

Putin Claims Strategic Parity, Respect

Vladimir Putin's announcement of new weapons systems to achieve nuclear parity was the result of the erosion of arms control regimes, such as the ill-advised U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty in 2002, Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

Russian President Vladimir Putin's State-of-the-Nation speech Thursday represents a liminal event in the East-West strategic balance – and an ominous one.

That the strategic equation is precarious today comes through clearly in Putin's words. The U.S. and Russia have walked backwards over the threshold of sanity first crossed in the right direction by their predecessors in 1972 with the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Amid the "balance of terror" that reigned pre-1972, sensible statesmen on both sides concluded and implemented the ABM treaty which, in effect, guaranteed "mutual assured destruction" – the (altogether fitting) acronym was MAD – if either side attempted a nuclear attack on the other. MAD might not sound much better than "balance of terror," but the ABM treaty introduced a significant degree of stability for 30 years.

The treaty itself was the result of painstaking negotiation with considerable understanding and good faith shown by both sides. The formidable task challenging us intelligence specialists was to be able to assure President Nixon that, if he decided to trust, we could monitor Soviet adherence and promptly report any violations. (Incidentally, the Soviets did cheat. In mid-1983 we detected a huge early warning radar installation at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia – a clear violation of the ABM treaty. President Reagan called them on it, and the Soviets eventually tore it down.)

During the U.S.-Soviet negotiations on the ABM treaty, a third of the CIA Soviet Foreign Policy Branch, which I led at the time, was involved in various supporting roles. I was in Moscow on May 26, 1972 for the treaty signing by President Richard Nixon and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. I recall not being able to suppress an audible sigh of relief. MAD, I believed, would surely be preferable to the highly precarious strategic situation that preceded it. It was.

Cornerstone of Stability

In his speech on March 1, President Putin included an accurate tutorial on what

happened after three decades, noting that Moscow was “categorically against” the U.S. decision in 2002 to withdraw from the ABM treaty. He described the treaty as “the cornerstone of the international security system.”

Putin explained that under the treaty, “the parties had the right to deploy ballistic missile defense systems in only one of its regions. Russia deployed these systems around Moscow, and the U.S. around its Grand Forks land-based ICBM base [in North Dakota].” (He did not mention the aborted attempt to deploy a second installation at Krasnoyarsk.)

The Russian President explained: “The ABM treaty not only created an atmosphere of trust, but also prevented either party from recklessly using nuclear weapons ... because the limited number of ballistic missile defense systems made the potential aggressor vulnerable to a response strike.”

Putin was saying, in effect, that no matter how bad – even mad – the MAD concept may seem, it played a huge stabilizing role. He added that the U.S. rejected all Russian proposals toward constructive dialogue on the post-ABM treaty situation, and grossly underestimated Russia’s ability to respond. The Russian President then gave chapter and verse, cum video clips, on an array of new Russian weaponry which, he claimed, rendered missile defense systems “useless.” The show-and-tell segment of Putin’s speech has been widely reported.

***New York Times* Skeptical**

David Sanger, the *New York Times*’ go-to guy on key issues, who is among the best in the trade on reporting as “flat facts” things like WMD in Iraq and “Russian meddling,” wrote the lede on Putin’s speech in Friday’s *NY Times* together with Neil MacFarquhar. The meme this time is not flat fact, but skepticism: “Do these weapons really exist? Or is Putin bluffing?”

In support of their skepticism, Sanger and MacFarquhar blithely report that “analysts writing on Facebook and elsewhere leaned toward the bluff theory.” So, QED!

And echoing former National Intelligence Director James Clapper’s insight that Russians are “typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever,” Sanger and MacFarquhar remind NYT readers that “deception lies at the heart of current Russian military doctrine.”

The two NYT journalists did get one thing right at the very end of their article; namely, “For years, Mr. Putin has chafed at the perceived disrespect showed to him and Russia by the United States. ‘Nobody listened to Russia,’ he said near the end of his speech, to huge applause. ‘Well, listen now.’”

Russians, like all proud and gifted people, resent attempts to demean or marginalize them. Putin may have seen his speech, in part, as a blistering response to former President Barack Obama's dismissive comments that "Russia doesn't make anything" and is no more than "a regional power."

Door Still Open to Talks

It is to be hoped that the Marine generals running U.S. defense policy, rather than calling Putin's bluff, will now encourage President Donald Trump to take up Putin's latest offer to "sit down at the negotiating table" and "work together ... to ensure global security" – taking into account that "strategic parity" is now a reality.

Referring to what he called "our duty to inform our partners" about Russia's claimed ability to render ABM systems "useless," Putin added: "When the time comes, foreign and defense ministry experts will have many opportunities to discuss all these matters with them, if of course our partners so desire."

Putin also said, "We are greatly concerned by certain provisions of the revised Nuclear Posture Review," which envisages a nuclear response to "conventional arms attacks and even to a cyber threat."

He described Russia's military doctrine, as "very clear and specific": "Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons solely in response to a nuclear attack, or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against the country or its allies, or an act of aggression against us with the use of conventional weapons that threatens the very existence of the state."

With burgeoning threats against Iran and Syria, it is to be hoped that someone in Washington thinks to ask Putin which countries he includes among Russia's allies.

White Lies Nobody Believes

Dana White, Pentagon spokeswoman, told reporters Thursday, "Our missile defense has never been about" Russia. Now, as Harry Truman would have put it, the Russians "weren't born yesterday." Putin has been extremely derisive toward those promoting the bromide that ABM installations in and around Europe are designed to defend against missiles from Iran – or North Korea.

In an unusually candid remark on missile defense on April 17, 2014, the day before Crimea was annexed, Putin told a national TV audience: "*Missile defense ... is no less, and probably even more important, than NATO's eastward expansion. Incidentally, our decision on Crimea was partially prompted by this.*" (Emphasis added)

To take some liberties with Shakespeare, “The fault is not in our stars, but in our Star Wars.” Ever since President Ronald Reagan was sold on the notion that a “Star Wars” ABM system could provide the U.S. with complete protection from missile attack, exceptional opportunities to restrain – or even put an end to – the nuclear arms race have been squandered. Victory has gone to the arms profiteers – those whom Pope Francis described to Congress as the “blood drenched arms merchants.”

The ABM project has been called, with justification, the world’s largest corporate welfare program. Jonathan Marshall today explains quite well what should scare us – still more billions likely to be thrown at the makers of systems that, most serious scientists and engineers agree, can always be defeated, and comparatively cheaply, way or another.

Three Decade-Old Conundrum

During the mid-80s, I had a front-row seat watching President Ronald Reagan blow what appeared to be a golden chance for a comprehensive peace. I had spent most of my CIA career focusing on Soviet foreign policy and was able to tell the senior U.S. officials I was briefing that Mikhail Gorbachev, in my view, was the real deal. Even so, I was hardly prepared for how far Gorbachev was willing to go toward disarmament. At the 1986 summit with President Ronald Reagan in Reykjavik, Iceland, Gorbachev proposed that all nuclear weapons be eliminated within ten years.

Reagan reportedly almost rose to the occasion, but was counseled to reject Gorbachev’s condition that any research on anti-ballistic missiles be confined to laboratories for that decade. “Star Wars,” the largest and most wasteful defense-industry program in recent memory, won the day.

I know the characters who, for whatever reason, danced to the tune of “Star Wars,” Reagan’s benighted, wistful wish for an airtight defense against strategic missiles.

The naysayers to peace included ideologues like CIA Director William Casey and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, windsocks like CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates and one of his proteges, Fritz Ermarth, a viscerally anti-Russian functionary and former Northrop Corporation employee, during Reykjavik.

According to author Jim Mann, several years after Reykjavik, Ermarth reflected on how he had been wrong in being overly suspicious of Gorbachev and how the intuition of Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz had been more perceptive.

What Now?

By all appearances, President Putin is as interested in stemming the strategic arms race as was Gorbachev. On Thursday, Putin talked about this particular moment being liminal – he called it “a turning point for the entire world.” Will there be anyone in Washington at the other end of the phone, if Moscow calls? If, in effect, the military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media complex answers, ABM developers will continue to fatten their purses and squander our children’s future.

It may be time to recall the admonition of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in a speech he gave 65 years ago:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. ...

We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people. ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron. [...] Is there no other way the world may live?

‘Nuff said.

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Katharine Gun’s Risky Truth-telling

From the Archive: On March 2, 2003, British intelligence official Katharine Gun blew the whistle on a pre-Iraq War ploy. On today’s 15-year anniversary of that event, we republish a 2014 article about Gun’s truth-telling by Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein ([first published Nov. 19, 2014](#))

“I felt it was explosive, it really made me angry when I read it. ... I genuinely hoped that the information would strengthen the people’s voice. ... It could derail the entire process for war.” So said Katharine Gun recently when asked about information she leaked shortly before the invasion of Iraq.

It wasn't self-serving hyperbole. Daniel Ellsberg, who himself leaked the Pentagon Papers, has called Katharine Gun's leak "the most important and courageous leak I have ever seen. No one else – including myself – has ever done what Gun did: tell secret truths at personal risk, before an imminent war, in time, possibly, to avert it."

And indeed, Ellsberg had asked for such a leak during this period. He had been saying during the run-up to the Iraq invasion: "Don't wait until the bombs start falling. ... If you know the public is being lied to and you have documents to prove it, go to Congress and go to the press. ... Do what I wish I had done before the bombs started falling [in Vietnam] ... I think there is some chance that the truth could avert war."

Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers – internal documents which showed a pattern of U.S. government deception about the Vietnam War – in 1971, though he had the information earlier. And while the Pentagon Papers, the leaks by Chelsea Manning to WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden's National Security Agency leaks were all quite massive, the Katharine Gun leak was just 300 words. Its power came from its timeliness.

In October of 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the so-called Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002. In November, the U.S. government had gotten the United Nations Security Council to pass a threatening resolution on Iraq, but in most people's view, it stopped short of actually authorizing force.

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N. at the time, John Negroponte, said when resolution 1441 was adopted unanimously: "There's no 'automaticity' and this is a two-stage process, and in that regard we have met the principal concerns that have been expressed for the resolution." That is, the U.S. would intend to come back for a second resolution if Iraq didn't abide by a "final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations."

On Feb. 5, 2003, Colin Powell claimed in his infamous presentation at the UN that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. Feb. 15, 2003 saw the greatest global protests in history, with millions around the world rallying against the impending Iraq invasion, including over a million near the UN headquarters in New York City.

It was around this time that Katharine Gun, who worked as a language specialist at the Government Communications Headquarters, the British equivalent of the NSA, got a memo from the NSA and then decided to – through intermediaries – leak it to the media. The brief email read in part:

“As you’ve likely heard by now, the Agency is mounting a surge particularly directed at the UN Security Council (UNSC) members (minus US and GBR of course) for insights as to how membership is reacting to the on-going debate RE: Iraq, plans to vote on any related resolutions, what related policies/ negotiating positions they may be considering, alliances/ dependencies, etc – the whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to US goals or to head off surprises. ... to revive/ create efforts against UNSC members Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Bulgaria and Guinea, as well as extra focus on Pakistan UN matters.”

The memo outlined that U.S. and British assets should focus on getting information to pressure member of the UN Security Council to go vote for a war resolution – material for blackmail to put it bluntly. This internal government document could show people – especially those who tend to put stock in government pronouncements – that what President George W. Bush was claiming at the time: “We are doing everything we can to avoid war in Iraq” – was exactly backwards. The U.S. government in fact was doing virtually everything it possibly could to ensure war.

When the British reporters writing the story called the author of the memo, Frank Koza, a top official at the NSA, they were put through to his office. When they shared the nature of their phone call, they were told by an assistant they had “the wrong number.” The reporters noted: “On protesting that the assistant had just said this was Koza’s extension, the assistant repeated that it was an erroneous extension, and hung up.”

The story was ignored by the U.S. media, though we at the Institute for Public Accuracy put out a string of news releases about it. Gun has commented that Martin Bright, one of the reporters who broke the story for the British *Observer*, had been booked on several U.S. TV networks just after the story was published but they had all quickly cancelled. [See video of an interview with Gun and Larry Wilkerson, former chief of staff for Colin Powell, on German TV from last year.]

However, the story did cause headlines around the world – especially in the countries on the Security Council that the memo listed as targets of the surveillance. Through whatever combination of authentic anger or embarrassment at their subservience to the U.S. government being exposed, most of these governments apparently peeled away from the U.S., and no second UN resolution was sought by the war planners.

Rather, George W. Bush started the Iraq war with unilateral demands that Saddam Hussein and his family leave Iraq (and then indicated that the invasion would commence in any case.)

In 2004, the *Observer* reported that “surveillance played a role in derailing a compromise UN resolution in the weeks before the Iraq war. Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, Mexico’s UN ambassador at the time, has charged that the U.S. spied on a private meeting of six swing countries on the Security Council aimed at a compromise. Zinser told the *Observer*: ‘The meeting was in the evening. They [U.S. diplomats] call us in the morning before the meeting of the Security Council and they say: “We appreciate you trying to find ideas, but this is not a good idea.”’”

Meanwhile, Katharine Gun had been found out as the leaker shortly after the memo was published – she has a talent for telling the truth, not so much for covering up apparently – and spent many months awaiting trial. England has no First Amendment that might have protected Gun. It does have a repressive Official Secrets Act, under which she was being prosecuted by the Blair government.

Marcia Mitchell, co-author of *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War: Katharine Gun and the Secret Plot to Sanction the Iraq Invasion*, notes however that at the last minute, the Blair government, which was about to face elections “with her signed confession in hand, chose not to present evidence that the invasion of Iraq was, in fact, legal, a demand by the Defense.”

That is, the British government was afraid of what could come out about the legality of the Iraq war in a trial. And so Gun, who was newly married when she exposed the NSA/GCHQ’s activities, was able to avoid jail and continue as a language instructor. She has since been supportive of Edward Snowden and others who expose government wrongdoing.

At the UN

The subject of spying at the UN was again highlighted in 2010 from cables leaked to WikiLeaks by Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning. Reuters reported at the time: “According to one cable, the State Department asked U.S. envoys at U.N. headquarters and elsewhere to procure credit card and frequent flyer numbers, mobile phone numbers, email addresses, passwords and other confidential data from top U.N. officials and foreign diplomats.”

Of course, spying on UN missions by the U.S. is illegal, Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations says: “The receiving State shall permit and protect free communication on the part of the mission for all official purposes.... The official correspondence of the mission shall be inviolable.”

Similarly, in 2013, the *Guardian* reported as G8 leaders meet in Northern Ireland: “Turkey, South Africa and Russia have reacted angrily to the British government demanding an explanation for the revelations that their politicians

and senior officials were spied on and bugged during the 2009 G20 summit in London.” The governments were responding to the *Guardian* story: “GCHQ Intercepted Foreign Politicians’ Communications at G20 Summits,” based on Edward Snowden’s NSA leaks.

Lessons Learned

The Katharine Gun case give us many lessons. First off, it’s a great example to rebut anyone parroting the establishment line that the NSA’s activities are based on stopping terrorism, or that they are merely overzealous efforts at ensuring security, or perhaps typical diplomatic games. Here, the NSA and GCHQ were spying to try to facilitate an aggressive war – the highest war crime under the Nuremberg statutes.

Similarly, it highlights what great ideals some “whistleblowers” – the term doesn’t really do justice – are motivated by. And of course, such revealers are much more threatening to war-makers and others when they are acting in parallel with movements. Those movements may also help ward off the government attempting to imprison the whistleblower.

The “rebuttal” that everybody spies and therefore it’s no big deal when the U.S. or some other government is caught doing so similarly doesn’t hold up. Yes, virtually every government spies – but you’re not supposed to get caught. And if a government does get caught, it’s an indication that it’s own people – the very people who are paid to carry out the surveillance – don’t believe in it and are willing to put themselves at risk to expose the spying and the underlying wrongdoing.

Perhaps most importantly, the lesson is not that Katharine Gun’s leak was futile because the U.S. invaded Iraq – any more than the lesson is that the Feb. 15 global protests were in vain. Rather, more of both could have really changed things. If global protests had started in 2002, then the congressional authorization for war in late 2002 could have been prevented. If more people within the war-making governments had their consciences moved by such movements and had leaked more critical information, war could have been forestalled.

And, even if the Iraq invasion happened, if global protests had continued and global solidarity were better coordinated, when it became clear to all that the WMDs not in Iraq were a contrived pretext for aggression, a sustained revulsion against the invasion could have led to the war-makers being held accountable, preventing much suffering in Iraq and elsewhere – and laying the basis for a world free of war.

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Iraq’s ‘Liberation Day’

From the Archive: Today is the 15-year anniversary of what was described as “the largest protest event in human history” – the Feb. 15, 2003 [coordinated day of demonstrations](#) against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. On this occasion we republish an article by Nat Parry detailing the concerns driving millions of people to take the streets.

By Nat Parry ([first published on Feb. 5, 2003](#))

Iraq’s “Day of Liberation” – as George W. Bush calls it – is set to begin with a bombardment of 3,000 U.S. missiles delivered over 48 hours, 10 times the number of bombs dropped during the first two days of the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Officials who have been briefed on the plans say the goal is to so stun the

Iraqis that they will simply submit to the overwhelming force demonstrated by the U.S. military.

Along with the destruction of buildings and the death of thousands from the explosive power of the weapons, the U.S. invasion force intends to paralyze Iraq's electrical and water systems, supposedly leaving Iraqi soldiers and civilians alike with no choice but to throw up their arms and surrender.

Never before in world history will a dominant world power have struck at a much weaker nation in a preemptive war with such ferocity. The strategy could be called liberation through devastation.

But the war plan also carries with it the potential of spiraling out of control, as Bush secretly brandishes nuclear weapons as a threat against the Iraqi government if it unleashes biological or chemical warfare against U.S. troops.

Civilian Dead

Even if the war does not bring the world a big step closer to the apocalypse, it is certain to mean the death of hundreds, if not thousands, of Iraqi non-combatants, no matter how targeted or precise the U.S. weapons. For those civilians, their end may come in the dark terror of crushing concrete or the blinding flash of high explosives, as it did for about 1,500 Iraqis who were crushed and incinerated in the early morning hours of Feb. 13, 1991.

These civilians were hiding in the al-Amariyah bomb shelter in a suburb of Baghdad at 4:30 a.m. when the first U.S. bomb ripped a hole in the shelter's roof. Neighborhood residents heard screams as people – mostly women and children – struggled to push aside rubble and escape. Then, the second bomb zipped through the hole created by the first bomb. That explosion was followed by silence, with fewer than two dozen people surviving.

Although there are no precise figures on the total number of civilians who died during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, most estimates put the toll at between 5,000 and 15,000. Besides the civilian dead, Iraqi military casualties are placed at between 100,000 and 300,000. [See Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.]

According to international relief agencies, the suffering has continued over the following decade. Since the war's end, Iraqi civilians have continued to die as a result of a badly damaged civilian infrastructure, crippling economic sanctions and high cancer rates attributed to hazardous chemicals released during the war, including the Pentagon's use of radioactive depleted uranium shells.

The United Nations predicts that the civilian casualties of a new war will

likely be even higher than in 1991, since the impoverished population is heavily dependent on government handouts to survive and those supplies will be disrupted by a U.S.-led invasion. In a confidential report, UN planners say the coming war and its aftermath could injure more than 500,000 civilians and leave nearly 1 million as refugees. About 3 million Iraqis – out of a population of 23 million – will suffer severe hunger, the UN report said.

As many as 7.4 million people will need immediate humanitarian relief. “The nutritional status of some 3.03 million persons countrywide will be dire,” the UN report said, adding that beyond hunger, disease will sweep the country in “epidemic, if not pandemic” proportions.

Other Warnings

Those warnings are echoed by other independent studies.

A report by the International Study Team, a Canadian non-governmental organization, says “because most of the 13 million Iraqi children are dependent on food distributed by the Government of Iraq, the disruption of this system by war would have a devastating impact on children who already have a high rate of malnutrition.”

The report says the physical state of Iraqi children makes them much more vulnerable to war than they were in 1991. Besides their physical weakness, the children are already fearful, anxious and depressed, with many suffering from nightmares. The report concluded that war on Iraq will cause a “grave humanitarian disaster,” with potential casualties among children in “the tens of thousands, and possibly in the hundreds of thousands.”

According to a Boston Globe article, the combination of the 1991 war and a decade of UN sanctions has transformed Iraq from a relatively prosperous Middle Eastern country – where a chief health concern had been childhood obesity – into a Third World nation where even casual observers can’t miss how Iraqis struggle to survive.

“In Baghdad, women with babies in their arms beg on the streets,” the Globe reported. “In cities like Basra to the south, poverty is inescapable. Raw sewage and trash choke the streets of a city once known for its glimmering, Venetian-style canals.”

“Iraq was not a Third World country in 1990,” said Denis Halliday, a former UN assistant secretary general who quit over UN sanctions. “Now you have this vulnerability out there.”

“We are already in a humanitarian crisis,” said Margaret Hassan, Iraq director

for CARE, the U.S. relief organization. "Frankly, these people can't take another one." [Boston Globe, Jan. 31, 2003]

Attacks on Infrastructure

Even in a short war, the civilian population will be put at risk. Pentagon planners have confirmed that shutting down important city services, such as water and electricity, will be one of the early goals of the U.S. assault. The planners say the strategy calls for using high-powered microwaves and other high-technology weapons to disable these vital services without permanently destroying them. [NYT, Feb. 2, 2003]

If the war doesn't end quickly, however, the interruption of these services can be expected to spread disease and death among the civilian population. If Iraqi troops withdraw into Baghdad and other major cities, forcing the U.S. military to wage time-consuming urban warfare, the lack of clean water and the absence of medicines could prove as deadly as the U.S. armaments.

The U.S. bombing campaign also will surely claim many civilian casualties. While the Bush administration stresses that its planned bombardment of ancient Baghdad and other cities will concentrate on military and government targets, the Pentagon's track record for precision bombing doesn't instill confidence. In recent conflicts, U.S. warplanes have inflicted substantial civilian death, either accidentally or on purpose.

For instance, in 1999 during the Kosovo crisis, U.S. warplanes killed non-combatants when going after civilian targets in Yugoslavia, such as bridges and even a television station that was deemed a government propaganda outlet. The lethal attack on the TV station was intentional. An international uproar followed the apparently accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy. The CIA blamed an "outdated map" for that fatal attack.

In the Afghan bombing campaign, U.S. warplanes struck two wedding parties and twice bombed the headquarters of the International Red Cross. It is estimated that the U.S. bombardment of Afghanistan has killed about 4,000 civilians.

A major difference between Afghanistan and Iraq, however, is that Afghanistan consists of a mainly rural population and Iraq has a largely urbanized population, with Baghdad alone crammed with about 5 million people.

The Nuclear Option

There is also no telling how out of control the war could spin, with Bush determined to destroy Saddam Hussein's government to avenge what many conservatives view as George H.W. Bush's failure to finish the job in 1991.

The younger Bush even has approved the use of nuclear weapons if Iraq uses chemical or biological warfare. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Bush's Nuclear Gamble."]

Bush's order, signed last September, reverses a decades-old U.S. policy of creating deliberate ambiguity about how Washington would react to a situation in which unconventional weapons were deployed against U.S. forces or their allies. "The United States will continue to make clear that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force – including potentially nuclear weapons – to the use of [weapons of mass destruction] against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies," the presidential document states. [Washington Times, Jan. 31, 2003]

In addition to an "overwhelming" retaliatory nuclear strike, Bush also is considering plans to use "tactical" nuclear weapons to destroy underground bunkers and similar critical targets.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the Pentagon is hastily developing computers to help decide when nuclear weapons would be used against fortified bunkers and how to measure collateral effects from radiation and fallout.

"From the start of the Bush administration, we have seen increasing interest in 'usable' nuclear weapons," said Christine Kucia, analyst at the Arms Control Association, a research group that studies proliferation issues.

By tailoring nuclear weapons for tactical warfare situations, such as bunker-busting, Kucia said the Bush administration is changing the status of nuclear devices that "have been reserved for decades as the absolute weapons of last resort. ... To put them in the realm of usable weapons is to take on a whole new definition that has never been explored and, frankly, should not be explored." [L.A. Times, Feb. 3, 2003]

'Poor Man's MAD'

Bush also may find that his goal of destroying Hussein and his government has been countered by Iraq's suspected pre-positioning of chemical and biological weapons outside Iraq for use only if the United States invades. In other words, Bush's strategy might touch off precisely the nightmare scenario that he says he is trying to prevent.

Last October, the CIA judged the likelihood of Iraq attacking the United States without U.S. provocation as "low" but rising dramatically if the U.S. prepared for a preemptive strike. "Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or C.B.W. [chemical or biological warfare] against the United States," wrote CIA director George Tenet in an Oct.

7 letter to Congress. "Should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Misleading the Nation to War.](#)"]

Since the CIA's assessment, the Bush administration has received specific warnings from abroad that easily transportable stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons indeed have been moved outside Iraq so they can be deployed against Western targets as retaliatory weapons.

Though the U.S. news media has largely kept this devastating possibility away from the American people, the Washington Post made an oblique reference to this potential danger in a Feb. 4 article entitled "CIA, Allies Tracking Iraqi Agents." The article states, "U.S. allies also are on alert for signs that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has sent agents abroad to arm Iraqis or terrorist groups with conventional, chemical or biological weapons, officials said. They said some of the weapons may already be in place outside Iraq's borders."

This "poor man's MAD" – for mutual assured destruction – should be a major element in an informed debate inside the United States especially since Bush outlined the ease with which these weapons can be moved and deployed. In his State of the Union address on Jan. 28, Bush said "it would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known."

But what if the vial, canister or crate is already en route? Might that "day of horror" actually be precipitated by Bush's invasion of Iraq, not delayed or prevented by going to war? Certainly, if one accepts the "evil" portrait of Saddam Hussein as painted by Bush, you'd have to assume that Saddam has long ago moved these dangerous weapons into positions where they can be of the most use to him – as a retaliatory weapon against a U.S. invasion.

The Aftermath

Yet even assuming U.S. forces succeed in eliminating Saddam Hussein and his army without a catastrophic escalation, the post-war period promises to be complicated and dangerous. The Bush administration has sent out mixed and confusing signals about what a "liberated" Iraq will look like.

At times, the administration has outlined plans to occupy Iraq for at least 18 months, possibly installing a military governor in the style of Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Japan after World War II. But it is not clear how the U.S. will police a population that is certain to include anti-American radicals ready to employ suicide bombings and other terror tactics against an occupying force.

Some of Bush's political allies also have urged pumping Iraqi oil to compensate

the U.S. government for the war's cost. While this idea might play well with Americans wary about paying billions of dollars in scarce tax dollars to occupy a foreign country, it won't sit well with many Iraqis and millions of others across the world, especially Islamic populations that already suspect a Western imperialist motive behind the war.

The war's devastation and the U.S. occupation also could play into the hands of the terrorist leader who had been the focus of the war on terror before Bush shifted his attention to Iraq.

The still-at-large Osama bin Laden spelled out in a recent message that he plans to gain a propaganda advantage from any U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, by presenting himself as the defender of the Arab people.

"Anyone who tries to destroy our villages and cities, then we are going to destroy their villages and cities," the al-Qaeda leader said. "Anyone who steals our fortunes, then we must destroy their economy. Anyone who kills our civilians, then we are going to kill their civilians."

George W. Bush drew his own line in the sand during his State of the Union address. "Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option," Bush declared as the U.S. built up a vast military force surrounding Iraq.

With that buildup in mind, Bush addressed what he called the "brave and oppressed people of Iraq." He told them, "Your enemy is not surrounding your country – your enemy is ruling your country." He then added, "the day [Saddam Hussein] and his regime are removed from power will be the day of your liberation."

Bush also pledged that while he would use the "full force and might of the United States military" to disarm the Iraqi government, the U.S. will fight "by just means – sparing in every way we can, the innocent."

How many of those innocents are *not* spared in the impending invasion – and the numbers of dead are likely to horrify the world – may become the new measure of how dangerous the post-war period will be for both the American and the Iraqi people.

Ten Commonsense Suggestions for Making

Peace, Not War

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

By William J. Astore

Whether the rationale is the need to wage a war on terror involving 76 countries or renewed preparations for a struggle against peer competitors Russia and China (as Defense Secretary James Mattis suggested recently while introducing America's new National Defense Strategy), the U.S. military is engaged globally.

A network of 800 military bases spread across 172 countries helps enable its wars and interventions. By the count of the Pentagon, at the end of the last fiscal year about 291,000 personnel (including reserves and Department of Defense civilians) were deployed in 183 countries worldwide, which is the functional definition of a military uncontained. Lady Liberty may temporarily close when the U.S. government grinds to a halt, but the country's foreign military commitments, especially its wars, just keep humming along.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trump's First Year of War-Making

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Despite the dismal record of the last decade and a half, our civilian leaders continue to insist that this country must have a military not only second to none but globally dominant. And few here wonder what such a quest for total dominance, the desire for absolute power, could do to this country. Two centuries ago, however, writing to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams couldn't have been clearer on the subject. Power, he said, "must never be trusted without a check."

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

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

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

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

Perpetual Warfare Whistles Through Washington

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

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

1. Abandon the notion of perfect security. You can't have it. It doesn't exist. And abandon as well the idea that a huge military establishment translates into national safety. James Madison didn't think so and neither did Dwight D. Eisenhower.
2. Who could have anything against calling the Pentagon a "defense" department, if defense were truly its focus? But let's face it: the Pentagon is actually a war department. So let's label it what it really is. After all, how can you deal with a problem if you can't even name it accurately?
3. Isn't it about time to start following the Constitution when it comes to our "wars"? Isn't it time for Congress to finally step up to its constitutional duties? Whatever the Pentagon is called, this country should no longer be able to pursue its many conflicts without a formal congressional declaration of war. If we had followed that rule, the U.S. wouldn't have fought any of its wars since the end of World War II.
4. Generational wars – ones, that is, that never end – should not be considered a measure of American resolve, but of American stupidity. If you wage war long, you wage it wrong, especially if you want to protect democratic institutions in this country.
5. Generals generally like to wage war. Don't blame them. It's their profession. But for heaven's sake, don't put them in charge of the

Department of "Defense" (James Mattis) or the National Security Council (H.R. McMaster) either – and above all, don't let one of them (John Kelly) become the gatekeeper for a volatile, vain president. In our country, civilians should be in charge of the war makers, end of story.

6. You can't win wars you never should have begun in the first place.
America's leaders failed to learn that lesson from Vietnam. Since then they have continued to wage wars for less-than-vital interests with predictably dismal results. Following the Vietnam example, America will only truly win its Afghan War when it chooses to rein in its pride and vanity – and leave.
7. The serious people in Washington snickered when, as a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2008, Congressman Dennis Kucinich called for a Department of Peace. Remind me, though, 17 years into our latest set of wars, what was so funny about that suggestion? Isn't it better to wage peace than war? If you don't believe me, ask a wounded veteran or a Gold Star family.
8. Want to invest in American jobs? Good idea! But stop making the military-industrial complex the preferred path to job creation. That's a loser of a way to go. It's proven that investments in "butter" create double or triple the number of jobs as those in "guns." In other words, invest in education, health care, and civilian infrastructure, not more weaponry.
9. Get rid of the very idea behind the infamous Pottery Barn rule – the warning Secretary of State Colin Powell offered George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq that if the U.S. military "breaks" a country, somehow we've "bought" it and so have to take ownership of the resulting mess. Whether stated or not, it's continued to be the basis for this century's unending wars. Honestly, if somebody broke something valuable you owned, would you trust that person to put it back together? Folly doesn't decrease by persisting in it.
10. I was an officer in the Air Force. When I entered that service, the ideal of the citizen-soldier still held sway. But during my career I witnessed a slow, insidious change. A citizen-soldier military morphed into a professional ethos of "warriors" and "warfighters," a military that saw itself as better than the rest of us. It's time to think about how to return to that citizen-soldier tradition, which made it harder to fight those generational wars.

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

uniform, to speak of them as above the citizenry. (“You are the best of us.”)

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

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

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

Be exceptional, America. Make peace, not war.

William Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and history professor, is a TomDispatch regular. He blogs at Bracing Views. [This article originally appeared at TomDispatch.com and is republished with permission.]

The Enduring Shame of Guantanamo

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

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

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

Some of the loudest complaints came from the staunchest U.S. ally, the United Kingdom, where three cabinet ministers Robin Cook, Patricia Hewitt and Jack

Straw expressed concern that international agreements about the treatment of prisoners of war were being breached. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, also objected to the camp and called on President George W. Bush's administration to follow the Geneva Conventions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

with law and the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lenarcic regretted that the practice of indefinite detention without trial has been codified into U.S. law with the recent adoption of the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). He called for a swift closure of the Guantanamo detention center and urged the authorities to prosecute promptly the remaining Guantanamo detainees in accordance with international fair trial standards, or release them.

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

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

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

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

Why Democrats Love Bush Now

The renewed popularity of George W. Bush among Democrats may reflect a growing tolerance of war among American voters, notes Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

Will Ferrell returned to his familiar role last weekend as George W. Bush on Saturday Night Live, doing a bit on the recent news that the 43rd US president is now enjoying soaring popularity among Democrats.

It was a funny bit, I guess. Ferrell reminded the SNL audience how “historically not good” Dubya was, joked about thrown shoes and how Dick Cheney’s heart is made of Legos now, and of course snuck in the obligatory comment about Russia rigging America’s elections as though that’s a real thing.

The majority of the skit was built around a refrain you’re hearing more and more from Democratic pundits who haven’t quite lost their minds yet, reminding viewers that as bad as Trump is, he still hasn’t done anything remotely as bad as Bush’s full-scale ground invasions of nations where US troops are still involved.

Anyone with even a drop of self-awareness knows that the cuddly wuddly new image Dubya is enjoying in mainstream America is taking Trump hysteria a bridge too

far. Even MSNBC stooge Chris Hayes said not long ago that “The Iraq War was worse than anything Donald Trump has done (so far).”

Yeah, they like to say that. What they never, ever like to do is acknowledge the far more uncomfortable fact that as bad as Trump is, he also still hasn't done anything as bad as what the Obama administration did to Libya.

It's true, though. For all the many, many, many evil things that this administration is guilty of, none of them come anywhere close to the destruction of an entire nation killing tens of thousands of people and creating a failed state where people are now sold as slaves. The destruction of Libya and attempted destruction of Syria that the Obama administration is guilty of have caused far more death and suffering than Trump has at this point in the game.

So I don't think it's accurate to suggest, as Ferrell's Dubya character does, that Bush's newfound popularity among Democrats is due solely to comparisons between the current Republican president and the last one. It's impossible to hold Bush as the horribly evil butcher that he unquestionably was while cheering on his successor for eight years who only continued and expanded those same bloodthirsty agendas. In order to support Obama, you necessarily had to compartmentalize away from the horrors of the Bush administration.

But I think there's an even more important factor at play here, and it's this: Democrats spent 2016 gaslighting themselves into believing that a warmongering neocon who supported the Iraq invasion would make a fantastic president.

Time and time again in the lead-up to the 2016 primary and general elections I debated Hillary Clinton supporters from the perspective that her support for the Iraq invasion utterly disqualified her for the role of Commander-in-Chief of the most powerful military force in the history of civilization. And they argued right back, often on the grounds that the Iraq invasion wasn't as bad as I was making it out to be.

Conversations and debates like this would have been happening all across the country that entire year, and Clinton supporters on that side of the debate would have to have found a way to contort their sense of reality into making Bush's barbarism seem understandable and acceptable. They had to psych themselves into supporting their candidate.

The more rank-and-file Democrats have been forced to find a way to get okay with the idea of warmongering neocon presidents, the more they're going to get okay with Bush.

And this is why members of the so-called “Resistance” would rather spend time drawing pictures of Robert Mueller riding on a shark than on trying to curb

Trump's Orwellian surveillance powers and unconstitutional war powers: those are Bush's policies, and Democrats have been forced to gaslight themselves into falling in love with Bush.

Democrats are Bush now. Everything they once opposed they have now been manipulated into supporting, and the smiling, blood-soaked face of establishment politics is allowed to lull us all deeper and deeper into insanity.

Wake up. For God's sake, wake up.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at [Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book [Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers](#).

Robert Parry's Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews

Robert Parry, editor and publisher of Consortiumnews.com, died peacefully Saturday evening. In this tribute, his son Nat Parry describes Robert's unwavering commitment to independent journalism.

By Nat Parry

It is with a heavy heart that we inform Consortiumnews readers that Editor Robert Parry has passed away. As regular readers know, Robert (or Bob, as he was known to friends and family) suffered a stroke in December, which – despite his own speculation that it may have been brought on by the stress of covering Washington politics – was the result of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that he had been unknowingly living with for the past 4-5 years.

He unfortunately suffered two more debilitating strokes in recent weeks and after the last one, was moved to hospice care on Tuesday. He passed away peacefully Saturday evening. He was 68.

Those of us close to him wish to sincerely thank readers for the kind comments and words of support posted on [recent articles](#) regarding Bob's health issues. We read aloud many of these comments to him during his final days to let him know how much his work has meant to so many people and how much concern there was for his well-being.

I am sure that these kindnesses meant a lot to him. They also mean a lot to us

as family members, as we all know how devoted he was to the mission of independent journalism and this website which has been publishing articles since the earliest days of the internet, launching all the way back in 1995.

With my dad, professional work has always been deeply personal, and his career as a journalist was thoroughly intertwined with his family life. I can recall kitchen table conversations in my early childhood that focused on the U.S.-backed wars in Central America and complaints about how his editors at The Associated Press were too timid to run articles of his that – no matter how well-documented – cast the Reagan administration in a bad light.

One of my earliest memories in fact was of my dad about to leave on assignment in the early 1980s to the war zones of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and the heartfelt good-bye that he wished to me and my siblings. He warned us that he was going to a very dangerous place and that there was a possibility that he might not come back.

I remember asking him why he had to go, why he couldn't just stay at home with us. He replied that it was important to go to these places and tell the truth about what was happening there. He mentioned that children my age were being killed in these wars and that somebody had to tell their stories. I remember asking, "Kids like me?" He replied, "Yes, kids just like you."

Bob was deeply impacted by the dirty wars of Central America in the 1980s and in many ways these conflicts – and the U.S. involvement in them – came to define the rest of his life and career. With grisly stories emerging from Nicaragua (thanks partly to journalists like him), Congress passed the Boland Amendments from 1982 to 1984, which placed limits on U.S. military assistance to the contras who were attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government through a variety of terrorist tactics.

The Reagan administration immediately began exploring ways to circumvent those legal restrictions, which led to a scheme to send secret arms shipments to the revolutionary and vehemently anti-American government of Iran and divert the profits to the contras. In 1985, Bob wrote the first stories describing this operation, which later became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

Contra-Cocaine and October Surprise

Parallel to the illegal arms shipments to Iran during those days was a cocaine trafficking operation by the Nicaraguan contras and a willingness by the Reagan administration and the CIA to turn a blind eye to these activities. This, despite the fact that cocaine was flooding into the United States while Ronald Reagan was proclaiming a "war on drugs," and a crack cocaine epidemic was

devastating communities across the country.

Bob and his colleague Brian Barger were the first journalists to report on this story in late 1985, which became known as the contra-cocaine scandal, and became the subject of a congressional investigation led by then-Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) in 1986.

Continuing to pursue leads relating to Iran-Contra during a period in the late 80s when most of Washington was moving on from the scandal, Bob discovered that there was more to the story than commonly understood. He learned that the roots of the illegal arm shipments to Iran stretched back further than previously known – all the way back to the 1980 presidential campaign.

That electoral contest between incumbent Jimmy Carter and challenger Ronald Reagan had come to be largely dominated by the hostage crisis in Iran, with 52 Americans being held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Iranian hostage crisis, along with the ailing economy, came to define a perception of an America in decline, with former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan promising a new start for the country, a restoration of its status as a “shining city on a hill.”

The hostages were released in Tehran moments after Reagan was sworn in as president in Washington on January 20, 1981. Despite suspicions for years that there had been some sort of quid pro quo between the Reagan campaign and the Iranians, it wasn't until Bob uncovered a trove of documents in a House office building basement in 1994 that the evidence became overwhelming that the Reagan campaign had interfered with the Carter administration's efforts to free the hostages prior to the 1980 election. Their release sooner – what Carter hoped would be his “October Surprise” – could have given him the boost needed to win.

Examining these documents and being already well-versed on this story – having previously travelled three continents pursuing the investigation for a PBS *Frontline* documentary – Bob became increasingly convinced that the Reagan campaign had in fact sabotaged Carter's hostage negotiations, possibly committing an act of treason in an effort to make sure that 52 American citizens continued to be held in a harrowing hostage situation until after Reagan secured the election.

Needless to say, this was an inconvenient story at a time – in the mid-1990s – when the national media had long since moved on from the Reagan scandals and were obsessing over new scandals, mostly related to President Bill Clinton's sex life and failed real estate deals. Washington also wasn't particularly interested in challenging the Reagan legacy, which at that time was beginning to solidify into a kind of mythology, with campaigns underway to name buildings and

airports after the former president.

At times, Bob had doubts about his career decisions and the stories he was pursuing. As he wrote in *Trick or Treason*, a book outlining his investigation into the October Surprise Mystery, this search for historical truth can be painful and seemingly thankless.

“Many times,” he wrote, “I had regretted accepting *Frontline*’s assignment in 1990. I faulted myself for risking my future in mainstream journalism. After all, that is where the decent-paying jobs are. I had jeopardized my ability to support my four children out of an old-fashioned sense of duty, a regard for an unwritten code that expects reporters to take almost any assignment.”

Nevertheless, Bob continued his efforts to tell the full story behind both the Iran-Contra scandal and the origins of the Reagan-Bush era, ultimately leading to two things: him being pushed out of the mainstream media, and the launching of Consortiumnews.com.

I remember when he started the website, together with my older brother Sam, back in 1995. At the time, in spite of talk we were all hearing about something called “the information superhighway” and “electronic mail,” I had never visited a website and didn’t even know how to get “on line.” My dad called me in Richmond, where I was a sophomore at Virginia Commonwealth University, and told me I should check out this new “Internet site” he and Sam had just launched.

He explained over the phone how to open a browser and instructed me how to type in the URL, starting, he said, with “http,” then a colon and two forward slashes, then “www,” then “dot,” then this long address with one or two more forward slashes if I recall. (It wasn’t until years later that the website got its own domain and a simpler address.)

I went to the computer lab at the university and asked for some assistance on how to get online, dutifully typed in the URL, and opened this website – the first one I had ever visited. It was interesting, but a bit hard to read on the computer screen, so I printed out some articles to read back in my dorm room.

I quickly became a fan of “The Consortium,” as it was called back then, and continued reading articles on the October Surprise Mystery as Bob and Sam posted them on this new and exciting tool called “the Internet.” Sam had to learn HTML coding from scratch to launch this online news service, billed as “the Internet’s First Investigative ‘Zine.” For his efforts, Sam was honored with the Consortium for Independent Journalism’s first Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

X-Files and Contra-Crack

At some point along the way, Bob decided that in addition to the website, where he was not only posting original articles but also providing the source documents that he had uncovered in the House office building basement, he would also take a stab at traditional publishing. He compiled the "October Surprise X-Files" into a booklet and self-published it in January 1996.

He was also publishing a newsletter to complement the website, knowing that at that time, there were still plenty of people who didn't know how to turn a computer on, much less navigate the World Wide Web. I transferred from Virginia Commonwealth University to George Mason University in the DC suburbs and started working part-time with my dad and Sam on the newsletter and website.

We worked together on the content, editing and laying it out with graphics often culled from books at our local library. We built a subscriber base through networking and purchasing mailing lists from progressive magazines. Every two weeks we would get a thousand copies printed from Sir Speedy and would spend Friday evening collating these newsletters and sending them out to our subscribers.

The launching of the website and newsletter, and later an even-more ambitious project called *I.F. Magazine*, happened to coincide with the publication in 1996 of Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series at the *San Jose Mercury-News*. Webb's series reopened the contra-cocaine controversy with a detailed examination of the drug trafficking networks in Nicaragua and Los Angeles that had helped to spread highly addictive crack cocaine across the United States.

The African-American community, in particular, was rightly outraged over this story, which offered confirmation of many long-standing suspicions that the government was complicit in the drug trade devastating their communities. African Americans had been deeply and disproportionately affected by the crack epidemic, both in terms of the direct impact of the drug and the draconian drug laws and mandatory minimum sentences that came to define the government's approach to "the war on drugs."

For a moment in the summer of 1996, it appeared that the renewed interest in the contra-cocaine story might offer an opportunity to revisit the crimes and misdeeds of the Reagan-Bush era, but those hopes were dashed when the "the Big Media" decided to double down on its earlier failures to cover this story properly.

Big Papers Pile On

The *Los Angeles Times* launched the attack on Gary Webb and his reporting at the *San Jose Mercury-News*, followed by equally dismissive stories at the *Washington*

Post and *New York Times*. The piling on from these newspapers eventually led *Mercury-News* editor Jerry Ceppos to denounce Webb's reporting and offer a mea culpa for publishing the articles.

The onslaught of hostile reporting from the big papers failed to address the basic premises of Webb's series and did not debunk the underlying allegations of contra-cocaine smuggling or the fact that much of this cocaine ended up on American streets in the form of crack. Instead, it raised doubts by poking holes in certain details and casting the story as a "conspiracy theory." Some of the reporting attempted to debunk claims that Webb never actually made – such as the idea that the contra-cocaine trafficking was part of a government plot to intentionally decimate the African-American community.

Gary Webb and Bob were in close contact during those days. Bob offered him professional and personal support, having spent his time also on the receiving end of attacks by journalistic colleagues and editors who rejected certain stories – no matter how factual – as fanciful conspiracy theories. Articles at The Consortium website and newsletter, as well as *I.F. Magazine*, offered details on the historical context for the "Dark Alliance" series and pushed back against the mainstream media's onslaught of hostile and disingenuous reporting.

Bob also published the book *Lost History* which provided extensive details on the background for the "Dark Alliance" series, explaining that far from a baseless "conspiracy theory," the facts and evidence strongly supported the conclusion that the Reagan-Bush administrations had colluded with drug traffickers to fund their illegal war against Nicaragua.

But sadly, the damage to Gary Webb was done. With his professional and personal life in tatters because of his courageous reporting on the contra-cocaine story, he committed suicide in 2004 at the age of 49. Speaking about this suicide later on *Democracy Now*, Bob noted how painful it is to be ridiculed and unfairly criticized by colleagues, as his friend had experienced.

"There's a special pain when your colleagues in your profession turn on you, especially when you've done something that they should admire and should understand," he said. "To do all that work and then have the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* attack you and try to destroy your life, there's a special pain in that."

In consultation with his family, Bob and the Board of Directors for the Consortium for Independent Journalism launched the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush

The presidency of George W. Bush was surreal for many of us, and no one more so than my dad.

In covering Washington politics for decades, Bob had traced many stories to “Dubya’s” father, George H.W. Bush, who had been implicated in a variety of questionable activities, including the October Surprise Mystery and Iran-Contra. He had also launched a war against Iraq in 1991 that seemed to be motivated, at least in part, to help kick “the Vietnam Syndrome,” i.e. the reluctance that the American people had felt since the Vietnam War to support military action abroad.

As Bob noted in his 1992 book *Fooling America*, after U.S. forces routed the Iraqi military in 1991, President Bush’s first public comment about the victory expressed his delight that it would finally put to rest the American reflex against committing troops to far-off conflicts. “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” he exulted.

The fact that Bush-41’s son could run for president largely on name recognition confirmed to Bob the failure of the mainstream media to cover important stories properly and the need to continue building an independent media infrastructure. This conviction solidified through Campaign 2000 and the election’s ultimate outcome, when Bush assumed the White House as the first popular-vote loser in more than a century.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court had halted the counting of votes in Florida, thus preventing an accurate determination of the rightful winner, most of the national media moved on from the story after Bush was sworn in on Jan. 20, 2001. Consortiumnews.com continued to examine the documentary record, however, and ultimately concluded that Al Gore would have been declared the winner of that election if all the legally cast ballots were counted.

At Consortiumnews, there was an unwritten editorial policy that the title “President” should never precede George W. Bush’s name, based on our view that he was not legitimately elected. But beyond those editorial decisions, we also understood the gravity of the fact that had Election 2000 been allowed to play out with all votes counted, many of the disasters of the Bush years – notably the 9/11 tragedy and the Iraq War, as well as decisions to withdraw from international agreements on arms control and climate change – might have been averted.

As all of us who lived through the post-9/11 era will recall, it was a challenging time all around, especially if you were someone critical of George W. Bush. The atmosphere in that period did not allow for much dissent. Those who stood up against the juggernaut for war – such as Phil Donahue at MSNBC, Chris

Hedges at the *New York Times*, or even the Dixie Chicks – had their careers damaged and found themselves on the receiving end of death threats and hate mail.

While Bob's magazine and newsletter projects had been discontinued, the website was still publishing articles, providing a home for dissenting voices that questioned the case for invading Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003. Around this time, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern and some of his colleagues founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and a long-running relationship with Consortiumnews was established. Several former intelligence veterans began contributing to the website, motivated by the same independent spirit of truth-telling that compelled Bob to invest so much in this project.

At a time when almost the entire mainstream media was going along with the Bush administration's dubious case for war, this and a few other like-minded websites pushed back with well-researched articles calling into question the rationale. Although at times it might have felt as though we were just voices in the wilderness, a major groundswell of opposition to war emerged in the country, with historic marches of hundreds of thousands taking place to reject Bush's push for war.

Of course, these antiwar voices were ultimately vindicated by the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the fact that the war and occupation proved to be a far costlier and deadlier enterprise than we had been told that it would be. Earlier assurances that it would be a "cakewalk" proved as false as the WMD claims, but as had been so often the case in Washington, there was little to no accountability from the mainstream media, the think tanks or government officials for being so spectacularly wrong.

In an effort to document the true history of that era, Bob, Sam and I co-wrote the book *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, which was published in late 2007. The book traced the work of Consortiumnews, juxtaposing it against the backdrop of mainstream media coverage during the Bush era, in an effort to not only correct the record, but also demonstrate that not all of us got things so wrong.

We felt it was important to remind readers – as well as future historians – that some of us knew and reported in real time the mistakes that were being made on everything from withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol to invading Iraq to implementing a policy of torture to bungling the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Obama Era

By the Obama presidency, Consortiumnews.com had become a home to a growing

number of writers who brought new perspectives to the website's content. While for years, the writing staff had been limited primarily to Bob, Sam and me, suddenly, Consortiumnews was receiving contributions from journalists, activists and former intelligence analysts who offered a wide range of expertise – on international law, economics, human rights, foreign policy, national security, and even religion and philosophy.

One recurring theme of articles at the website during the Obama era was the enduring effect of unchallenged narratives, how they shaped national politics and dictated government policy. Bob observed that even a supposedly left-of-center president like Obama seemed beholden to the false narratives and national mythologies dating back to the Reagan era. He pointed out that this could be at least partially attributed to the failure to establish a strong foundation for independent journalism.

In a 2010 piece called "Obama's Fear of the Reagan Narrative," Bob noted that Obama had defended his deal with Republicans on tax cuts for the rich because there was such a strong lingering effect of Reagan's messaging from 30 years earlier. "He felt handcuffed by the Right's ability to rally Americans on behalf of Reagan's 'government-is-the-problem' message," Bob wrote.

He traced Obama's complaints about his powerlessness in the face of this dynamic to the reluctance of American progressives to invest sufficiently in media and think tanks, as conservatives had been doing for decades in waging their "the war of ideas." As he had been arguing since the early 1990s, Robert insisted that the limits that had been placed on Obama – whether real or perceived – continued to demonstrate the power of propaganda and the need for greater investment in alternative media.

He also observed that much of the nuttiness surrounding the so-called Tea Party movement resulted from fundamental misunderstandings of American history and constitutional principles. "Democrats and progressives should be under no illusion about the new flood of know-nothingism that is about to inundate the United States in the guise of a return to 'first principles' and a deep respect for the U.S. Constitution," Bob warned.

He pointed out that despite the Tea Partiers' claimed reverence for the Constitution, they actually had very little understanding of the document, as revealed by their ahistorical claims that federal taxes are unconstitutional. In fact, as Bob observed, the Constitution represented "a major power grab by the federal government, when compared to the loosely drawn Articles of Confederation, which lacked federal taxing authority and other national powers."

Motivated by a desire to correct falsified historical narratives spanning more

than two centuries, Bob published his sixth and final book, *America's Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes to Obama*, in 2012.

Along with revenues from book sales, growing donations from readers enabled Bob to not only pay writers but also to hire an assistant, Chelsea Gilmour, who began working for Consortiumnews in 2014. In addition to providing invaluable administrative support, Chelsea also performed duties including research, writing and fact-checking.

Political Realignment and the New McCarthyism

Although at the beginning of the Obama era – and indeed since the 1980s – the name Robert Parry had been closely associated with exposing wrongdoing by Republicans, and hence had a strong following among Democratic Party loyalists, by the end of Obama's presidency there seemed to be a realignment taking place among some of Consortiumnews.com's readership, which reflected more generally the shifting politics of the country.

In particular, the U.S. media's approach to Russia and related issues, such as the violent ouster in 2014 of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, became "virtually 100 percent propaganda," Bob said.

He noted that the full story was never told when it came to issues such as the Sergei Magnitsky case, which led to the first round of U.S. sanctions against Russia, nor the inconvenient facts related to the Euromaidan protests that led to Yanukovich's ouster – including the reality of strong neo-Nazi influence in those protests – nor the subsequent conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

Bob's stories on Ukraine were widely cited and disseminated, and he became an important voice in presenting a fuller picture of the conflict than was possible by reading and watching only mainstream news outlets. Bob was featured prominently in Oliver Stone's 2016 documentary "Ukraine on Fire," where he explained how U.S.-funded political NGOs and media companies have worked with the CIA and foreign policy establishment since the 1980s to promote the U.S. geopolitical agenda.

Bob regretted that, increasingly, "the American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the 'other side of the story.'" Indeed, he said that to even suggest that there might be another side to the story is enough to get someone branded as an apologist for Vladimir Putin or a "Kremlin stooge."

This culminated in late 2016 in the blacklisting of Consortiumnews.com on a

dubious website called "PropOrNot," which was claiming to serve as a watchdog against undue "Russian influence" in the United States. The PropOrNot blacklist, including Consortiumnews and about 200 other websites deemed "Russian propaganda," was elevated by the *Washington Post* as a credible source, despite the fact that the neo-McCarthyites who published the list hid behind a cloak of anonymity.

"The *Post*'s article by Craig Timberg," Bob wrote on Nov. 27, 2016, "described PropOrNot simply as 'a nonpartisan collection of researchers with foreign policy, military and technology backgrounds [who] planned to release its own findings Friday showing the startling reach and effectiveness of Russian propaganda campaigns.'"

As Bob explained in an article called "Washington Post's Fake News Guilt," the paper granted PropOrNot anonymity "to smear journalists who don't march in lockstep with official pronouncements from the State Department or some other impeccable fount of never-to-be-questioned truth."

The *Post* even provided an unattributed quote from the head of the shadowy website. "The way that this propaganda apparatus supported [Donald] Trump was equivalent to some massive amount of a media buy," the anonymous smear merchant said. The *Post* claimed that the PropOrNot "executive director" had spoken on the condition of anonymity "to avoid being targeted by Russia's legions of skilled hackers."

To be clear, neither Consortiumnews nor Robert Parry ever "supported Trump," as the above anonymous quote claims. Something interesting, however, did seem to be happening in terms of Consortiumnews' readership in the early days of the Trump presidency, as could be gleaned from some of the comments left on articles and social media activity.

It did appear for some time at least that a good number of Trump supporters were reading Consortiumnews, which could probably be attributed to the fact that the website was one of the few outlets pushing back against both the "New Cold War" with Russia and the related story of "Russiagate," which Bob didn't even like referring to as a "scandal." (As an editor, he preferred to use the word "controversy" on the website, because as far as he was concerned, the allegations against Trump and his supposed "collusion" with Russia did not rise to the level of actual scandals such as Watergate or Iran-Contra.)

In his view, the perhaps understandable hatred of Trump felt by many Americans – both inside and outside the Beltway – had led to an abandonment of old-fashioned rules of journalism and standards of fairness, which should be applied even to someone like Donald Trump.

"On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump 'Resistance,'" Bob wrote in his final article for Consortiumnews.

"The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster," he said. "Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal."

He marveled that even senior editors in the mainstream media treated the unproven Russiagate allegations as flat fact.

"No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government's institutions," Bob wrote. "Anti-Trump 'progressives' were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies."

An Untimely End and the Future of Consortiumnews

My dad's untimely passing has come as a shock to us all, especially since up until a month ago, there was no indication whatsoever that he was sick in any way. He took good care of himself, never smoked, got regular check-ups, exercised, and ate well. The unexpected health issues starting with a mild stroke Christmas Eve and culminating with his admission into hospice care several days ago offer a stark reminder that nothing should be taken for granted.

And as many Consortiumnews readers have eloquently pointed out in comments left on recent articles regarding Bob's health, it also reminds us that his brand of journalism is needed today more than ever.

"We need free will thinkers like you who value the truth based on the evidence and look past the group think in Washington to report on the real reasons for our government's and our media's actions which attempt to deceive us all," wrote, for example, "FreeThinker."

"Common sense and integrity are the hallmarks of Robert Parry's journalism. May you get better soon for you are needed more now than ever before," wrote "T.J."

"We need a new generation of reporters, journalists, writers, and someone always being tenacious to follow up on the story," added "Tina."

As someone who has been involved with this website since its inception – as a

writer, an editor and a reader – I concur with these sentiments. Readers should rest assured that despite my dad’s death, every effort will be made to ensure that the website will continue going strong.

Indeed, I think that everyone involved with this project wants to uphold the same commitment to truth-telling without fear or favor that inspired Bob and his heroes like George Seldes, I.F. Stone, and Thomas Paine.

That commitment can be seen in my dad’s pursuit of stories such as those mentioned above, but also so many others – including his investigations into the financial relationship of the influential *Washington Times* with the Unification Church cult of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the truth behind the Nixon campaign’s alleged efforts to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks with Vietnamese leaders in 1968, the reality of the chemical attack in Syria in 2013, and even detailed examinations of the evidence behind the so-called “Deflategate” controversy that he felt unfairly branded his favorite football team, the New England Patriots, as cheaters.

Reviewing these journalistic achievements, it becomes clear that there are few stories that have slipped under Consortiumnews.com’s radar, and that the historical record is far more complete thanks to this website and Bob’s old-fashioned approach to journalism.

But besides this deeply held commitment to independent journalism, it should also be recalled that, ultimately, Bob was motivated by a concern over the future of life on Earth. As someone who grew up at the height of the Cold War, he understood the dangers of allowing tensions and hysteria to spiral out of control, especially in a world such as ours with enough nuclear weapons to wipe out all life on the planet many times over.

As the United States continues down the path of a New Cold War, my dad would be pleased to know that he has such committed contributors who will enable the site to remain the indispensable home for independent journalism that it has become, and continue to push back on false narratives that threaten our very survival.

Thank you all for your support.

In lieu of flowers, Bob’s family asks you to please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Consortium for Independent Journalism.

George W. Bush: Dupe or Deceiver?

From the Archive: With six in ten Americans – including a majority of Democrats – now holding favorable views of George W. Bush, we republish an analysis by Robert Parry from 2010, when the revisionist history of Bush's presidency began with publication of his memoirs.

By Robert Parry (first published on November 20, 2010)

George W. Bush's memoir, *Decision Points*, is without doubt a self-serving defense of his presidency – and Bush's own words condemn him as a liar – but there is another nagging question that surrounds this curious book: Has the U.S. media/political system become so polluted with falsehoods that even people at the top now believe the propaganda?

It is not clear which is the more troubling answer: that Bush and his advisers were bald-faced liars confident that their elite status lets them deceive at will, or that they have wallowed so long in a Washington's hot tub of spin that their brains can no longer separate fact from fiction.

In general, I assume that political leaders know the truth and just believe that the rest of us are easily manipulated by clever propaganda or can be readily bullied into line. As long as the leaders stick to their story (no matter how false it is), they can rely on their Establishment credentials to tough it out against the few skeptics who dare call out the lies.

But there were moments in reading Bush's memoir when I began wondering whether – at least for him – the other explanation was more plausible, that he was clinically delusional in the sense that he could no longer distinguish between what was real and what had been created by others to appeal to his preconceptions, biases and vanity.

Under this scenario, Bush was the amiable front man who was handled by those around him, by the neoconservatives who wanted to prove their mettle to the Israeli Right with a demonstration of American shock-and-awe against hostile Arabs in Iraq, or by the oil men who saw U.S. military domination of the Middle East as the ticket to trillions of dollars in energy reserves.

These groups grew skilled at baiting Bush with misinformation and exaggeration, knowing what would rile him up and push his buttons. The intellectually lazy but egotistical Bush would then come to think that the plans that they planted in his mind were his and that he was the true Decider.

However, there are other indications in the book that Bush was part of this

lying clique and that the American people were the targets of the falsehoods. In this scenario, Bush grew so confident before an obsequious Washington press corps that he felt he could lie with impunity and that the capital's pundit class would simply nod in acceptance.

An example that supports the Bush-is-a-deceiver scenario emerged several months after the invasion of Iraq, when it became clear that there were no WMD stockpiles. So, Bush began insisting that Iraq's Saddam Hussein "chose war" by refusing to allow UN weapons inspectors back into his country – even though the public had seen the inspectors rushing around Iraq in their white vans for months in late 2002 and early 2003.

Nevertheless, at a White House press briefing on July 14, 2003, Bush told reporters: "We gave him [Saddam Hussein] a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn't let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him from power."

Facing no contradiction from the obsequious White House press corps, Bush repeated this lie in varied forms until the last days of his presidency.

Jarring Admission

The only possible defense of Bush's clear-cut lie was that he might have forgotten that Saddam Hussein had allowed the inspectors to return in fall 2002, giving them unfettered access to suspected WMD sites, and that it was Bush who forced them to leave in March 2003.

However, in his memoir, Bush jarringly acknowledges that he was aware that the UN inspectors were roaming around Iraq during the lead-up to the war.

"Some believed we could contain Saddam by keeping the inspectors in Iraq," Bush wrote. "But I didn't see how. If we were to tell Saddam he had another chance – after declaring this was his last chance – we would shatter our credibility and embolden him."

Bush also recounts the central role that the reintroduction of the UN inspectors had played in April 2002 when he was convincing British Prime Minister Tony Blair to support "coercive diplomacy" against Iraq. Bush wrote:

"Tony suggested that we seek a UN Security Council resolution that presented Saddam with a clear ultimatum: allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq, or face serious consequences. I didn't have a lot of faith in the UN. The Security Council had passed sixteen resolutions against Saddam to no avail. But I agreed to consider his idea."

Ultimately, the UN Security Council did approve Resolution 1441 demanding that Iraq reveal what it had done with its prior weapons programs and allow UN inspectors back in. In fall 2002, Iraq complied with both demands, letting inspectors return and turning over a 12,000-page declaration explaining how Iraq's WMD stockpiles had been eliminated.

Despite Iraq's submission of these records, leading neocons who were itching for war, the likes of Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, mocked Iraq's efforts, a disdain that Bush cited favorably in his memoir, recalling:

"Joe Lieberman was more succinct. He said the declaration was a 'twelve-thousand-page, one-hundred-pound lie.'"

Though Bush stayed on course for war, he portrays himself in his memoir as a reluctant warrior, forced to launch an aggressive war because of the Saddam Hussein's belligerence. Bush wrote:

"Whenever I heard someone claim that we had rushed to war, I thought back to this period. It had been more than a decade since the Gulf War resolutions had demanded that Saddam disarm, over four years since he had kicked out the weapons inspectors, six months since I had issued my ultimatum at the UN, four months since Resolution 1441 had given Saddam his 'final opportunity,' and three months past the deadline to fully disclose his WMD. Diplomacy did not feel rushed. It felt like it was taking forever."

There is, of course, some madness in Bush's argument as well as contempt for the factual record. The truth was that Iraq had disarmed and had tried to comply with Resolution 1441; Saddam Hussein had responded to his "final opportunity" by letting the UN inspectors back in; and he couldn't "fully disclose his WMD" because he didn't have any to disclose.

Peace Lover

Bush devotes a large segment of his memoir to fabricating a false history so the American people will see him as a peace lover who was left with only one option: war.

"I remembered the shattering pain of 9/11, a surprise attack for which we had received no warning," Bush wrote. "This time we had a warning like a blaring siren. Years of intelligence pointed overwhelmingly to the conclusion that Saddam had WMD. He had used them in the past. He had not met his responsibility to prove their destruction.

"He had refused to cooperate with the inspectors, even with the threat of an invasion on his doorstep. The only logical conclusion was that he was hiding

WMD. And given his support of terror and his sworn hatred of America, there was no way to know where those weapons would end up.”

Yet, even amid these lies and rationalizations, there remains the possibility that Bush was more the duped dauphin than the wily prince. He surely had plenty of conniving counselors whispering in his ear from behind his throne.

Just days after the 9/11 attacks, Bush described a meeting of his national security team at which Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, an arch-neoconservative, “suggested that we consider confronting Iraq as well as the Taliban” in Afghanistan. So, the idea of invasion was planted early.

Bush, however, insisted that he was reluctant to go in that direction, writing:

“Unless I received definitive evidence tying Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 plot, I would work to resolve the Iraq problem diplomatically. I hoped unified pressure by the world might compel Saddam to meet his international obligations. The best way to show him we were serious was to succeed in Afghanistan.”

Bungling Tora Bora

Despite Bush’s protestations about not rushing to war with Iraq and needing to succeed first in Afghanistan, Bush notes in passing the key moment when he pivoted prematurely from finishing off Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda’s leadership at Tora Bora in fall 2001 and instead focusing the U.S. military on Iraq war plans. Bush wrote:

“Two months after 9/11, I asked Don Rumsfeld to review the existing battle plans for Iraq. We needed to develop the coercive half of coercive diplomacy. Don tasked General Tommy Franks [then in charge of the Central Command covering the Middle East and Central Asia] with updating the plans. Just after Christmas 2001, Tommy came to Crawford to brief me on Iraq.”

What Bush left out of that narrative was what was later revealed by a Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigation, that Franks was overseeing the military operation aimed at capturing or killing bin Laden when Rumsfeld relayed Bush’s order to freshen up the invasion plan for Iraq.

According to the committee’s analysis of the Tora Bora battle, the small team of American pursuers believed they had bin Laden trapped at his mountain stronghold at Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan and called for reinforcements to seal off possible escape routes to Pakistan.

But Bush was already turning his attention to Iraq, as his neocon advisers wanted. The Senate report said:

"On November 21, 2001, President Bush put his arm on Defense Secretary [Donald] Rumsfeld as they were leaving a National Security Council meeting at the White House. 'I need to see you,' the president said. It was 72 days after the 9/11 attacks and just a week after the fall of Kabul. But Bush already had new plans" for freshening up the invasion plans for Iraq.

In his memoir, *American General*, Gen. Franks said he got a phone call from Rumsfeld on Nov. 21, after the Defense Secretary had met with the President, and was told about Bush's interest in an updated Iraq war plan.

At the time, Franks said he was in his office at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida working with one of his aides on arranging air support for the Afghan militia who were under the guidance of the U.S. Special Forces in charge of the assault on bin Laden's Tora Bora stronghold.

Franks told Rumsfeld that the Iraq war plan was out of date, prompting the Defense Secretary to instruct Franks to "dust it off and get back to me in a week."

"For critics of the Bush administration's commitment to Afghanistan," the Senate report noted, "the shift in focus just as Franks and his senior aides were literally working on plans for the attacks on Tora Bora represents a dramatic turning point that allowed a sustained victory in Afghanistan to slip through our fingers. Almost immediately, intelligence and military planning resources were transferred to begin planning the next war in Iraq."

Futile Appeals

The CIA and Special Forces teams, calling for reinforcements to finish off bin Laden and al-Qaeda, "did not know what was happening back at CentCom, the drain in resources and shift in attention would affect them and the future course of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan," the report said.

Henry Crumpton, who was in charge of the CIA's Afghan strategy, made direct appeals to Franks to move more than 1,000 Marines to Tora Bora to block escape routes to Pakistan. But the CentCom commander rebuffed the request, citing logistical and time problems, the report said.

"At the end of November, Crumpton went to the White House to brief President Bush and Vice President [Dick] Cheney and repeated the message that he had delivered to Franks," the report said. "Crumpton warned the president that the Afghan campaign's primary goal of capturing bin Laden was in jeopardy because of the military's reliance on Afghan militias at Tora Bora. ...

"Crumpton questioned whether the Pakistani forces would be able to seal off the

escape routes and pointed out that the promised Pakistani troops had not arrived yet.”

Crompton also told Bush that the Afghan militia were not up to the job of assaulting al-Qaeda’s bases at Tora Bora and warned the President, “we’re going to lose our prey if we’re not careful,” the report said, citing journalist Ron Suskind’s *The One Percent Doctrine*.



But the Iraq-obsessed Bush still didn’t act. Finally, in mid-December 2001, the small U.S. Special Forces team convinced the Afghan militia fighters to undertake a sweep of the mountainous terrain, but they found it largely deserted.

The Senate report said bin Laden and his bodyguards apparently departed Tora Bora on Dec. 16, 2001, adding: “With help from Afghans and Pakistanis who had been paid in advance, the group made its way on foot and horseback across the mountain passes and into Pakistan without encountering any resistance.

“The Special Operations Command history (of the Afghan invasion) noted that there were not enough U.S. troops to prevent the escape, acknowledging that the failure to capture or kill ... bin Laden made Tora Bora a controversial battle.”

Though excluding those details from his memoir, Bush tries to rebut the criticism that he bungled the battle of Tora Bora. He wrote:

“Years later, critics charged that we allowed bin Laden to slip the noose at Tora Bora. I sure didn’t see it that way. I asked our commanders and CIA officials about bin Laden frequently. They were working around the clock to locate him, and they assured me they had the troop levels and resources they needed. If we had ever known for sure where he was, we would have moved heaven and earth to bring him to justice.”

The reality, however, was that the neocons, who saw Iraq as a more serious threat to Israel, and the oil men, who lusted after Iraq’s petroleum reserves, persuaded Bush to concentrate more on getting rid of Saddam Hussein than Osama bin Laden.

Macho Talk

To do that, some advisers played on Bush’s macho self-image. In his memoir, Bush recalled one of his weekly lunches with Vice President Cheney (the former head

of the Halliburton oil-drilling company), who was urging him to get on with the business of eliminating Saddam Hussein.

“Dick asked me directly, ‘Are you going to take care of this guy, or not?’ That was his way of saying he thought we had given diplomacy enough time. I appreciated Dick’s blunt advice. I told him I wasn’t ready to move yet. ‘Okay, Mr. President, it’s your call,’ he said.”

However, even as he was being prodded by Cheney and the neocons to act, Bush was using similar macho rhetoric – about having “the balls” to go to war – to ensure that Prime Minister Blair would commit British forces when the time came. In one melodramatic passage in *Decision Points*, Bush recounts a discussion with Blair:

“We both understood what the decision meant. Once we laid out our position at the UN, we had to be willing to follow through with the consequences. If diplomacy failed, there would be only one option left. ‘I don’t want to go to war,’ I told Tony, ‘but I will do it.’

“Tony agreed. After the meeting, I told Alastair Campbell, one of Tony’s top aides, ‘Your man has got cojones.’ I’m not sure how that translated to the refined ears of 10 Downing Street. But to anyone from Texas, its meaning was clear.”

But Bush’s memoir also has indications that he was not just swept up by the manly excitement of blasting apart some nearly defenseless nation, but he was carried along by intelligence reports which were themselves being manipulated by a combination of Cheney/neocon pressure and CIA analysts who cared more for their jobs than the truth. Bush wrote:

“One intelligence report summarized the problem: ‘Since the end of inspections in 1998, Saddam has maintained the chemical weapons effort, energized the missile program, made a bigger investment in biological weapons, and has begun to try to move forward in the nuclear area.’”

The Zarqawi Myth

The memoir also contains references in which it’s ambiguous whether Bush is the manipulator or the one being manipulated.

For instance, Bush cites the case of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a brutal terrorist who was operating in an area of Iraq that was protected by the U.S. and British “no-fly zone,” which prevented Saddam Hussein’s ruthless counter-terror operations from targeting anti-government Islamic militants like Zarqawi.

Though U.S. intelligence knew that the secular Sunni Saddam Hussein was a bitter

enemy of these Islamic fundamentalists, the Bush administration exploited for propaganda purposes the fact that Zarqawi was located inside Iraq and had slipped into Baghdad for some medical treatment.

In his memoir, Bush cites the Zarqawi case to defend his decision to invade, but it's unclear whether the existence of the known terrorist in Iraq was also used to bait Bush.

"In the summer of 2002, I received a startling piece of news. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist who had experimented with biological weapons in Afghanistan, was operating a lab in northeastern Iraq.

"Suspect facility in this area may be producing poisons and toxins for terrorist use,' the briefing read. 'Al-Zarqawi is an active terrorist planner who has targeted U.S. and Israeli interests: Sensitive reporting from a [classified] service indicates that al-Zarqawi has been directing efforts to smuggle an unspecified chemical material originating in northern Iraq into the United States.'

"We couldn't say for sure whether Saddam knew Zarqawi was in Iraq. We did have intelligence indicating that Zarqawi had spent two months in Baghdad receiving medical treatment and that other al Qaeda operatives had moved to Iraq.

"The CIA had worked with a major Arab intelligence service to get Saddam to find and extradite Zarqawi. He refused." [It was later revealed that Saddam Hussein's police had searched for Zarqawi in Baghdad but failed to locate him.]

At another point in the memoir, Bush portrays himself as something of an innocent victim, deceived by erroneous intelligence in late 2002. He wrote:

"I asked George Tenet and his capable deputy, John McLaughlin, to brief me on what intelligence we could declassify to explain Iraq's WMD programs. A few days before Christmas, John walked me through their first effort. It was not very convincing.

"I thought back to CIA briefings I had received, the NIE that concluded Saddam had biological and chemical weapons, and the data the CIA had provided for my UN speech in September. 'Surely we can do a better job of explaining the evidence against Saddam,' I said. George Tenet agreed. 'It's a slam dunk,' he said.

"I believed him. I had been receiving intelligence briefings on Iraq for nearly two years."

No More Delays

By March 2003, Bush claims he had exhausted all peaceful efforts to resolve the

issues regarding Iraq's WMD and was left with only one choice, to invade Iraq:

"For more than a year, I had tried to address the threat from Saddam Hussein without war. We had rallied an international coalition to pressure him to come clean about his weapons of mass destruction programs. We had obtained a unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution making clear there would be serious consequences for continued defiance.

"We had reached out to Arab nations about taking Saddam into exile. I had given Saddam and his sons a final forty-eight hours to avoid war. The dictator rejected every opportunity. The only logical conclusion was that he had something to hide, something so important that he was willing to go to war for it."

Of course, the other logical conclusion would be that Iraq had no WMD stockpiles, that it had done its best to convince the outside world of that fact, and that it trusted that the international community would uphold the principles enshrined at the post-World War II Nuremberg Tribunals and in the UN Charter, making aggressive war the supreme international crime.

Instead, recognizing that the Security Council was overwhelmingly opposed to an invasion, Bush withdrew a second resolution seeking explicit authorization to use force, got the UN inspectors to flee Iraq, and turned to his "coalition of the willing."

In his memoir, Bush describes what happens next in the most heroic and melodramatic terms.

"On Wednesday, March 19, 2003, I walked into a meeting I had hoped would not be necessary," he wrote. "I turned to [Defense Secretary] Don Rumsfeld. 'Mr. Secretary,' I said, 'for the peace of the world and the benefit and freedom of the Iraqi people, I hereby give the order to execute Operation Iraqi Freedom. May God bless the troops.'

"Tommy [Franks] snapped a salute. 'Mr. President,' he said, 'may God bless America.'"

Within three weeks, the invasion had ousted Saddam Hussein's government. A few weeks later, Bush flew onto the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln and gave his infamous "Mission Accomplished" speech. Eventually, Bush even had the satisfaction of having U.S. troops deliver Hussein to the scaffold where he was hanged in late 2006. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Bush Silences a Dangerous Witness](#)."]]

But the war also drove Iraq into seven years (and counting) of a living hell,

with the death toll now estimated in the hundreds of thousands, with many more maimed, and with millions of Iraqis displaced from their homes and living in degradation and squalor.

Losing Afghanistan

The consequences for Afghanistan – from Bush’s premature pivot away from that war to the one ardently desired by the neocons – were also devastating. Rather than stabilizing Afghanistan and ensuring that al-Qaeda and its allies could not reestablish bases there, Bush watched as the Taliban mounted a comeback and the U.S. military remained bogged down in Iraq. He wrote:

“My CIA and military briefings included increasingly dire reports about Taliban influence. The problem was crystallized by a series of color-coded maps I saw in November 2006. The darker the shading, the more attacks had occurred in that part of Afghanistan.

“The 2004 map was lightly shaded. The 2005 map had darker areas in the southern and eastern parts of the country. By 2006, the entire southeastern quadrant was black. In just one year, the number of remotely detonated bombs had doubled. The number of armed attacks had tripled. The number of suicide bombings had more than quadrupled.”

The situation also was deteriorating in Iraq, with various Iraqi nationalist forces taking up arms against the U.S. military occupation and a sectarian civil war breaking out between the Sunnis, who represented the previous ruling elite, and the Shiites, who had risen to power since the invasion.

Though Bush had suggested before the war that the presence of Zarqawi and a few al-Qaeda operatives was a key justification for invading Iraq, he acknowledges in his memoir that it was only after the invasion that al-Qaeda began focusing on Iraq. He wrote:

“When al Qaeda lost its safe haven in Afghanistan, the terrorists went searching for a new one. After we removed Saddam in 2003, bin Laden exhorted his fighters to support the jihad in Iraq. In many ways, Iraq was more desirable for them than Afghanistan. It had oil riches and Arab roots.

“Over time, the number of extremists affiliated with al Qaeda in Afghanistan declined to the low hundreds, while the estimated number in Iraq topped ten thousand.”

Bush also confirms some key facts about his decision to beef up U.S. forces in 2007, the “surge.” His account demonstrates how wrong the U.S. press corps and the congressional Democrats were in their interpretation of events in late 2006,

when – after the Democratic victory in congressional elections – Bush fired Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and replaced him with former CIA Director Robert Gates.

The immediate conventional wisdom was that the shakeup represented a victory for the realist doves over the ideological hawks, that the pragmatic Gates would oversee a rapid drawdown of U.S. forces and that Rumsfeld had remained an unrepentant hardliner on the war.

Consortiumnews.com was one of the few outlets that reported that the conventional wisdom was upside down, that the reality was that Rumsfeld was backing U.S. commanders who wanted to dramatically reduce the U.S. “footprint” in Iraq and that Gates was so eager to resume a prominent position in Washington that he had acquiesced to an escalation.

Neocons Push the Surge

That is essentially the account that Bush offers in his memoir, in the context of presenting the “surge” as one of his finest hours as the Decider, albeit with the guidance of leading neocons.

In June 2006, Bush wrote, he received a special briefing from outside experts:

“Fred Kagan, a military scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, questioned whether we had enough troops to control the violence. Robert Kaplan, a distinguished journalist, recommended adopting a more aggressive counterinsurgency strategy.

“Michael Vickers, a former CIA operative who helped arm the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s, suggested a greater role for Special Operations. Eliot Cohen, the author of *Supreme Command*, a book about the relationship between presidents and their generals ..., told me I needed to hold my commanders accountable for results.”

In other words, the seeds of the “surge” came from neocons, including “journalist” Robert Kaplan, who took it upon themselves to advise the commander-in-chief on escalating the killing in Iraq.

This neocon advice clashed with the judgment of the commanders in the field, whose recommendations Bush famously pronounced he would follow.

By mid-2006, the commanders were seeing a turning point in the violence that was ripping Iraq apart. Sunni militants had begun rejecting al-Qaeda extremists; Zarqawi was killed in an air raid; the sectarian violence had caused a de facto ethnic cleansing with Sunni and Shiites retreating to safer enclaves; a

classified program was targeting and killing insurgents in greater numbers.

The field commanders, including the senior general in Iraq, George Casey, favored an accelerated drawdown of U.S. forces and an exit plan for combat troops, rather than an expanded and open-ended stay. The commanders had Rumsfeld's support.

Bush wrote: "General [George] Casey told me we could succeed by transferring responsibility to the Iraqis faster. We needed to 'help them help themselves,' Don Rumsfeld said. That was another way of saying that we needed to take our hand off the bicycle seat.

"I wanted to send a message to the team that I was thinking differently. 'We must succeed,' I said. 'If they can't do it, we will. If the bicycle teeters, we're going to put the hand back on. We have to make damn sure we do not fail.'"

To impose this new strategy, Bush sought new leadership both in Iraq and at the Pentagon, sounding out Gates as a replacement for Rumsfeld.

"The weekend before the midterms, I met with Bob Gates in Crawford to ask him to become secretary of defense. Bob had served on the Baker-Hamilton Commission, a panel chartered by Congress to study the situation in Iraq. He told me he had supported a troop surge as one of the group's recommendations."

Sealing the Deal

Once Rumsfeld was dumped and Gates was appointed (to the misguided acclaim of Official Washington), Bush and the neocons pressed ahead with the escalation. Bush wrote:

"Over weeks of intense discussion in November and December, most of the national security team came to support the surge. Dick Cheney, Bob Gates, Josh Bolten, and Steve Hadley and his NSC warriors were behind the new approach."

Though Bush credits his decision to order the "surge" as the turning point in Iraq, he also includes facts that support the opposite conclusion, that the tide was already turning against al-Qaeda extremists before the 30,000 extra U.S. troops arrived in 2007. He wrote:

"The people of Anbar [province] had a look at life under al Qaeda, and they didn't like what they saw. Starting in mid-2006, tribal sheikhs banded together to take their province back from the extremists. The Awakening drew thousands of recruits."

Nevertheless, the neocons – who remain extraordinarily influential in Washington to this day – spun the "surge" as the singular explanation for the gradual

decline in violence in Iraq. This new conventional wisdom was enthusiastically pushed by the Bush administration and accepted by the Washington press corps. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Gen. Petraeus and the Surge Myth.](#)"]

Not surprisingly, Bush's memoir also embraces the "surge-did-it" conventional wisdom. After all, it finally made him out to be the great war-time Decider that he always envisioned, a self-image that the neocons and his other advisers carefully nurtured and exploited as the key to their own influence.

Yet, after finishing *Decision Points*, I still wasn't sure where the line was between Bush being the one getting manipulated and the one manipulating the rest of us. Had he drunk his own Kool-Aid or had he cynically instructed his ghost writer to fashion some old talking points into a memoir designed to rehabilitate himself and his powerful family?

The only certainty is that within the many miscalculations of his presidency, many people died unnecessary deaths, many more faced severe personal hardships that didn't need to happen, and the United States was left in a fiscal, economic and strategic mess.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and *Newsweek*, and since 1995 has published Consortiumnews.com. His books, including *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, [can be purchased here.](#)

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A National Defense Strategy of Sowing Global Chaos

In the new U.S. National Defense Strategy, military planners bemoan the erosion of the U.S.'s "competitive edge," but the reality is that they are strategizing to maintain the American Empire in a chaotic world, explains Nicolas J.S. Davies.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

Presenting the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States on Friday at the Johns Hopkins University, Secretary of Defense James Mattis painted a picture of a dangerous world in which U.S. power – and all of the supposed "good" that it does around the world – is on the decline.

“Our competitive edge has eroded in every domain of warfare – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace,” he said. “And it is continually eroding.”

What he could have said instead is that the United States military is overextended in every domain, and that much of the chaos seen around the world is the direct result of past and current military adventurism. Further, he could have acknowledged, perhaps, that the erosion of U.S. influence has been the result of a series of self-inflicted blows to American credibility through foreign policy disasters such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

There were also two important words hidden between the lines, but never mentioned by name, in the new U.S. National Defense Strategy: “empire” and “imperialism.”

It has long been taboo for U.S. officials and corporate media to speak of U.S. foreign policy as “imperialism,” or of the U.S.’s global military occupations and network of hundreds of military bases as an “empire.” These words are on a long-standing blacklist of “banned topics” that U.S. official statements and mainstream U.S. media reports must never mention.

The streams of Orwellian euphemisms with which U.S. officials and media instead discuss U.S. foreign policy do more to obscure the reality of the U.S. role in the world than to describe or explain it, “hiding imperial interests behind ever more elaborate fig leaves,” as British historian A.J.P. Taylor described European imperialists doing the same a century ago.

As topics like empire, imperialism, and even war and peace, are censored and excised from political debate, U.S. officials, subservient media and the rest of the U.S. political class conjure up an illusion of peace for domestic consumption by simply not mentioning our country’s 291,000 occupation troops in 183 other countries or the 39,000 bombs and missiles dropped on our neighbors in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since Trump took office.

The 100,000 bombs and missiles dropped on these and other countries by Obama and the 70,000 dropped on them by Bush II have likewise been swept down a kind of real time “memory hole,” leaving America’s collective conscience untroubled by what the public was never told in the first place.

But in reality, it’s been a long time since U.S. leaders of either party resisted the temptation to threaten anyone anywhere, or to follow through on their threats with “fire and fury” bombing campaigns, coups and invasions. This is how empires maintain a “credible threat” to undergird their power and discourage other countries from challenging them.

But far from establishing the “Pax Americana” promised by policymakers and

military strategists in the 1990s, from Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney to Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton, the results have been consistently catastrophic, producing what the new National Defense Strategy calls, “increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing, rules-based international order.”

Of course the drafters of this U.S. strategy document dare not admit that U.S. policy is almost single-handedly responsible for this global chaos, after successive U.S. administrations have worked to marginalize the institutions and rules of international law and to establish illegal U.S. threats and uses of force that international law defines as crimes of aggression as the ultimate arbiter of international affairs.

Nor do they dare acknowledge that the CIA’s politicized intelligence and covert operations, which generate a steady stream of political pretexts for U.S. military intervention, are designed to create and exacerbate international crises, not to solve them. For U.S. officials to admit such hard truths would shake the very foundations of U.S. imperialism.

Opposition to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran – the so-called nuclear deal – from Republicans and Democratic hawks alike seems to stem from the fear that it might validate the use of diplomacy over sanctions, coups and war, and set a dangerous precedent for resolving other crises – from Afghanistan and Korea to future crises in Africa and Latin America. Iran’s success at bringing the U.S. to the negotiating table, instead of falling victim to the endless violence and chaos of U.S.-backed regime change, may already be encouraging North Korea and other targets of U.S. aggression to try to pull off the same trick.

But how will the U.S. justify its global military occupation, illegal threats and uses of force, and trillion-dollar war budget once serious diplomacy is seen to be more effective at resolving international crises than the endless violence and chaos of U.S. sanctions, coups, wars and occupations?

From Bhurtpoor to Baghdad

Major Danny Sjursen, who has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and taught history at West Point, is a rare voice of sanity from within the U.S. military. In a poignant article in Truthdig, Major Sjursen eloquently described the horrors he has witnessed and the sadness he expects to live with for the rest of his life. “The truth is,” he wrote, “I fought for next to nothing, for a country that, in recent conflicts, has made the world a deadlier, more chaotic place.”

Danny Sjursen’s life as a soldier of the U.S. Empire reminds me of another

soldier of Empire, my great-great-great grandfather, Samuel Goddard. Samuel was born in Norfolk in England in 1793, and joined the 14th Regiment of Foot as a teenager. He was a Sergeant at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. During 14 years in India, his battalion led the assault on the fortress of Bhurtpoor in 1826, which ended the last resistance of the Maratha dynasty to British rule. He spent 3 years in the Caribbean, 6 years in Canada, and retired as Commandant of Dublin Castle in 1853 after a lifetime of service to Empire.

Danny's and Samuel's lives have much in common. They would probably have a lot to talk about if they could ever meet. But there are critical differences. At Bhurtpoor, the two British regiments who led the attack were followed through the breach in the walls by 15 regiments of Indian "Native Infantry." After Bhurtpoor, Britain ruled India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh) for 120 years, with only a thousand British officials in the Indian Civil Service and a few thousand British officers in command of up to 2.5 million Indian troops.

The British brutally put down the Indian Mutiny in 1857-8 with massacres in Delhi, Allahabad, Kanpur and Lucknow. Then, as up to 30 million Indians died in famines in 1876-9 and 1896-1902, the British government of India explicitly prohibited relief efforts or actions that might reduce exports from India to the U.K. or interfere with the operation of the "free market."

As Mike Davis wrote in his 2001 book, Late Victorian Holocausts, "What seemed from a metropolitan perspective the nineteenth century's final blaze of imperial glory was, from an Asian or African viewpoint, only the hideous light of a giant funeral pyre."

And yet Britain kept control of India by commanding such loyalty and subservience from millions of Indians that, in every crisis, Indian troops obeyed orders from British officers to massacre their own people.

Danny Sjursen and U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Iraq and other post-Cold War U.S. war zones are having a very different experience. In Afghanistan, as the Taliban and its allies have taken control of more of the country than at any time since the U.S. invasion, the U.S.-backed Afghan National Army has 25,000 fewer troops under its command than it did five years ago, while ten years of training by U.S. special operations forces has produced only 21,000 trained Afghan Commandos, the elite troops who do 70-80% of the killing and dying for the corrupt U.S.-backed Afghan government.

But the U.S. has not completely failed to win the loyalty of its imperial subjects. The first U.S. soldier killed in action in Afghanistan in 2018 was Sergeant 1st Class Mihail Golin, originally from Latvia. Mihail arrived in the U.S. in November 2004, enlisted in the U.S. Army three months later and has now

given his life for the U.S. Empire and for whatever his service to it meant to him. At least 127 other Eastern Europeans have died in occupied Afghanistan, along with 455 British troops, 158 Canadians and 396 soldiers from 17 other countries. But 2,402 – or 68%, over two-thirds – of the occupation troops who have died in Afghanistan since 2001, were Americans.

In Iraq, an American war that always had even less international support or legitimacy, 93% of the occupation troops who have died were Americans, 4,530 out of a total of 4,852 “coalition” deaths.

When Ben Griffin, who later founded the U.K. branch of Veterans for Peace, told his superiors in the U.K.’s elite SAS (Special Air Service) that he could no longer take part in murderous house raids in Baghdad with U.S. special operations forces, he was surprised to find that his entire chain of command understood and accepted his decision. The only officer who tried to change his mind was the chaplain.

The Future of Empire

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff have explicitly told Congress that war with North Korea would require a ground invasion, and the same would likely be true of a U.S. war on Iran. South Korea wants to avoid war at all costs, but may be unavoidably drawn into a U.S.-led Second Korean War.

But besides South Korea, the level of support the U.S. could expect from its allies in a Second Korean War or other wars of aggression in the future would probably be more like Iraq than Afghanistan, with significant international opposition, even from traditional U.S. allies. U.S. troops would therefore make up nearly all of the invasion and occupation forces – and take nearly all of the casualties.

Compared to past empires, the cost in blood and treasure of policing the U.S. Empire and the blame for its catastrophic failures fall disproportionately – and rightly – on Americans. Even Donald Trump recognizes this problem, but his demands for allied countries to spend more on their militaries and buy more U.S. weapons will not change their people’s unwillingness to die in America’s wars.

This reality has created political pressure on U.S. leaders to wage war in ways that cost fewer American lives but inevitably kill many more people in countries being punished for resistance to U.S. imperialism, using air strikes and locally recruited death squads instead of U.S. “boots on the ground” wherever possible.

The U.S. conducts a sophisticated propaganda campaign to pretend that U.S. air-launched weapons are so accurate that they can be used safely without killing large numbers of civilians. Actual miss rates and blast radii are on the

“banned topics” blacklist, along with realistic estimates of civilian deaths.

When former Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari told Patrick Cockburn of the U.K.’s Independent newspaper that he had seen Iraqi Kurdish intelligence reports which estimated that the U.S.- and Iraqi-led destruction of Mosul had killed 40,000 civilians, the only remotely realistic estimate so far from an official source, no other mainstream Western media followed up on the story.

But America’s wars are killing millions of innocent people: people defending themselves, their families, their communities and countries against U.S. imperialism and aggression; and many more who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time under the onslaught of over 210,000 American bombs and missiles dropped on at least 7 countries since 2001.

According to a growing body of research (for example, see the UN Development Program study, Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping-Point for Recruitment), most people who join armed resistance or “terrorist” groups do so mainly to protect themselves and their families from the dangers of wars that others have inflicted on them. The UNDP survey found that the final “tipping point” that pushes over 70% of them to take the fateful step of joining an armed group is the killing or detention of a close friend or family member by foreign or local security forces.

So the reliance on airstrikes and locally recruited death squads, the very strategies that make U.S. imperialism palatable to the American public, are in fact the main “drivers” spreading armed resistance and terrorism to country after country, placing the U.S. Empire on a collision course with itself.

The U.S. effort to delegate war in the Middle East to Saudi Arabia is turning it into a target of global condemnation as it tries to mimic the U.S. model of warfare by bombing and starving millions of innocent people in Yemen while blaming the victims for their plight. The slaughter by poorly trained and undisciplined Saudi and Emirati pilots is even more indiscriminate than U.S. bombing campaigns, and the Saudis lack the full protection of the Western propaganda system to minimize international outrage at tens of thousands of civilian casualties and an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis.

The need to win the loyalty of imperial subjects by some combination of fear and respect is a basic requirement of Empire. But it appears to be unattainable in the 21st century, certainly by the kind of murderous policies the U.S. has embraced since the end of the Cold War. As Richard Barnett already observed 45 years ago, at the end of the American War in Vietnam, “At the very moment the number one nation has perfected the science of killing, it has become an impractical instrument of political domination.”

Obama's sugar-coated charm offensive won U.S. imperialism a reprieve from global public opinion and provided political cover for allied leaders to actively rejoin U.S.-led alliances. But it was dishonest. Under cover of Obama's iconic image, the U.S. spread the violence and chaos of its wars and regime changes and the armed resistance and terrorism they provoke farther and wider, affecting tens of millions more people from Syria and Libya to Nigeria and Ukraine.

Now Trump has taken the mask off and the world is once again confronting the unvarnished, brutal reality of U.S. imperialism and aggression.

China's approach to the world based on trade and infrastructure development has been more successful than U.S. imperialism. The U.S. share of the global economy has declined from 40% to 22% since the 1960s, while China is expected to overtake the U.S. as the world's largest economy in the next decade or two – by some measures, it already has.

While China has become the manufacturing and trading hub of the global economy, the U.S. economy has been financialized and hollowed out, hardly a solid basis for future growth. The neoliberal model of politics and economics that the U.S. adopted a generation ago has created even greater wealth for people who already owned disproportionate shares of everything, but it has left working people in the U.S. and across the U.S. Empire worse off than before.

Like the "next to nothing" that Danny Sjursen came to realize he was fighting for in Iraq and Afghanistan, the prospects for the U.S. economy seem ephemeral and highly vulnerable to the changing tides of economic history.

The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers

In his 1987 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, historian Paul Kennedy examined the relationship between economic and military power in the histories of the Western empires who colonized the world in the past 500 years. He described how rising powers enjoy significant competitive advantages over established ones, and how every once-dominant power sooner or later has to adjust to the tides of economic history and find a new place in a world it can no longer dominate.

Kennedy explained that military power is only a secondary form of power that wealthy nations develop to protect and support their expanding economic interests. An economically dominant power can quickly convert some of its resources into military power, as the U.S. did during the Second World War or as China is doing today. But once formerly dominant powers have lost ground to new, rising powers, using military power more aggressively has never been a successful way to restore their economic dominance. On the contrary, it has

typically been a way to squander the critical years and scarce resources they could otherwise have used to manage a peaceful transition to a prosperous future.

As the U.K. found in the 1950s, using military force to try to hold on to its empire proved counter-productive, as Kennedy described, and peaceful transitions to independence proved to be a more profitable basis for future relations with its former colonies. The drawdown of its global military commitments was an essential part of its transition to a viable post-imperial future.

The transition from hegemony to coexistence has never been easy for any great power, and there is nothing exceptional about the temptation to use military force to try to preserve and prolong the old order. This has often led to catastrophic wars and it has always failed.

It is difficult for any political or military leader to preside over a diminution of his or her country's power in the world. Military leaders are rewarded for military strategies that win wars and expand their country's power, not for dismantling it. Mid-level staff officers who tell their superiors that their weapons and armies cannot solve their country's problems do not win promotion to decision-making positions.

As Gabriel Kolko noted in *Century of War* in 1994, this marginalization of critical voices leads to an "inherent, even unavoidable institutional myopia," under which, "options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles."

After two world wars and the independence of India, the Suez crisis of 1956 was the final nail in the coffin of the British Empire, and the Eisenhower administration burnished its own anti-colonial credentials by refusing to support the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was forced to resign, and he was replaced by Harold Macmillan, who had been a close aide to Eisenhower during the Second World War.

Macmillan dismantled the remains of the British Empire behind the backs of his Conservative Party's supporters, winning reelection in 1959 on the slogan, "You've never had it so good," while the U.S. supported a relatively peaceful transition that preserved Western international business interests and military power.

As the U.S. faces a similar transition from empire to a post-imperial future, its leaders have been seduced by the chimera of the post-Cold War "power dividend" to try to use military force to preserve and expand the U.S. Empire,

even as the relative economic position of the U.S. declines.

In 1987, Paul Kennedy ended *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* with a prescient analysis of the U.S. position in the world. He concluded,

“In all of the discussions about the erosion of American leadership, it needs to be repeated again and again that the decline referred to is relative not absolute, and is therefore perfectly natural; and that the only serious threat to the real interests of the United States can come from a failure to adjust sensibly to the newer world order.”

But after Kennedy wrote that in 1987, instead of accepting the future of peace and disarmament that the whole world hoped for at the end of the Cold War, a generation of American leaders made a fateful bid for “superpower.” Their delusions were exactly the kind of failure to adjust to a changing world that Kennedy warned against.

The results have been catastrophic for millions of victims of U.S. wars, but they have also been corrosive and debilitating for American society, as the perverted priorities of militarism and Empire squander our country’s resources and leave working Americans poorer, sicker, less educated and more isolated from the rest of the world.

When I began writing *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq* in 2008, I hoped that the catastrophes in Afghanistan and Iraq might bring U.S. leaders to their senses, as the Suez crisis did to British leaders in 1956.

Instead, eight more years of carefully disguised savagery under Obama have squandered more precious time and good will and spread the violence and chaos of U.S. war-making even farther and wider. The new National Defense Strategy’s implicit threats against Russia and China reveal that 20 years of disastrous imperial wars have done nothing to disabuse U.S. leaders of their delusions of “superpower status” or to restore any kind of sanity to U.S. foreign policy.

Trump is not even pretending to respect diplomacy or international law, as he escalates Bush’s and Obama’s wars and threatens new ones of his own. But maybe Trump’s nakedly aggressive policies will force the world to finally confront the dangers of U.S. imperialism. A coming together of the international community to stop further U.S. aggression may be the only way to prevent an even greater catastrophe than the ones that have already befallen the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Honduras, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

Or will it actually take a new and even more catastrophic war in Korea, Iran or somewhere else to finally force the United States to “adjust sensibly to the new

world order,” as Paul Kennedy put it in 1987? The world has already paid a terrible price for our leaders’ failure to take his sound advice a generation ago. But what will be the final cost if they keep ignoring it even now?

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