinian Journalist, Wafa Al-Udaini

By Dennis J Bernstein



According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), the Palestinian death toll since March 30, 2018 “has risen to 33, including 4 children and 1 photojournalist, and the number of those wounded has risen to 2,436, including 410 children, 66 women, 22 journalists and 9 paramedics.”

There have been no Israeli casualties.

According to PCHR, on Friday, April 20th, Israeli snipers “killed 4 Palestinian civilians, including a child, and wounded 274 others, including 41 children, 6 women and 1 journalist, in addition to hundreds suffering tear gas inhalation, including PCHR’s fieldworkers who were documenting the Israeli forces’ suppression of the entirely peaceful demonstrations near the border fence with Israel, east of the Gaza Strip.”

PCHR maintains that “for the fourth week in a row and upon a decision by the Israeli highest military and political echelons, the Israeli forces used lethal force against the peaceful protesters, who did not pose any threat to the soldiers’ life.” There is a cell phone camera recording now being widely distributed that appears to show Israeli snipers and soldiers cheering as they gun down unarmed Palestinians fleeing in the distance.

On April 17th, I spoke with Gaza-based Palestinian Journalist Wafa Al-Udaini who has been an eyewitness to all the Gaza protests in the ongoing anti-occupation, Right to Return protests since late March. Al-Udaini’s friend and colleague, Yaser Murtaja, a photojournalist and camera person for a Gaza-based media production company was shot on April 6th by Israeli sharpshooters and died the next day of his wounds.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, “Pictures posted on social media by local journalists and witness testimony from local journalists show that Murtaja was wearing a bulletproof vest and helmet that were both clearly marked with the words “PRESS” when he was hit.”

Today I interview the little brave man. He said, he went to protest peacefully

Get back occupied lands#GreatReturnMarch pic.twitter.com/5RMUc9eGNg

– Wafa A Al-Udaini (@wafa_Gaza) [April 18, 2018](#)

In the following interview, Al-Udaini offers an eye-witness recounting of the initial protest in Gaza on March 30th, in which at least 18 protesters were killed by Israeli snipers and well over a thousand people were wounded.

Dennis Bernstein: We are going to hear now some eyewitness accounts, some very troubling testimony of the way in which Israeli snipers, from a long distance away, behind a fence and across a field, began to gun down hundreds of people, wounding over a thousand protesters and killing at least 18 Palestinians on the first day. It was truly horrifying.

Some people were protesting, some were praying, and others, like Wafa Al-Udaini, were sitting down for a meal during the long day of anti-occupation protests, when Israeli snipers opened fire and began to gun down unarmed Palestinians.

Wafa Al-Udaini, tell us a bit of your background and then tell us what you witnessed on March 30th and the other protest days that you were an eye-witness to.

Wafa Al-Udaini: I live here in the Gaza Strip. My grandparents were expelled from Beersheba by Israeli gangs in 1948. Now I live as a Palestinian refugee in the Gaza Strip. I work as a journalist for different websites and on radio. I am also an activist, the leader of a youth group here composed of students and journalists who work to present Palestinian issues to the world.

We were so excited about the Great March of Return protests, which began on the 13th of March. It was a peaceful and secular march, where all Palestinians, male and female, elderly and children, came to the border fence to resist peacefully. I took my family with me and we brought along something to eat and drink. We sat together and shared our food. We were asserting our right to demonstrate and reminding the world of our right to return to the land we occupied before we were driven from our homes. I brought my camera and intended to livestream the event. We were about 700 meters from the Israeli side.

DB: Could you talk about when you realized that the soldiers were opening fire on civilians? Were people around you being shot?

WAU: At the moment, I was interviewing people around me about what life was like before 1948, stories they had heard from their grandparents. Then suddenly I heard shots and I saw people running. I asked what was happening and they told

me that the Israelis were opening fire. A man fleeing with his children told me some had been murdered. The Israelis began throwing teargas and they gunned down people who were fleeing.

DB: Let me explain to people that there is the border fence, which is electrified, and then there is a major piece of land between the fence and where the protest was happening. My understanding is that the soldiers were sharpshooters and they were picking people off from the other side of the fence.

WAU: Exactly. It had nothing to do with “defense,” because of the distance and because we were unarmed. They fired on women holding the Palestinian flag. This was their crime. Claims of self defense are just ludicrous.

DB: A friend of yours, a journalist, Yaser Murtaja, was gunned down on April 6th. I understand he was wearing his press vest, that clearly marked him as a journalist. He was gunned down and killed by Israeli snipers. Do you think he might have been shot *because* he was wearing his press vest, and the Israelis weren't crazy about there killing fields being broadcast around the world?

WAU: Yes. The Israelis are realizing that they can't continue to fool people indefinitely. This camera footage of all of this flies in the face of any claims that the Israeli army is acting in self defense. These on-the-ground images show Israeli propoganda for what it is.

DB: It appears they are willing to wipe out peaceful protesters while the rest of the world is watching, while the US government continues to provide them with arms, and while the Western corporate press works to bury the real story.

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

Palm Sunday: History and Tradition

The time for the followers of Jesus to publicly protest injustices such as wealth inequality is at hand, argues retired Baptist minister Rev. Howard Bess.

By Howard Bess

In about 30 CE, Jesus traveled about 70 miles south of his native Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. This trip is mentioned in Matthew's, Mark's

and Luke's Gospels, all of which describe Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as the first event of a tumultuous week that ended with Jesus' crucifixion as an insurrectionist and later with his resurrection from the dead. When scholars interested in studying the historical Jesus look for historical certainties in the gospel writings, they almost unanimously identify this trip to Jerusalem as a matter of history, not just tradition or fiction.

Scholars are not of one mind about the details of these three events. The three gospel writers obviously embellished their stories with fiction. There are things we know with reasonable confidence. We know that Jesus being greeted by multitudes in Jerusalem is not remotely possible. This was probably Jesus' only trip to Jerusalem during the short years of his public ministry in Galilee. 70 miles is a long walk. He might have been known by Jerusalem's Pharisees, but the Pharisees would have ignored him. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was more likely a very small political protest march, more like a form of street theatre.

The details of the story, i.e. children waving palm branches and Jesus riding a donkey in fulfillment of a non-existent Old Testament prediction, are more likely small parts of the process of turning the political nature of the Jesus movement into a new religion that glorifies the political leader. The reality is that Jesus was a religiously devout and practicing Jew, who was killed for his political activities. Those who want to look at the whole process should read Barrie Wilson's book "How Jesus Became Christian." The process of change has left followers of Jesus reciting the Apostles' Creed that deifies Jesus and leaves what he said, taught and lived unsaid. It left Jesus followers asking "what should I believe?" to the exclusion of "what should I be doing?"

On Palm Sunday, 2018, children will once again parade through church sanctuaries waving Palm branches or paper replicas in the celebration of the "triumphal" entry into the city of Jerusalem. It is a tradition that seemingly will not go away. Once again nothing will be said from Christian pulpits about the horror of Roman rule. The Roman rulers were ruthless thieves of land and wealth. They made hard-working laborers into economic slaves. The Roman tyrants in the hinterlands of the Empire shipped stolen wealth back to Rome, where wealthy people had sumptuous living.

The Romans were masters of the vision of greatness. They called it Pax Romana. In fact the Romans had a vast propaganda program that justified the gap between the wealthy and the poor. It was unimaginable no matter what they called it. Jesus saw through all the ugliness, seeing it as a wholesale denial of justice. His entry into Jerusalem was the beginning of a week of protest.

Today, pastors of churches, who are well trained in high quality seminaries, know the context of the ministry of Jesus from Nazareth. Ministers by the tens

of thousands know about the ruthless greed that drove the Romans. They know of the compromises that were being made by the priests of the Jerusalem temple. They know about the rage of Jesus at the injustices of the system. They know about the fraud of a triumphal entry but will say nothing. Instead, tradition will triumph once more and children will wave Palm branches once more.

If there is any time in the year when followers of Jesus should massively protest against the evils in our society, it is during holy week beginning with Palm Sunday.

Jim Wallace, editor of Sojourners magazine has chosen the April 2018 edition to call for a return to aggressive protest by followers of Jesus from Nazareth. He sees the disparities of the Roman Empire being repeated in America under the banner of Make America Great Again. For Wallace the time for the followers of Jesus to publicly protest is at hand. Protest marches against injustice are a part of our Jesus tradition.

In our America, protest marches have been used effectively to bring about change. The American master of the protest march was Martin Luther King Jr. When he led marches, he was using the tool of Jesus, the protest march. Many Christians kept advising King to back off from his protest marches. He kept on marching. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is one of the truly great literary pieces of our history. It was addressed to the clergy of Birmingham. Protest marches are unsettling to the majority. They produce consequences that are not comfortable for the protesters. King was in a jail in Birmingham because of his non-violent protest marching. Jesus was killed because he protested.

Jim Wallace has been arrested and jailed 23 times because of his protests against injustice.

The tradition of celebrating Palm Sunday as a triumphal entry should cease. It needs to be replaced with protest marches against the abuse of power and injustice in all its forms. It is the message of Palm Sunday.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

Senate Votes to Continue Yemen Devastation

On Tuesday, the Senate voted down a resolution that would have withdrawn US

support for the Saudi-led war on Yemen, choosing instead to continue to illegally assist what the UN has called “the world’s largest humanitarian crisis,” reports Dennis J. Bernstein and Shireen Al-Adeimi in this interview.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shireen Al-Adeimi: It is very disappointing because it ensures that millions more Yemenis will continue to suffer. On average, 130 children die every day in Yemen due to malnutrition and disease caused by the Saudi-led blockade. Many more will die because of US bombs which are dropped from Saudi jets. People

continue to die for no reason at all.

DB: Could you give us a little background?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

People who were once wealthy or middle-class are now resorting to begging on the streets and selling their possessions. Three million are displaced internally because there is nowhere to go with the blockade in place. People can't find water, they can't find food, they can't find medicine or fuel. They

can't decide whether to take a sick child to the hospital or provide them with food. It is as bad as it can get.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DB: How do you explain these congress people who support this ongoing war and

famine in Yemen? Are they owned by the weapons manufacturers?

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

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Billy Graham: An Old Soldier Fades Away

Evangelist Billy Graham, who counseled presidents and stirred controversy with inflammatory statements on gay rights, opposition to Martin Luther King’s tactics of civil disobedience, and support for U.S. wars, died Wednesday. Cecil Bothwell reflects here on his life and legacy.

By Cecil Bothwell

“We are selling the greatest product on earth. Why shouldn’t we promote it as effectively as we promote a bar of soap?” – Billy Graham, Saturday Evening Post, 1963

Billy Graham was a preacher man equally intent on saving souls and soliciting financial support for his ministry. His success at the former is not subject to proof and his success at the latter is unrivaled. He preached to millions on every ice-free continent and led many to his chosen messiah.

When Graham succumbed to various ailments this week at the age of 99 he left behind an organization that is said to have touched more people than any other Christian ministry in history, with property, assets and a name-brand worth hundreds of millions. The address lists of contributors alone comprise a mother lode for the Billy Graham Evangelical Association, now headed by his son and namesake, William Franklin Graham, III.

Graham also left behind a United States government in which religion plays a far greater role than before he intruded into politics in the 1950s. The shift from secular governance to “In God We Trust” can be laid squarely at this minister’s feet.

Graham’s message was principally one of fear: fear of a wrathful god; fear of

temptation; fear of communists and socialists; fear of unions; fear of Catholics; fear of homosexuals; fear of racial integration and above all, fear of death. But as a balm for such fears, he promised listeners eternal life, which he said was readily claimed through acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's savior.

Furthermore, he assured listeners that God loved us so much that He created governments, the most blessed form being Western capitalist democracy. To make this point, he frequently quoted Romans 13, particularly the first two verses. In the New American Standard Version of the Bible, they read, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

The question of whether this was actually the recorded word of God or a rider inserted into the bill by Roman senators with rather more worldly aims never dimmed Graham's insistence that all governments are the work of the Almighty. Almost perversely, he even endorsed the arrest of a woman who lofted a Christian banner during his Reagan-era visit to Moscow, opting for the crack-down of "divine" authority over the civil disobedience of a believer.

Governments, he reminded his Moscow listeners, do God's work.

Based on that Biblical mandate for all governments, Graham stood in solid opposition to the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, all but addressed to Graham, King noted, "We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was 'legal' and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was 'illegal.' ... If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's anti-religious laws."

Finger on the Pulse of American Fear

Fear is the stock in trade of most evangelists, of course, comprising the necessary setup before the pitch. As historian William Martin explained in his 1991 account of Graham's early sermons, "even those whose personal lives seemed rich and fulfilling must live in a world filled with terror and threat. As a direct result of sinful humanity's rebellion against God, our streets have become jungles of terror, mugging, rape, and death. Confusion reigns on campuses as never before. Political leaders live in constant fear of the assassin's bullet. Racial tension seems certain to unleash titanic forces of hatred and violence. Communism threatens to eradicate freedom from the face of the earth.

Small nations are getting the bomb, so that global war seems inevitable. High-speed objects, apparently guided by an unknown intelligence, are coming into our atmosphere for reasons no one understands. Clearly, all signs point to the end of the present world order. ...

“Graham’s basic mode of preaching in these early years was assault. ... Then, when he had his listeners mentally crouching in terror, aware that all the attractively labeled escape routes—alcohol, sexual indulgence, riches, psychiatry, education, social-welfare programs, increased military might, the United Nations—led ultimately to dead ends, he held out the only compass that pointed reliably to the straight and narrow path that leads to personal happiness and lasting peace.”

Columnist and former priest James Carroll had much the same take, noting that “Graham had his finger on the pulse of American fear, and in subsequent years, anti communism occupied the nation’s soul as an avowedly religious obsession. The Red Scare at home, unabashed moves toward empire abroad, the phrase ‘under God’ inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance, the scapegoating of homosexuals as ‘security risks,’ an insane accumulation of nuclear weapons, suicidal wars against postcolonial insurgencies in Asia—a set of desperate choices indeed. Through it all, Billy Graham was the high priest of the American crusade, which is why U.S. presidents uniformly sought his blessing.”

While Carroll had most of that right, the record suggests that, over and over again, it was Graham who sought presidential blessing, rather than the other way around. Letters enshrined in the presidential and Graham libraries reveal a preacher endlessly seeking official audience. As Truman said, years after his presidency, “Well, I hadn’t ought to say this, but he’s one of those counterfeits I was telling you about. He claims he’s a friend of all the presidents, but he was never a friend of mine when I was president.”

Of course, politicians have often brandished fear as well, and the twin streams of fear-based politics and fear-based religion couldn’t have been more confluent. Communist infiltrators, missile gaps and the domino effect each took their turn, as did the Evil Empire and, more recently, Saddam, Osama bin Laden and an amorphous threat of global terrorism.

In light of the Biblical endorsement of rulers, Graham supported police repression of Vietnam war protesters and civil rights marchers, opposed Martin Luther King’s tactic of civil disobedience, supported South American despots, and publicly supported every war or intervention waged by the United States from Korea forward.

A Pro-War Christian

Born on a prosperous dairy farm and educated at Wheaton College, Graham first gained national attention in 1949 when the publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, searching for a spiritual icon to spread his anti-communist sentiments, discovered the young preacher holding forth at a Los Angeles tent meeting. Hearst wired his editors across the nation, "puff Graham," and he was an instant sensation.

Hearst next contacted his friend and fellow publisher Henry Luce. Their Wall Street ally, Bernard Baruch, arranged a meeting between Luce and Graham while the preacher was staying with the segregationist Governor Strom Thurmond in the official mansion in Columbia, South Carolina, Luce concurred with Hearst about Graham's marketability and Time and Life were enlisted in the job of selling the soap of salvation to the world. Time, alone, has run more than 600 stories about Graham.

The man who would become known as "the minister to presidents" offered his first military advice in 1950. On June 25, North Korean troops invaded South Korea and Graham sent Truman a telegram. "MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS PRAYING GOD GIVE YOU WISDOM IN THIS CRISIS. STRONGLY URGE SHOWDOWN WITH COMMUNISM NOW. MORE CHRISTIANS IN SOUTHERN KOREA PER CAPITA THAN ANY PART OF WORLD. WE CANNOT LET THEM DOWN."

It was the first time Graham encouraged a president to go to war, and with characteristic hyperbole: Korea has never topped the list of Christian-leaning nations. Subsequently, Graham gave his blessing to every conflict under every president from Truman to the second Bush, and most of the presidents, pleased to enjoy public assurance of God's approval, made him welcome in the White House.

Graham excoriated Truman for firing General Douglas MacArthur and supported the general's plan to invade China. He went so far as to urge Nixon to bomb dikes in Vietnam – knowing that it would kill upward of a million civilians – and he claimed to have sat on the sofa next to G.H.W. Bush as the bombs began falling in the first Gulf War (though Bush's diary version of the evening somehow excludes Graham, as does a White House video of Bush during the attack).

According to Bush's account, in a phone call the preceding week, Graham quoted poetry that compared the President to a messiah destined to save the world, and in the next breath called Saddam the Antichrist. Bush wrote that Graham suggested it was his historical mission to destroy Saddam.

Through the years, Graham's politics earned him some strange bedfellows. He praised Senator Joseph McCarthy and supported his assault on Constitutional rights, then scolded the Senate for censuring McCarthy for his excesses. He befriended oil men and arms manufacturers. He defended Nixon after Watergate,

right up to the disgraced president's resignation, and faced public scorn when tapes were aired that exposed the foul-mouthed President as a schemer and plotter.

Nixon's chief of staff, Bob Haldeman, reported on Graham's denigration of Jews in his posthumously published diary—a claim Graham vehemently denied until released tapes undid him in 2002. Caught with his prejudicial pants down, Graham claimed ignorance of the hour-and-a-half long conversation in which he led the anti-Semitic attack.

As reported by the Associated Press on March 2, 2002:

“Although I have no memory of the occasion, I deeply regret comments I apparently made in an Oval Office conversation with President Nixon . . . some 30 years ago,” Graham said in a statement released by his Texas public relations firm. “They do not reflect my views, and I sincerely apologize for any offense caused by the remarks.”

Whether or not the comments reflect Graham's views at the time or thirty years later, it is his defense that bears much closer scrutiny. What were we to make of a preacher who insisted that his words didn't reflect his beliefs? Were we to believe him then or later, on other matters?

Graham was a political operative, reporting to Kennedy on purported communist insurgencies in Latin America, turning over lists of activist Christians to the Republican party, conferring regularly with J. Edgar Hoover and networking with the CIA in South America and Vietnam. He was even assigned by Nixon's operatives to talk George Wallace out of a second run for the White House.

To accomplish the latter, he phoned Wallace as he was coming out of an anesthetic stupor after one of his numerous post-assassination-attempt surgeries. While the long suffering gunshot victim asked the minister to pray for him, the minister asked him not to make a third-party bid for the presidency. “I won't do anything to help McGovern,” Wallace replied.

There are many who would argue that the good that Graham did outweighs whatever political intrigue he embraced, and even the several wars he enthusiastically endorsed. To the extent that bringing people to Christ is of benefit to them, an untestable hypothesis, he was successful with his calls to come forward. He accrued hundreds of millions of dollars which were used to extend his ministry and thereby bring more people to “be saved,” which is self-justifying but fails as evidence of goodness.

Billy Graham Freeway

If Christian beliefs about the hereafter prove correct, we will all presumably discover what good he accomplished, or what chance for salvation we missed, in the sweet by and by.

In talking to one of his biographers, Graham recalled his mood during his fire and brimstone declamations, "I would feel as though I had a sword, a rapier, in my hand, and I would be slashing deeper and deeper into the consciences of the people before me, cutting away straight to their very souls."

In that regard, Graham's largest and most lasting monument is a highway cut through Beaucatcher Mountain, blasted through a majestic land form that once bisected Asheville, North Carolina. He helped convince recalcitrant landowners to permit the excavation and construction through the cut of the short stretch of Interstate highway subsequently named the Billy Graham Freeway.

Downwind residents report that the weather has permanently shifted due to the gaping mountain maw and the future of the highway that transects the city continues to be one of the most divisive issues in that southern metropolis.

"Straight to their very souls," indeed.

In every way, Graham was the spiritual father of today's right-wing religious leaders who so inhabit the national conversation. If he cloaked his suasion in public neutrality it was the hallmark of an era in which such intrusion was deemed unseemly. If today's practitioners are less abashed, it is in many ways reflective of the secure foundation Graham built within Republican and conservative circles.

Graham endorsed and courted Eisenhower and compared a militaristic State of the Union speech to the Sermon on the Mount, fanned anti-Catholic flames in the Nixon-Kennedy contest, backed Johnson and then Nixon in Vietnam, lobbied for arms sales to Saudi Arabia during the Reagan years, conveyed foreign threats and entreaties for Clinton and lent his imprimatur to G.W. Bush as he declared war on terrorism from the pulpit of the National Cathedral.

Billy Graham approved of warriors and war, weapons of mass destruction (in white, Christian hands) and covert operations. He publicly declaimed the righteousness of battle with enemies of American capitalism, abetted genocide in oil-rich Ecuador and surrounds and endorsed castration as punishment for rapists. A terrible swift sword for certain, and effective no doubt, but not much there in the way of turning the other cheek.

Graham will be cordially remembered by those who found solace in his golden promises and happy homilies, but the worldly blowback from his ministry is playing out in Iraq and Afghanistan, Chechnya and Korea, the Philippines and

Colombia – everywhere governments threaten human rights and pie in the sky is offered in lieu of daily bread.

In the words of Graham’s ministerial and secular adversary, Dr. King, “I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.”

Farewell Reverend Graham. Let justice roll.

Prize-winning investigative reporter Cecil Bothwell is author of *The Prince of War: Billy Graham’s Crusade for a Wholly Christian Empire*, (Brave Ulysses Books, 2007) and *Whale Falls: An exploration of belief and its consequences* (Brave Ulysses Books, 2010).

A Treacherous Crossing

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

By Kathy Kelly

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



The passengers had already risked the perilous journey from African shores to Yemen, a dangerous crossing that leaves people vulnerable to false promises, predatory captors, arbitrary detention and tortuous human rights violations. Sheer desperation for basic needs has driven hundreds of thousands of African migrants to Yemen. Many hope, upon arrival, they can eventually travel to prosperous Gulf countries further north where they might find work and some measure of security. But the desperation and fighting in southern Yemen were horrible enough to convince most migrants that boarded the smuggling boat on January 23rd to try and return to Africa.

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

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

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

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

Raytheon and Boeing are the companies that will primarily benefit from a deal

that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement coinciding with President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May.

Paul Ryan's Remarks

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

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

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

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

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

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

Potential starvation of their children terrifies people who can't acquire food for their families. Those who can't obtain safe drinking water face nightmarish prospects of dehydration or disease. Persons fleeing bombers, snipers, and armed

militias who might arbitrarily detain them shudder in fear as they try to devise escape routes.

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

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

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

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Former Ambassador Reflects on Current Events

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

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

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

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

Randy Credico: The last time we spoke, Craig, you were involved in a libel suit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rethinking Cultural Attitudes Towards Sex and Violence

The recent stories of sexual harassment being shared through the #MeToo campaign and allegations against Washington, Hollywood and Olympics bigwigs is an opportunity to correct harmful cultural perceptions of sex and violence, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Sigmund Freud published his book Civilization and Its Discontents in 1930. Having witnessed World War I, Freud knew that discontent was part and parcel of the human condition. The question he sought to answer was why that was so.

The short answer he came up with goes like this:

Human beings have instinctual drives such as sex and violent aggression – expressions of the Id. Left unchecked they would destroy any hope of settled life and high culture. According to Freud, civilization is the vehicle humans have created to control these inherent drives. Civilization and its various component cultures create rules and regulations– as well as feelings of remorse and guilt (expressions of a culturally attuned Superego) – that result in either suppression or sublimation of these primitive drives.

However, the results are not perfect, especially when it comes to controlling violent aggression. Indeed, as a consequence of the mass slaughter that was World War I, Freud came to the conclusion that human beings have a deep and permanent “death wish.” Even at less drastic levels of aggression, most societies experience frequent episodes of domestic violence, and the high degree of across-the-board neuroses.

In the Freudian scheme, control of the instinctual sexual drive (itself another form of aggression) is supposed to be a bit easier. Eros can be sublimated into the creation of beauty (art) as well as various intellectual achievements. Yet here too, what has been evolved are imperfect controls, especially when encapsulated in cultures that promote male domination.

If one does not like Freud's ideas, the whole issue of the activation and control of aggression and sex can be looked at in terms of brain function. In other words, our brains have evolved to promote survival and reproduction – originally in the pre-state, pre-tribal primate bands of distant prehistory. These tasks involve multiple parts of the cortex and amygdala, thalamus and hypothalamus, and so forth. There is one area of the brain that is particularly important in keeping instinct from running amok – the prefrontal cortex. Slow to mature (it is not fully on-line until one's mid-twenties) it is this part of the brain that exercises "executive function." It encourages you "to do the right, though perhaps harder, thing."

The Role of Culture

Despite the fact that the physical manner in which most individuals experience these primitive and instinctual drives is similar, culture makes a difference in how aggression and sexual urges are expressed. For instance, most of the world's cultures are patriarchal. That is, they overtly assign authority, both in the public realm and private, to men. Men are supposed to exercise that authority within the confines of their culture's rules and regulations. Sometimes these are relatively strict, damping down the "macho" impulses that rationalize aggressive physical and sexual behavior. More often they condone or even encourage "macho."

Keep in mind that the assignment of authority is the assignment of power, and power is the ability to act with aggression. Thus, in a patriarchy, it is with men that the issue of control is most immediate. If there are not sufficient mechanisms within such cultures that identify specific aggressive behavior as unacceptable, or promote public shaming, or just generate a heck of a lot of remorse and guilt, you are going to have high degree male recklessness – everything from schoolyard bullying to criminal violence, as well as the sexual "acting out" we now see as not just rape, but also sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment as a Worldwide Problem

The common definition of sexual harassment is as follows: "uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate (such as an employee or student)." The legal definition in the U.S. pertains chiefly to the workplace, where the unwelcome approach has the connotation of blackmail – something like, "Do this with me or you won't get promoted." There are also a myriad number of state and local laws that cover a wide range of situations. Many of these have been on the books only since the 1960s and, unfortunately, are not uniformly enforced.

It is hard to get exact numbers unless you start adding up the results of

hundreds of surveys and polls that address the whole range of harassment-related situations. And these only give you the approximate numbers of reported incidents. Time magazine had a series of particularly scandalous cases at Cornell and Harvard Universities in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and came up with an estimate that “as many as 18 million American females were harassed sexually while at work in 1979 and 1980.”

If this estimate is anywhere near accurate, the problem of sexual harassment has to be huge. We know it can't be just a U.S. problem. It has to be a worldwide phenomenon.

Sad to say, such a horrid diagnosis should not be surprising if sexual aggression stems from evolution-based drives *and* societal accommodation to this primal instinct through the encouragement of machismo male characteristics.

What To Do?

If in nothing else, Freud was correct in seeing that culture is, albeit imperfectly, our only plausible line of defense. It takes on this role by serving as a guide for the prefrontal cortex – a guide to the “right, though harder, thing to do.” The problem is that, to date, patriarchal cultures have not defined the protection of the subordinate gender as a necessarily “right” thing. They are more interested in directing male aggression into pathways compatible with patriarchal power structures. In other words, the guide is corrupt.

Although this is the way it is, it is not the way it has to be. It is possible to reshape cultural concepts. For better or worse, religions and empowered ideologies have been doing this for a long time. However, their targets have not been male aggression, sexual or otherwise.

But now we may have a window of time when this important subject can be rethought – rethought to the end of improving the cultural assistance given to the mature prefrontal cortex. Along these lines, here are some potential steps to consider. All should be pursued in a non-ideological way. Let's keep religion and politics out of these efforts, and let science and evolutionary awareness be our tutors.

– Educate both men and women about the nature of the primitive instincts they are subject to. As it is, most individuals grow up without having a clue about what they are experiencing. Explain the need to manage these instinctual urges in reasonable ways. Explain that this means maintaining responsible cultural values.

– Sexual egalitarianism should be implemented by law and then taught as “what is

right” from kindergarten through college. The gender biases inherent in patriarchy should be seen as part of an unfortunate past history – like racism.

– Devise instructional lessons to prepare young folks for serious relationships and marriage based on egalitarian principles. Such lessons should be at least as detailed as those needed to get a driver’s license.

– Use the media to create a popular cultural environment that strongly condemns sexual harassment and other forms of aggression. The media should encourage serious remorse among bullies and harassers.

Do these suggestions sound like some civil authority should be allowed to shape how we think? Sorry, but in every culture, past and present, something like that has always been the case. You can also safely assume that those primitive instincts have always been playing with your mind.

And what have all the age-old, status quo cultural rules brought us so far? Civilization? Well, perhaps. But it is a civilization that still suffers periodic outbreaks of aggressive violence and rationalizes a tradition of unwanted sexual behavior abetted by patriarchal values. Not surprisingly, current laws, as they reflect the current state of culture, haven’t been very effective holding either form of aggression back.

Now that the sexual harassment genie seems to have escaped the bottle, we can see the problem more clearly. It’s time to pursue serious culture renovation – to take on those primitive instincts and thoughtfully develop better, non-doctrinaire cultural ways to manage them. One thing is for sure, they are not going to go away on their own.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest; America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

Gazing at Iran Through a Distorted Glass

A truism about U.S. politics and media is that once a foreign leader or a country has been demonized everything written or said about the subject will be skewed to the negative, a rule reflecting Washington’s groupthink and careerism, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar notes about Iran.

By Paul R. Pillar

With any country that, like Iran, has been the subject of acrimonious debate in Washington, pronouncements by American observers about events in that country have more to do with politics here than with what is going on over there. So it has been with much of the spinning and interpreting of protests in Iranian streets during the past few days. Some guidelines for intelligent, responsible, and useful commentary on those protests are in order, and applicable no matter what are the policy preferences of whoever is commenting.

The first guideline is to apply a large dose of agnosticism to the question of where the protests are heading. The future course of popular unrest in any country is inherently difficult to predict. That future depends on the vicissitudes of emotion, the complex interplay of different issues and political forces, and the especially unpredictable ways in which minor incidents can spark much larger responses. A current trajectory cannot be extrapolated into the future, partly because of the effects of decisions not yet made. In the current Iranian case, security elements of the regime have refrained so far from using most of their capability to crack down on protesters, but have strongly hinted that the capability may yet be used. Such use would change the game being played in Iranian streets, but again with much uncertainty about where things would go from there.

Some qualities of the current protests make their future path especially unpredictable, even in comparison with the larger protests in Iran in 2009. There is no single movement with a recognizable leadership as there was with the Green Movement in the earlier disturbances. There is no single happening or trigger equivalent to the disputed presidential election in 2009. Diverse political elements have participated. It appears that some of the first protests in Mashhad were the work of hardliners apparently seeking to embarrass President Hassan Rouhani, but they were joined by economically disgruntled citizens of other political persuasions. The messages being chanted in the street also are diverse.

Domestic Economics

The diversity of the messages leads to another guideline, which is not to presume to know what is in the hearts and minds of protesters. Nor should it be presumed that what is chanted or is written on a protester's sign identifies the motivation behind the protests. American commentators who have pushed for confrontation with Iran have taken pains to point out how one theme voiced in the protests has been that resources ought to be spent back in Iran rather than for foreign adventurism. But inclusion of that message does not overturn the recurrent pattern—in country after country in addition to Iran—that, per Bill

Clinton's famous observation, it is the state of a nation's economy that most determines whether political support is won or lost. Most residents of provincial Iranian cities in which protests have occurred probably care little about the Syrian civil war or the balance of forces in northern Iraq. They care instead about unemployment and a stagnant standard of living. If a slogan about foreign adventurism is consistent with the economic grievances and it sounds like a point where the regime might be vulnerable, then it gets used.

Americans ought to find this easy to understand because we have had in the United States similar dynamics between economic discontent and political themes. Donald Trump molded a winning campaign with themes such as America having allowed foreigners to take advantage of it in ways that supposedly have had economic repercussions at home. But the Rust Belt voters who were swayed by Trump's message did not really care about whether bilateral trade deals were better than multilateral agreements or whether Europeans weren't paying their fair share of NATO's expenses, let alone about U.S. refueling of Saudi warplanes bombing Yemen. They cared about unemployment and a stagnant standard of living. And if Trump loses their support it will not be because, contrary to what he said in the campaign, he has not curbed foreign adventurism and has even expanded it. It instead will be because he did not bring back jobs and improve standards of living for working class Americans. Such dynamics are remarkably similar to what appears to be going on with much of the current popular unrest in Iran, which can be described as a working class protest in which many protesters have much in common with denizens of the Rust Belt.

Consistency is Key

Another guideline is that, however much knowledge one may or may not claim to have about what is going on in Iran, one at least should be logically (as well as morally) consistent. The protests have presented consistency challenges especially to those who have argued most strongly for confrontation with, and punishment of, Iran. The chief inconsistency is that those who have been most in favor of imposing more rather than fewer sanctions on Iran are also those who today are calling most loudly for supporting the economically disgruntled protesters in Iranian streets—who are among those most economically harmed by the sanctions.

Arguments that have long been used against the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement that restricts Iran's nuclear program, raise additional challenges to consistency. If the current protests are a good thing—and the aforementioned anti-Iran American hardliners seem downright excited about them—one needs to note that this is happening with the JCPOA having been in effect for two years. Wasn't that agreement, according to the

agreement's opponents, supposed to have given Iran a windfall that unduly and prematurely relieved economic pressure on Tehran? The opponents try to square this circle with the notion of the regime diverting the "windfall" to foreign adventurism while making citizens suffer. This notion usually gets conveyed without any supporting data about economics and fiscal policies (and Rouhani's policies have emphasized domestic economic improvement above all else). It also raises another inconsistency. If the current protests really are as much of a regime-shaking occurrence as some American hardliners contend, wouldn't any Iranian leader with at least half a brain and a desire to stay in power use the "windfall" to buy domestic support rather than wasting it away on foreign adventurism, if that really were the choice?

By treating the protests as a vehicle for pressuring the regime to change non-nuclear policies, the American hardliners also run into inconsistency with all their prior opposition to doing any business with the Iranian regime, of which opposition to the JCPOA has been a part. If this regime is as irredeemable and thoroughly dominated by hardline fanatics as the American hardliners have repeatedly portrayed it, who could possibly emerge from such a cauldron to respond positively to street protests? Thus we get intellectual contortions such as trying to argue in the space of a single paragraph that it was a mistake in the past to "be in the business of currying favor with the regime's 'moderates' " but that today the protests provide an occasion to "strengthen the arguments of pragmatists arguing for a change in policy".

Regardless of whether the eventual overall outcome of the current protests is good or bad from a U.S. point of view, it would be just as mistaken for supporters of the JCPOA to claim credit for whatever good comes out of them as for opponents to make such a claim. The JCPOA needs to stand or fall based on its intended purpose, which was to close all pathways to a possible Iranian nuclear weapon. The economic under-performance that has spawned discontent in Iran, as manifested in the current protests, has multiple sources. Economic mismanagement by the regime is one. Sanctions are another, including non-nuclear sanctions that the United States keeps in place today. Moreover, even the lifting of nuclear sanctions has not brought much of the hoped-for economic benefit to Iran, given uncertainty in the private sector—uncertainty the Trump administration has vigorously stoked—about the future of the JCPOA, with the private sector knowing of the U.S. Treasury's ability to punish even non-American businesses for any future sanctions transgressions. The Rouhani government also probably raised Iranian economic expectations to an unreachable level as it worked to sell the agreement over hardline Iranian opposition.

Dangers of Foreign Interference

Another guideline for American commentators of any persuasion is to be mindful that such commentary is not only part of an American debate but also is heard by Iranian ears. This includes ears in the regime, where, as with regimes everywhere, the perception that a foreign government is trying to overthrow you is a big disincentive to doing any business with that government or trusting its promises. Also listening are the protesters and other citizens of Iran. Regardless of the sympathy we have for them, American expressions of support will not be fuel for keeping the protests going. No would-be protester will go out in the street and risk arrest or worse because some U.S. leader encouraged him to do so.

The much more likely hazard is to taint Iranian opposition with the stain of foreign involvement. For any Iranian movement, a perception that the United States put it up to whatever it is doing is a political kiss of death. Those in the United States urging a more active encouragement of the protests dismiss this hazard by saying, "No matter what we say and do, the regime will seek to blame the United States for the protests." Of course it will; that's the sort of accusation almost any regime in such a situation will make. But that's beside the point. What matters is whether the United States makes such accusations appear credible, in the eyes of Iranians in the street and Iranians in general, by what it does and what it says.

Certainly there is a role for declaring strong support for the right of Iranians or any other people to express their grievances peacefully, and for condemning any use of force against such expression. The line between such declarations and a posture that gives credibility to the Iranian regime's accusations about foreign interference is admittedly thin. But the line exists, and Americans do no favors to the Iranian people by crossing it.

Finally, as the events in Iranian streets have gotten regime change juices flowing again back in the United States, those feeling the flow need to be careful what they wish for. They should bear in mind how hardliners apparently were in the forefront of getting the current protests going. They also should think about the likelihood that the Iranian politics and policies that would follow any harsh crackdown on protesters—which is still one of the possible next chapters in the current events—would likely be at least as unfavorable to U.S. interests as what Tehran exhibits now. In other words, change can be a change for the worse rather than for the better.

Also worthy of reflection is the absence of Green Movement-style leadership of the current protests, and more broadly of a credible alternative leadership for the nation that would be better than what Rouhani represents. The paucity of attractive alternatives for Americans to latch on to is demonstrated by how many

otherwise sane U.S. political figures have latched on to the terrorist-group-cum-cult known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which has little support inside Iran.

Even if a more attractive leadership were in the wings, the history of revolutions worldwide shows how frequently a moderate figure becomes an Alexander Kerensky, who gives way to more extreme and ruthless elements who hold power much longer. Iran itself has had its Kerenskys, in the persons of Mehdi Bazargan and Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, briefly-tenured leaders after the fall of the shah who lost out to the forces of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

If all this were not enough to give pause, there are more recent lessons in Iraq, where U.S.-fomented regime change boosted the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Libya, which is still divided and chaotic.

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Giving War Too Many Chances

As the new year begins, it is important for the U.S. to acknowledge its troubling history of global war-making, especially over the past two-decades, as Nicolas J.S. Davies delineates.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

I met John Lennon and Yoko Ono on Christmas Eve in 1969. I joined them and a small group of local peace activists in a Christmas fast for world peace in front of Rochester Cathedral in England, a short walk from where I lived with my family in Chatham Dockyard. I was 15 years old, and my father was the dockyard medical officer, responsible for the health and safety of the dockyard workers who maintained the U.K.'s new fleet of nuclear submarines.

John and Yoko arrived before midnight mass. We were all introduced and went in for the service. By the time we came out, thousands of people had heard John was there. He was still a Beatle and he was mobbed by a huge crowd, so he and Yoko decided they couldn't stay with us as planned. While most of our little group helped John back to their iconic white Rolls Royce, I and another boy not much older than me were left to shepherd a panicking Yoko back through the crowd to the car. They both made it, and we never saw them again. The next morning a florist came by with a huge box of white carnations, and we spent the rest of

our Christmas and Boxing Day handing flowers to passers-by and getting to know each other – the birth of what became the Medway and Maidstone Peace Action Group.

While the U.K. was not openly involved in the Vietnam War, it was deeply involved in the Cold War and the nuclear arms race, and watching the U.K.'s closest ally destroy Vietnam led many of my generation to question the Cold War assumptions about “good guys” and “bad guys” that we’d been raised on. John and Yoko became the de facto leaders of the peace movement, and their song “Give Peace a Chance” was a simple unifying anthem.

After two world wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War, we all wanted peace, but it seemed to be the one thing our leaders were not willing to try, claiming that the Cold War justified an endless arms race, and wars and coups wherever U.S. and British leaders thought they’d spotted a Red under somebody’s bed. That included many countries whose experiments with socialism were less advanced than in the U.K., where I grew up with a cradle to grave healthcare system, free education through university, a comprehensive welfare state and state-owned utilities, railways and major industries.

The peace dividend vs the power dividend

Once the Cold War ended, the justification for 50 years of massive military spending, global warfare and coups was finally over. Like U.S. allies, enemies and neighbors around the world, Americans breathed a sigh of relief and welcomed the “peace dividend.” Robert McNamara and Lawrence Korb, former cold warriors of both parties, testified to the Senate Budget Committee that the U.S. military budget could be cut in half from its FY1990 level over the next 10 years.

Committee chairman Senator Jim Sasser hailed “this unique moment in history” as “the dawn of the primacy of domestic economics.”

But the peace dividend was short-lived, trumped by what Carl Conetta of the Project for Defense Alternatives has dubbed the “power dividend,” the drive to exploit the end of the Cold War to consolidate and expand U.S. military power.

Influential voices linked to military industrial interests had a new refrain, essentially “Give War a Chance.” But of course, they didn’t put it so plainly:

– After the First Gulf War in 1991, President Bush I celebrated “kick(ing) the Vietnam syndrome,” and deployed U.S. pilots directly from Kuwait to the Paris Air Show to cash in on the marketing value of a war that had just killed tens of thousands of people in Iraq. The next 3 years set a new record for U.S. arms sales. The Pentagon later admitted that only 7% of the bombs and missiles dropped on Iraq were the “precision-guided” ones they showcased to TV viewers, and only 41% to 60% of those “precision” weapons hit their targets anyway. Iraq

was ruthlessly carpet bombed, but we were sold a high-tech dog and pony show.

- Despite surely being well aware of the reality behind the propaganda, Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz crowed to General Wesley Clark, “With the end of the Cold War, we can now use our military with impunity.”
- As the Clinton administration took over the reins of the U.S. war machine in 1992, Madeleine Albright challenged General Colin Powell on his “Powell Doctrine” of limited war, asking him, “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”
- Albright was appointed Secretary of State in 1997, mainstreaming new political pretexts for otherwise illegal wars such as “humanitarian intervention” and the “responsibility to protect.” But despite the steady diet of war propaganda, Albright was drowned out by protests from the audience when she threatened war on Iraq at a town hall meeting in Columbus in 1998.
- Clinton’s 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review declared, “When the interests at stake are vital... we should do whatever it takes to defend them, including, when necessary, the unilateral use of military power. U.S. vital national interests include, but are not limited to... preventing the emergence of a hostile regional coalition... (and) ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources.” But as the U.K. Foreign Office’s senior legal adviser told his government during the Suez crisis in 1956, “The plea of vital interest, which has been one of the main justifications for wars in the past, is indeed the very one which the UN Charter was intended to exclude as a basis for armed intervention in another country.”
- After a failed CIA coup in 1996 betrayed every CIA agent in Iraq to the Iraqi government, precluding a second coup attempt, the newly formed neoconservative Project for the New American Century began pushing for war on Iraq. The 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, threatening “regime change” through the use of military force, passed Congress with only 38 Nays in the House and unanimous consent in the Senate.
- When U.K. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told Albright his government was having trouble “with our lawyers” over NATO’s illegal plan to attack Yugoslavia and annex Kosovo, she told him it should just “get new lawyers.”
- Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations a few weeks before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 2000, Hillary Clinton derided recent U.S. wars in Panama, Kuwait and Yugoslavia as “splendid little wars” and called for what a banking executive in the audience described as a “new imperialism.”
- Samantha Power popularized the idea that the use of U.S. military force

could have prevented the genocide in Rwanda, an assumption challenged by experts on genocide (see "A Solution From Hell") but which has served ever since as a powerful political argument for the U.S. uses of military force.

Afghanistan

After pleading with the American people to "Give War a Chance" for a decade, U.S. political leaders seized on the crimes of September 11th, 2001 to justify an open-ended "global war on terror."

Many Americans approved of attacking Afghanistan as an act of self defense, but of course it was not Afghanistan or the Taliban that committed the crimes of September 11th. As former Nuremberg prosecutor Ben Ferencz told NPR at the time, "It is never a legitimate response to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done. If you simply retaliate en masse by bombing Afghanistan, let us say, or the Taliban, you will kill many people who don't approve of what has happened."

Sixteen years later, 16,500 U.S. troops soldier on through the graveyard of empires, while U.S. warplanes have dropped 3,852 bombs and missiles on Afghanistan since Mr. Trump took office. No serious study has been conducted to estimate how many hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been killed since 2001.

As Matthew Hoh wrote in his resignation letter as he quit his post as the U.S. Political Officer in Zabul Province in Afghanistan in 2009,

"The Pashtun insurgency, which is composed of multiple, seemingly infinite local groups, is fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies. ...I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul."

Or as an Afghan taxi driver in Vancouver told me, "We defeated the Persians in the 18th century, the British in the 19th century and the Russians in the 20th.

Now, with NATO, we're fighting 29 countries at once, but we'll defeat them too." Who would doubt it?

Today, after 16 years of occupation by up to 100,000 U.S. troops, thousands of deadly "kill or capture" night raids by U.S. special operations forces and over 60,000 bombs and missiles dropped on Afghanistan on the orders of 3 U.S. presidents, the corrupt U.S.-backed government in Kabul governs less territory today than at any time since before the U.S. invasion.

The U.S. war on Afghanistan is the longest war in U.S. history. There must be U.S. troops in Afghanistan today whose fathers were fighting there 16 years ago. This isn't giving war a chance. It's giving it a blank check, in blood and money.

Iraq

When President Bush II unveiled a "national security strategy" based on a flagrantly illegal doctrine of preemptive war in 2002, Senator Edward Kennedy called it a "call for 21st century imperialism that no other country can or should accept." The rest of the world rejected the U.S. case for war on Iraq in the UN Security Council and 30 million people took to the streets in the largest global demonstrations in history. But the U.S. and U.K. invaded Iraq anyway.

The U.K.'s role in the invasion was thrown into limbo when Admiral Michael Boyce, the Chief of the Defense Staff, told his government he could not give orders to invade Iraq without written confirmation that it would be legal. It took Tony Blair and his cronies five full days of grappling with their legal advisers before one of them, Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, who was not even an international lawyer, was willing to contradict what he and all the U.K.'s legal advisers had consistently and repeatedly told their government, that the invasion of Iraq would be a criminal act of aggression.

Four days later, the U.S. and U.K. committed the war crime of the new century, unleashing a war that has killed a million innocent people and left Iraq mired in bloody violence and chaos for 14 years and counting.

When the people of Iraq rose in resistance to the illegal invasion and occupation of their country, the U.S. launched a bloody "counterinsurgency" campaign. As U.S. forces destroyed Fallujah and Ramadi, U.S. officials in Baghdad recruited, trained and ran Interior Ministry death squads who tortured and assassinated tens of thousands of men and boys to ethnically cleanse Baghdad and other areas on a sectarian basis.

The most recent U.S. atrocity in Iraq was the massacre of an estimated 40,000 civilians in Mosul by U.S., Iraqi, French and other "coalition" forces. The U.S.-led bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria has dropped 104,000 bombs and missiles since 2014, making it the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since the American War in Vietnam. Iraqi government death squads once again prowl through the ruins of Mosul, torturing and summarily executing anyone they identify as a suspected Islamic State fighter or sympathizer.

In Iraq, "Give war a chance" does not mean, "It didn't work here. Let's try it somewhere else." It means, "Keep bombarding Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul and

massacring their people over and over again until there is nothing left but rubble and graveyards.” That is why 9,123 U.S. troops remain deployed in a land of rubble and graveyards in the 15th year of an illegal war.

Somalia

Independent Somalia was formed from the former colonies of British and Italian Somaliland in 1970. After initially investing in literacy and infrastructure, Said Barre and his government built the largest army in Africa, supported first by the U.S.S.R. and then by the U.S., as it waged a long war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden, an ethnically Somali region of Ethiopia. In 1991, Barre was ousted in a civil war and the central government collapsed. UN and U.S. military interventions failed to restore any kind of order and foreign troops were withdrawn in 1995.

For the next 11 years, a dozen warlords ruled small fiefdoms while the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the internationally recognized government, hunkered down in Baidoa, the sixth largest city. But the country was not as violent as some other parts of Africa. Somalia is an ancient society and some order was preserved by traditional systems of law and government, including a unique system of customary law called Xeer, which has existed and evolved in Somalia since the 7th century.

In 2006, these various local authorities came together and formed the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). With the support of one of the strongest warlords, they defeated other warlords, including ones backed by the CIA, in fierce fighting in the capital, Mogadishu, and soon controlled the southern half of the country.

People who knew Somalia well hailed the ICU as a hopeful development and tried to reassure the Bush administration that it was not a danger.

But the threat of peace breaking out in Somalia was too much for the “give war a chance” crowd to stomach. The U.S. backed an Ethiopian invasion, supported by U.S. air strikes and special operations forces, plunging Somalia back into violence and chaos that continues to this day. The Ethiopian invaders drove the ICU out of Mogadishu, and it split into factions, with some of its leaders going into exile and others forming new armed groups, not least Al-Shabaab [an offshoot of Al Qaeda], to resist the Ethiopian invasion.

After Ethiopia agreed to withdraw its forces in 2008, a coalition government was formed by TFG and ICU leaders but did not include Al-Shabaab, which by then controlled large areas of the country. The government has been fighting Al-Shabaab ever since, supported by an African Union force and currently at least 289 U.S. special operations forces and other U.S. troops. The government has made gains, but Al-Shabaab still controls some areas. As it has been pushed

back militarily, Al-Shabaab has launched devastating terrorist attacks in Somalia and Kenya, where the U.S. now also has 212 troops deployed. Neighboring Djibouti hosts 4,715 U.S. troops at the largest U.S. base in Africa.

The U.S. is doggedly expanding its militarized counterterrorism strategy in Africa, with at least 7,271 U.S. troops in 47 countries as of September 30th.

But a new body of research has confirmed what independent analysts have long believed, that it is precisely these kind of operations that drive civilians into armed resistance in the first place. A recent survey of 500 African militants by the UN Development Program found that the “tipping-point” that decided 71% of them to join a group like Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram or Al Qaeda was the killing or detention of a family member or friend in U.S.-led or U.S.-model “counterterrorism” operations.

So the circular logic of U.S. counterterrorism policy uses the emergence and growth of groups like Al-Shabaab as a pretext to expand the operations that are fueling their growth in the first place, turning more and more civilians into combatants and their homes and communities into new U.S. battlefields, to “give war a chance” in country after country.

Honduras

On June 28th 2009, President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras was woken in the early hours of the morning by soldiers in combat gear bursting into his official residence. They hauled him away at gunpoint in his pajamas, bundled him into a car and onto a plane to Costa Rica. President Obama immediately called the coup a coup and reaffirmed that Zelaya was still the democratically-elected president of Honduras, appearing to adopt the same position as every government in Latin America, the European Union and the UN General Assembly.

But, in the coming days, as Hillary Clinton has since admitted, she went to work to push for a new election in Honduras that would, as she put it, “render the question of Zelaya moot,” by making the coup against him a *fait accompli* and allowing the coup regime of Roberto Micheletti to organize the new election.

Despite Obama’s statement and Wikileaks’ release of cables in which the U.S. Ambassador also called this an illegal coup, the U.S. never officially recognized that a coup had taken place, avoiding the cut-off of military aid to the post-coup government that was required under U.S. federal law and any further action to restore the democratically-elected president. In the coming years, Honduras, which was already the murder capital of the world, became even more dangerous as labor organizers and activists of all stripes were killed with impunity by the post-coup government’s death squads. Environmental activist Berta Cáceres’ murder caused worldwide outrage, but she is one of hundreds of

activists and organizers killed.

The role of Secretary Clinton and the U.S. government in consolidating the results of the coup in Honduras should be seen in the context of the U.S.'s dominant historic role in Honduras, the original "banana republic," 70% of whose exports are still sold to the United States. Honduras currently hosts 529 U.S. military personnel, far more than any other country in the Western hemisphere, and they are deeply embedded with the Honduran military which committed the coup.

In the 1980s, under Ambassador John Negroponte, who eventually became Director of National Intelligence, the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa reportedly hosted the largest CIA station in the world, from where the CIA ran its covert war against Nicaragua, death squads that killed even American nuns with impunity in El Salvador and an outright genocide in Guatemala. With this history of U.S. military and CIA involvement in Honduras, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the CIA was secretly involved in planning the coup against Zelaya.

The 2009 coup in Honduras has now come home to roost, as even the historically U.S.-controlled Organization of American States has demanded a rerun of the latest rigged election and Honduras's feared Cobra paramilitary police have refused to repress pro-democracy protesters. The opposition party, the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship, which appears to have won the most votes in the election, is a coalition of left and right against the post-coup government. How far will Trump and the U.S. go to rescue Clinton's 2009 campaign in Honduras? Will it ask us to "give war another chance?"

Yemen

From 897 (not a typo) until 1962, most of Yemen was ruled by the Zaidi Imams.

The Zaidis follow a branch of Shiite Islam, but in Yemen they coexist and worship in the same mosques as Sunnis. The Houthis, who rule most of Yemen today, are also Zaidis. The last Zaidi Imam was overthrown by a republican coup in 1962, but, with Saudi support, he fought a civil war until 1970. Yes, you read that right. In the 1960s, the Saudis backed the Zaidi royalists in the Yemeni civil war. Now they call the Zaidis apostates and Iranian stooges and are waging a genocidal war to bomb and starve them to death.

At the peak of the previous civil war, 70,000 Egyptian troops fought on the republican side in Yemen, but the 1967 Arab-Israeli War changed the priorities of Arab countries on both sides. In February 1968, royalist forces lifted their siege of Sana'a and the two sides began peace talks, which led to a peace agreement and international recognition of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1970.

Meanwhile, also in 1967, a popular armed rebellion forced the U.K. to withdraw from its colony in Aden, which formed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a Marxist state and Soviet ally. When the Cold War ended, the two Yemens merged to form a united Republic of Yemen in 1990. Ali Abdallah Saleh, the president of North Yemen since 1978, became president of the united Yemen and ruled until 2011.

Saleh's repressive government alienated many sectors of Yemeni society, and the Zaidi Houthis launched an armed rebellion in their northern homeland in 2004.

The Zaidis and other Shia Muslims make up about 45% of the population and Zaidis ruled the country for centuries, so they have always been a force to be reckoned with.

At the same time, the new Obama administration launched a campaign of cruise missile and drone strikes and special forces operations against the fledgling Al Qaeda faction in the country and increased military aid to Saleh's government.

A U.S. drone strike assassinated Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, and another strike two weeks later murdered his American son, 16-year-old Abdulrahman. Like militarized U.S. counterterrorism campaigns in other countries, U.S. attacks have predictably killed hundreds of civilians, fueling the growth of Al Qaeda in Yemen.

Arab Spring protests and political turmoil forced Saleh to resign in November 2011. His deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, was elected in February 2012 to head a unity government that would draw up a new constitution and organize a new election in two years. After Hadi failed to hold an election or step down as president, the Houthis invaded the capital in September 2014, placed him under house arrest and demanded that he complete the political transition.

Hadi and his government rejected the Houthis' demands and simply resigned in January 2015, so the Houthis formed a Revolutionary Council as an "interim authority." Hadi fled to Aden, his hometown, and then to Saudi Arabia, which launched a savage bombing campaign and naval blockade against Yemen on Hadi's behalf. The U.S. provides most of the weapons, munitions, satellite intelligence and in-air refueling and is a vital member of the Saudi-led coalition, but of course U.S. media and politicians downplay the U.S. role.

The Saudi-U.S. coalition's bombing campaign has killed at least ten thousand civilians, probably many more, while a naval blockade and the bombing of ports have reduced the population to a state of near-starvation. Hadi's forces have recaptured Aden and an area around it, but they have failed to defeat the Houthis in the rest of the country.

U.S.-made bombs keep hitting markets, hospitals and other civilian targets in

Yemen. Western military trainers regard the Saudi armed forces as more or less untrainable, due mainly to Saudi Arabia's rigid class and tribal hierarchy. The officer corps, some of whom are members of the royal family, are beyond criticism, so there is no way to correct mistakes or enforce discipline. So Saudi pilots bomb indiscriminately from high altitude, and will keep doing so unless and until the U.S. stops selling them munitions and withdraws its military and diplomatic complicity in this genocidal war.

Aid agencies keep warning that millions of Yemenis are close to starvation, but neither Saudi nor U.S. officials seem to care. The normalization of war and the culture of apathy nurtured by 16 years of American wars that have killed millions of people in a dozen countries have left U.S. officials supremely cynical, but their cynicism will be tested in 2018 as the predictable results of this "made in the U.S.A." humanitarian catastrophe unfold. The U.S. propaganda machine will also be tested as it keeps trying to pin all the blame on the Saudis.

Libya

Muammar Gaddafi was a favorite villain of the West and an ally of the U.S.S.R., Cuba, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, the PLO, the IRA and the Polisario Front in Western Sahara. Gaddafi created a unique form of direct democracy, and he used Libya's oil wealth to provide free healthcare and education and to give Libya the 5th highest GDP per capita in Africa and the highest development rating in Africa on the UN's HDI index, which measures health and education as well as income.

Gaddafi also used Libya's wealth to fund projects to give African countries more control of their own natural resources, like a Libyan-funded factory in Liberia to manufacture and export tire grade rubber instead of raw rubber. He also co-founded the African Union in 2002, which he envisioned growing into a military alliance and a common market with a single currency.

Militant Islamists within the military tried but failed to assassinate Gaddafi in 1993. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), formed by Libyans who had fought with CIA- and Saudi-backed forces in Afghanistan, was paid by the U.K.'s MI6 intelligence agency and Osama Bin-Laden to also try to kill him in 1996.

The U.K. gave asylum to some of LIFG's members, most of whom settled among the large Libyan community in Manchester.

The U.K. banned LIFG in 2005 and confiscated its members' passports due to its links with Al Qaeda. But that all changed again in 2011, their passports were returned, and MI6 helped many of them travel back to Libya to join the "NATO rebels." One LIFG member, Ramadan Abedi, took his 16-year old son Salman with

him to Libya. Six years later, Salman struck his own blow for his family's Islamist ideology, carrying out a suicide bombing that killed 23 young music fans at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in May 2017.

Western leaders' eagerness to overthrow Gaddafi led France, the U.K., the U.S. and their NATO and Arab royalist allies to exploit a UN Security Council Resolution that authorized the use of force to protect civilians in Libya to overthrow the government, rejecting an African Union initiative to resolve the crisis peacefully.

The UN resolution called for an "immediate ceasefire" in Libya, but also authorized a "no-fly zone," which became a pretext for bombing Libya's military and civilian infrastructure with 7,700 bombs and missiles, and secretly deploying CIA officers and British, French and Qatari special operations forces to organize and lead Libyan rebel forces on the ground.

Qatar's Chief of Staff, Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Atiya, told AFP, "We were among them and the numbers of Qataris on the ground were in the hundreds in every region. Training and communications had been in Qatari hands. Qatar... supervised the rebels' plans because they are civilians and did not have enough military experience. We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces."

Qatari forces were even spotted leading the final assault on Libya's Bab al-Aziziya military headquarters in Tripoli.

After taking Tripoli, NATO and its Libyan and Qatari allies cut off food, water and electricity to the people of Sirte and Bani Walid as they bombarded them for weeks. The combination of aerial, naval and artillery bombardment, starvation and thirst on these civilian populations made a final, savage mockery of UNSCR 1973's mandate to protect civilians.

Once the U.S. and its allies had destroyed Libya's government, they abandoned it to chaos and civil war that still rage on six years later. Two competing governments control different parts of the country, while local militias control many smaller areas. Since 2011, human rights groups have reported that thousands of black Libyans and sub-Saharan Africans have suffered arbitrary detention and appalling abuse at the hands of the Libyan militias that the U.S. and its allies helped to take over the country. News reports of Africans being sold in slave markets in Libya are only the latest outrage.

As Libya struggles to dig its way out of the endless chaos the U.S. and its allies plunged it into, the U.S. has more or less washed its hands of the crisis in Libya. In 2016, U.S. foreign aid to Libya was only \$27 million.

Syria

The U.S. role in the civil war in Syria is a case study in how a CIA covert operation can fuel a conflict and destabilize a country to create pretexts for U.S. military intervention. The CIA began organizing the transport of fighters and weapons from Libya to Turkey in late 2011, as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were militarizing an uprising in Syria that grew out of Arab Spring protests earlier in the year. British and French special operations forces provided military training in Turkey, and the CIA managed the infiltration of fighters and the distribution of weapons across the Syrian border.

The Syrian government's repression contributed to the transition from peaceful protests to an armed uprising. But the primarily leftist groups that organized the political protests in 2011 were committed to opposing violence, sectarianism and foreign intervention. They have always blamed Syria's descent into war mainly on the foreign powers who supported the small Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and funneled more extreme foreign-based Islamist forces and thousands of tons of weapons into the country to ignite a full-scale civil war.

In 2012, as Kofi Annan tried to negotiate a ceasefire and a political transition in Syria, the U.S. and its allies poured in foreign fighters and heavier weapons and pledged even greater support to rebel forces at three Orwellian "Friends of Syria" conferences. One of these was timed to coincide with the date when Annan's ceasefire was to take effect, and their new pledges of weapons, money and support for the rebels were a flagrant move to undermine the ceasefire.

After Annan eventually got all sides to agree on a peace plan in Geneva on June 30th 2012, on the understanding that it would then be codified in a UN Security Council Resolution, the U.S. and its allies went back to New York and inserted new conditions and triggers for sanctions and military action in the resolution, leading to a Russian veto. Annan's Geneva Communique has been eclipsed by 5 more years of war and equally fruitless Geneva II, Geneva III and Geneva IV peace conferences.

Annan quit a month later and was characteristically guarded in his public statements. But UN officials told the Atlantic in 2013 that Annan blamed the U.S. government for the failure of his mission. "The U.S. couldn't even stand by an agreement that the Secretary of State had signed in Geneva," said one of Annan's closest aides. "He quit in frustration."

After shipping at least 2,750 tons of weapons from Libya to Turkey in 2011 and 2012, including howitzers, RPGs and sniper rifles, the CIA began scouring the Balkans for weapons left over from the wars in the 1990s that the Saudis and Qataris could buy to flood into Syria through Turkey and Jordan. They shipped in up to 8,000 tons of weapons on flights from Croatia by March 2013.

Since then, the Saudis have bought more weapons from 8 different Balkan countries, as well as 15,000 TOW anti-tank missiles directly from the U.S. for \$1.1 billion in December 2013. That was despite U.S. officials admitting as early as October 2012 that most of the weapons shipped into Syria had gone to "hardline Islamic jihadists." Investigators in the Balkans report that the Saudis made their largest purchases ever in 2015, including brand new weapons straight off the production line. Only 60% of these weapons had been delivered by early 2017, meaning that the flood of weapons will continue as long as the CIA keeps facilitating it and U.S. allies like Turkey and Jordan keep acting as conduits.

The main innovation in U.S. war-making under the Obama administration was a doctrine of covert and proxy war that avoided heavy U.S. casualties at the expense of a reliance on aerial bombardment, drone killings, a huge expansion of deadly special forces operations and the use of foreign proxy forces. In every case, this fueled the global explosion of violence and chaos unleashed by Bush, and the main victims were millions of innocent civilians in country after country.

U.S. support for Al Qaeda splinter groups like Jabhat al-Nusra (now rebranded Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) and Islamic State turned the U.S. "war on terror" on its head. Only ten years after September 11th, the U.S. was ready to support these groups to destabilize Libya and Syria, where the CIA was looking for pretexts for war and regime change. The U.S. only reverted to its "war on terror" narrative after U.S. and allied support had built up these groups to the point that they could invade Iraq and take over its second largest city and a large swath of the country.

The U.S. covert proxy war in Syria led to the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since Vietnam, which has reduced several cities in Iraq and Syria to rubble and killed tens of thousands of civilians; a civil war in Syria that has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians; and a refugee crisis that has overwhelmed U.S. allies in the Middle East and Europe. After 6 years of war, Syria remains fragmented and mired in chaos. The Syrian government has regained control of many areas, but the future remains very dangerous and uncertain for the people of Syria. The U.S. currently has at least 1,723 troops on the ground in Syria, without any legal basis to be there, as well as 2,730 in Jordan and 2,273 in Turkey.

Ukraine

President Yanukovich of Ukraine was overthrown in a violent coup in February 2014. Originally peaceful protests in the Maidan, or central square, in Kiev had gradually become dominated by the extreme right-wing Svoboda Party and,

since November 2013, by a shadowy new group called Right Sector. These groups displayed Nazi symbols, fought with police and eventually invaded the Ukrainian parliament building, prompting Yanukovich to flee the country.

On February 4th, 2014, leaked audio of a conversation between U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland revealed U.S. plans for a coup to remove Yanukovich and install U.S. favorite Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Prime Minister. Nuland and Pyatt used language like, “glue this thing,” “midwife this thing” and “we could land jelly side up on this thing if we move fast,” as well as the more widely reported “Fuck the EU,” who they didn’t expect to support their plan.

On February 18th, Right Sector led 20,000 protesters on a march to the parliament building. They attacked police with Molotov cocktails, stormed and occupied government buildings and the police attacked the protest camp in the Maidan. As running battles with the police continued over the next few days, an estimated 75 people were killed, including 10 police and soldiers. Mysterious snipers were reported firing from Philharmonic Hall and a hotel overlooking the Maidan, shooting at police and protesters.

Yanukovich and his government held meetings with opposition leaders, and the EU sent the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland to mediate the crisis. On February 21st, Yanukovich agreed to hold new presidential and parliamentary elections before the end of the year.

But the protesters, now led by Svoboda and Right Sector, were not satisfied and took over the parliament building. Right Sector had broken into an armory in Lviv and seized assault rifles and pistols, and the police no longer resisted. On February 22nd, the parliament failed to make a quorum (338 of 447 members), but the 328 members present voted to remove Yanukovich from office and hold a new election in May. Yanukovich issued defiant statements and refused to resign, then fled to Russia.

Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine refused to accept the results of the coup. The Crimean parliament organized a referendum, in which 97% voted to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, which Crimea had been part of since 1783. As an administrative matter, Khrushchev had placed Crimea within the Ukrainian SSR in the 1950s, but when the USSR broke up, 94% of Crimeans voted to become an autonomous republic and 83% voted to keep dual Russian and Ukrainian citizenship.

Russia accepted the result of the referendum and now governs Crimea. The greatest dangers to Russia from the coup in Kiev were that Ukraine would join NATO and Russia would lose its most strategic naval base at Sevastopol on the

Black Sea. NATO issued a declaration in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO.” Also in 2008, Ukraine threatened not to renew the lease on the base at Sevastopol, which was due to expire in 2017, but it was eventually extended to 2042.

The UN has not recognized Russia’s reintegration of Crimea, and the U.S. has called it a violation of international law. But given the history and autonomous status of Crimea, and the importance of Sevastopol to Russia, it was an understandable and predictable response to the illegal U.S.-planned coup in Ukraine. It is the height of hypocrisy for U.S. officials to suddenly pose as champions of international law, which U.S. policy has systematically ignored, violated and undermined since the 1980s.

Russian-speaking majorities in Eastern Ukraine also declared independence from Ukraine as the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and appealed for Russian support, which Russia has covertly provided, although the extent of it is hotly debated. There were also large protests against the coup in Odessa on the Black Sea, and 42 protesters were killed when a Right Sector mob attacked them and set fire to the Trades Union building where they took refuge.

With the Ukrainian military unable or unwilling to launch a civil war against its Russian-speaking compatriots in the East, the post-coup government recruited and trained a new “National Guard” to do so. It was soon reported that the Azov Battalion and other National Guard units were linked to Svoboda and Right Sector, and that they were still displaying Nazi symbols as they assaulted Russian-speaking areas in Eastern Ukraine. In 2015, the Azov Battalion was expanded to a 1,000-strong Special Operations Regiment.

The civil war in Ukraine has killed more than 10,000 people. The Minsk agreements between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany in September 2014 and February 2015 established a tenuous ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons by both sides, but the political problems persist, fueling outbreaks of fighting. The U.S. has now agreed to send Ukraine Javelin anti-tank missiles and other heavier weapons, which are likely to reignite heavier fighting and complicate political negotiations.

Giving Peace a Chance?

Giving war a chance has not worked out well, to put it mildly, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Honduras, Yemen, Libya, Syria or Ukraine. All remain mired in violence and chaos caused by U.S. invasions, bombing campaigns, coups and covert operations. In every case, U.S. policy decisions have either made these countries’ problems worse or are entirely responsible for the incredible problems afflicting them. Many of those decisions were illegal or criminal

under U.S. and/or international law. The human cost to millions of innocent people is a historic tragedy that shames us all. In every case, the U.S. could have made different decisions, and in every case, the U.S. can still make different decisions.

As an American general once observed, "When the only tool you've got is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." The allocation of most of our federal budget to military spending both deprives the U.S. of other "tools" and creates political pressures to use the one we have already paid so much for, as implied in Albright's question to Powell in 1992.

In Mr. Trump's new national security strategy, he promised Americans that he will "preserve peace through strength." But the U.S. is not at peace today. It is a nation at war across the world. The U.S. has 291,000 troops stationed in 183 foreign countries, amounting to a global military occupation. It has deployed special operations troops on secret combat and training missions to 149 countries in 2017 alone. It has dropped 39,000 bombs and missiles on Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since Trump took office, and the U.S.- and Iraqi-led assault on Mosul alone killed an estimated 40,000 civilians. Pretending we are at peace and vowing to preserve it by diverting more of our resources to the military industrial complex is not a national security strategy. It is an Orwellian deception taken straight from the pages of *1984*.

At the dawn of 2018, nobody could accuse the American public of not giving war a chance. We have let successive presidents talk us into war over each and every international crisis, most of which were caused or fueled by U.S. aggression and militarism in the first place, in the belief that they may have finally found an enemy they can defeat and a war that will somehow make life better for somebody somewhere. But they haven't.

As we look forward to a new year, surely it is time to try something different and finally "Give Peace a Chance." My 15-year old self was willing to spend Christmas fasting on the cold steps of a church to do that in 1969. What can you do to give peace a chance in 2018?

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Remaining Peaceful Was Their Choice

Despite early efforts at peaceful protest, Yemeni civilians face the reality of another year of devastating warfare inflicted by Saudi- and U.S.-led forces, as Kathy Kelly describes.

By Kathy Kelly

People living now in Yemen's third largest city, Taiz, have endured unimaginable circumstances for the past three years. Civilians fear to go outside lest they be shot by a sniper or step on a land mine. Both sides of a worsening civil war use Howitzers, Kaytushas, mortars and other missiles to shell the city. Residents say no neighborhood is safer than another, and human rights groups report appalling violations, including torture of captives. On Dec. 26th, 2017, a Saudi-led coalition bomber killed between 20 and 50 people in a crowded marketplace.

Before the civil war developed, the city was regarded as the official cultural capital of Yemen, a place where authors and academics, artists and poets chose to live. Taiz was home to a vibrant, creative youth movement during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. Young men and women organized massive, yet peaceful demonstrations to protest the enrichment of entrenched elites as ordinary people struggled to survive.

Peaceful Protest

The young people were exposing the roots of one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world today. They were sounding an alarm about the receding water tables which made wells ever harder to dig and were crippling the agricultural economy. They were similarly distressed over unemployment. When starving farmers and shepherds moved to cities, the young people could see how the increased population would overstress already inadequate systems for sewage, sanitation and health care delivery. They protested their government's cancellation of fuel subsidies and the skyrocketing prices which resulted. They clamored for a refocus on policy away from wealthy elites and toward creation of jobs for high school and university graduates.

Despite their misery, they steadfastly opted for unarmed, nonviolent struggle.

Dr. Sheila Carapico, an historian who has closely followed Yemen's modern history, noted the slogans adopted by demonstrators in Taiz and in Sana'a, in 2011: 'Remaining Peaceful Is Our Choice,' and 'Peaceful, Peaceful, No to Civil War.'

Carapico adds that some called Taiz the epicenter of the popular uprising. "The city's relatively educated cosmopolitan student body entertained demonstration participants with music, skits, caricatures, graffiti, banners and other artistic embellishments. Throngs were photographed: men and women together; men and women separately, all unarmed."

In December of 2011, 150,000 people walked nearly 200 kilometers from Taiz to Sana'a, promoting their call for peaceful change. Among them were tribal people who worked on ranches and farms. They seldom left home without their rifles, but had chosen to set aside their weapons and join the peaceful march.

Yet, those who ruled Yemen for over thirty years, in collusion with Saudi Arabia's neighboring monarchy which fiercely opposed democratic movements anywhere near its borders, negotiated a political arrangement meant to co-opt dissent while resolutely excluding a vast majority of Yemenis from influence on policy. They ignored demands for changes that might be felt by ordinary Yemenis and facilitated instead a leadership swap, replacing the dictatorial President Ali Abdullah Saleh with Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, his vice-president, as an unelected president of Yemen.

The U.S. and neighboring petro-monarchies backed the powerful elites. At a time when Yemenis desperately needed funding to meet the needs of starving millions, they ignored the pleas of peaceful youths calling for demilitarized change, and poured funding into "security spending" – a misleading notion which referred to further military buildup, including the arming of client dictators against their own populations.

And then the nonviolent options were over, and civil war began.

The Nightmare of War

Now, the nightmare of famine and disease those peaceful youths anticipated has become a horrid reality, and their city of Taiz is transformed into a battlefield.

What could we wish for Taiz? Surely, we wouldn't wish the terror plague of aerial bombardment to cause death, mutilation, destruction and multiple traumas. We wouldn't wish for shifting battle lines to stretch across the city and the rubble in its blood-marked streets. I think most people in the U.S. wouldn't wish such horror on any community and wouldn't want people in Taiz to be singled out for further suffering.

We could instead build massive campaigns demanding a U.S. call for a permanent ceasefire and an end of all weapon sales to any of the warring parties. But, if the U.S. continues to equip the Saudi-led coalition, selling bombs to Saudi

Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and refueling Saudi bombers in midair so they can continue their deadly sorties, people in Taiz and throughout Yemen will continue to suffer.

The beleaguered people in Taiz will anticipate, every day, the sickening thud, ear-splitting blast or thunderous explosion that could tear apart the body of a loved one, or a neighbor, or a neighbors' child; or turn their homes to masses of rubble, and alter their lives forever or end their lives before the day is through.

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