

# How Trump is Reshaping US Foreign Policy

Trump's policies are shaping America's relationship with the world in major ways even if those policies don't exhibit a consistent strategy, observes Paul Pillar.

By Paul Pillar



The urge within the commentariat to describe every president's foreign policy in terms of some clearly defined doctrine is as strong as ever, but Donald Trump presents would-be doctrine-definers with perhaps their toughest challenge yet.

This observation is not by itself a criticism of Trump's policies. Doctrine is overrated. Given the complexities of America's relationship with the world and the multiplicity of U.S. interests involved, any set of policies that fits neatly into a simply defined doctrine is apt to be too simple to uphold those interests effectively. But Trump's policies are shaping America's relationship with the world in major ways even if those policies don't exhibit the sort of consistent strategy worthy of the lofty term "doctrine".

One recent attempt to define a Trump Doctrine was reported by Jeffrey Goldberg, who quotes a "senior White House official with direct access to the president and his thinking" as saying that there definitely is a Trump Doctrine, which is, "We're America, Bitch". That remark has some validity in that it reflects an attitude that many of Trump's policies have exhibited. The remark is a crude synonym for assertive nationalism, a label that clearly applies to much of what Trump has said and done and which analysts of an earlier administration applied in more genteel form to the likes of Richard Cheney.

But as a broad description of Trump's overall approach to the world, the concept falls short in not only precision but also direction. How can it be reconciled with Trump's campaign theme of getting out of the sorts of costly and bloody foreign engagements that people like Cheney got the United States into?

Another recent effort at doctrinal labeling comes from Robert Kagan, who defines Trump's foreign policy as being a "rogue superpower," an approach Kagan describes as a "third option" that contrasts with both internationalism and isolationism. This concept accurately captures much of what Trump's policies have been about, particularly a disdain for international rules and order and even efforts to undermine or destroy the rules. Other parts of Kagan's picture and his applying of labels, however, are off the mark. His description of Trump's policies as "pure realism" should make true realists cringe.

Realism does not, as Kagan would have it, see international politics as nothing but a “struggle of all-against-all” in which allies and alliances are blithely blown off. The use of alliances, based on partially convergent interests, in balance-of-power politics is at the core of classical realism. And although the notion of all-against-all is found in much Trumpian rhetoric, it does not reflect the administration’s policy in the Middle East, with its rigid tying of the United States to Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Kagan also states, “The United States’ adversaries will do well in this world, for Trump’s America does not want war.” If “Trump’s America” refers to major trends in American public opinion that helped to put Trump into office, that statement is true. But as with much else with the first year and a half of Trump’s administration, there are disconnects between domestically-directed rhetoric and outwardly-directed policy.

It is hard to square Kagan’s comment with Trump’s appointment of uber-hawk John Bolton as national security advisor, or with the extent to which the administration already has used military force in Syria and in the name of counterterrorism elsewhere.

### **Traits, Not Doctrine**

Conspicuous and consistent traits of Trump’s foreign policy do not involve the sorts of objectives or principles that customarily merit the term “doctrine”. The traits have major effects and the effects sometimes fall into discernible patterns, but the effects are not objectives of a coherent strategy. The most conspicuous trait of Trump’s policies has been to do the opposite of, and to try to destroy, anything significant that his predecessor accomplished. This trait is at the center of much of what Kagan’s “rogue superpower” has done—specifically, the rejection of important agreements on the environment, trade, and weapons proliferation.

But anti-Obamaism is entirely negative; it says nothing about what kind of world the United States is *for* and wants to build. Depending on the specific issues involved, it can take Trump in different directions from just tearing down multilateral agreements.

Self-promotion as a supposedly master deal-maker is another major characteristic of Trump’s approach to foreign policy. It is another trait that does not make for consistently applied foreign policy principles that could plausibly be described as a doctrine. Any sense of order and consistency gets lost, as individual deals are separately hyped or castigated depending on who reached them. Hence Trump’s self-congratulation for nuclear diplomacy with North Korea that already compares unfavorably with previous diplomacy with Iran that

Trump has vociferously condemned.

Hardly unique to Trump is the influence on policy of those who helped to elect the president. Even setting aside the still-under-investigation Russia dimension of this subject, such influence in Trump's case has been readily apparent—especially when comparing Trump's earlier rhetoric with his later positions on matters involving Israel and the Gulf Arabs.

Related to such campaign indebtedness is the priority that Trump continues to give to playing to his domestic base and seeking applause lines at home. This habit has had significant effects on U.S. foreign relations, but again the effects have had little or nothing to do with any coherent vision of America's place in the world. The United States is embarking on a trade war with China and Europe less because a trade war had a prominent place in someone's foreign policy doctrine than because of applause lines that get applause due in large part to domestic economic dislocations tinged with xenophobia.

(A constant theme of Trump's going back decades is that other countries have been taking advantage of America.)

A current example of the same phenomenon is how the pressure the administration has been feeling over its handling of child immigrants along the southern U.S. border has further poisoned U.S. relations with European allies—which, in any coherent foreign policy doctrine, ought to be two entirely unrelated subjects. Part of Trump's response to the pressure has been to expound ever more forcefully about the supposed evils of immigration. This response has included an outburst about Germany that not only was factually false regarding crime but constituted an extraordinary effort to undermine the incumbent government of an important U.S. ally in favor of some of the more extreme elements in that government's domestic opposition.

Finally, there is the possible influence on foreign policy of the private financial interests of Trump and his family. This subject so far involves a murky and incomplete picture with mostly anecdotal reporting and with many questions still under investigation. But given that this U.S. presidency, more than any other in recent decades, has unabashedly co-mingled public interests with private ones, the subject cannot be ignored.

### **Resulting Patterns**

The broader effects of all these aspects of Trump's conduct of foreign policy do not represent objectives that flow from any foreign policy doctrine. Indeed, for the most part they are not even objectives. One such effect is a serious weakening of the North Atlantic alliance. Another is a reversal of any progress

that the previous administration made (and it didn't make much) in pivoting away from deep U.S. immersion in the conflicts of the Middle East. This pattern is illustrated by continued U.S. support for the highly destructive Saudi and Emirati intervention in Yemen, which recently expanded with an assault on the port of Hodeida.

The collective effect of the traits still leaves big uncertainties about some important questions, with different traits tugging in different directions. Prime among these is the future U.S. relationship with China—a clear vision of which ought to be part of any foreign policy doctrine worthy of the name. Trump's initial steps regarding North Korea have been mostly to China's liking and imply the forging of a cooperative relationship. But the trade war obviously points in the opposite direction.

One more generalization can be made about the overall effect that Trump's approach probably will have on America's place in the world and that involves a vocabulary often used in discussion of foreign policy doctrines. The United States will be more isolated than before.

Other states, whether friend or foe, will be less willing to bargain with the United States when it is governed by an administration that reneges on previous agreements and that, other governments believe, bargains in bad faith. Such mistrust impedes the reaching not only of the sort of multilateral agreements that Trump rejects but also the sort of bilateral agreements that he says he favors. To return to Kagan's typology, Trump's America is moving closer to isolationism—in diplomacy, if not in the use of military force—not because isolationism is part of any Trump Doctrine but because it is a byproduct of Trump's way of doing business.

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## Trump's Spaced-Out Space Force

While key members of his administration oppose him, Donald Trump seems intent on forging ahead with plans to create a sixth military branch—in outer space, as Renee Parsons reports.

**By Renee Parsons**

At a recent meeting of the newly-revived National Space Council, President Donald Trump announced the Space Policy Directive: National Space Traffic Management (STM) Policy and ordered the Department of Defense to establish a Space Force as a sixth branch of the US military.

Creating a “separate but equal” Space Corps would need Congressional authorization, however, which could abort Trump’s lift off.

Members of Trump’s own cabinet, including the secretary of defense, are opposed to creating a new military branch, meaning the president’s plans could be left on the launching pad.

The Directive suggests an overly-ambitious mission of broad, wide-ranging goals with no timeline or funding under the guise of a ‘space junk directive’ to clean up a “congested and contested” cosmos. That promises to keep the military industries happy while making space safe for the coming commercial space industry (CSI).

Specifically, the Directive provides a role for the Department of Defense “to protect and defend US space assets and interests.” The Director of National Intelligence is supposed to provide a Space Situational Awareness (SSA) of “knowledge and characterization of space objects.” Expanding on the U.S. role in outer space, Trump could not be clearer about his intentions: “Our destiny, beyond the Earth, is not only a matter of national identity, but a matter of national security. We must have American dominance in space.”

As the U.S. presumes to act on behalf of other countries on the planet and commercial space endeavors, the Directive proposes to establish operational criteria with the assumption that all players will accept such U.S. dominance.

Opposition within the Trump Administration has been vocal, with Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson suggesting that, “The Pentagon is complicated enough. This will make it more complex, add more boxes to the organization chart, and cost more money.”

In an October, 2017 letter on the National Defense Authorization Act 2018, Defense Secretary James Mattis commented: "I oppose the creation of a new military service and additional organizational layers at a time when we are focused on reducing overhead and integrating joint war-fighting functions."

In a second letter to Congress, Mattis reiterated, "I do not wish to add a separate service that would likely present a narrower and even parochial approach to space operations."

### **Outer Space, Out of Mind**

Despite Pentagon opposition, an administration witness told a recent House Armed Services subcommittee that "the President has prioritized space. He recognized the threats that have evolved and the pace at which they evolve."

In March, the president endorsed a Space Force during a White House ceremony, saying, "We're getting very big in space, both militarily and for other reasons," suggesting that the true purpose of a Space Force may be more than the equivalent of a celestial traffic cop.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, there are 1,738 operational satellites with 803 US satellites in orbit (476 commercial, 150 government, 159 military and 18 civil). Russia has 142 operational satellites and China has 204. There are also 2,600 non-functional human-made satellites, most of which weigh less than 5 tons and fly in a low orbit specifically programmed to burn out and fall to earth after 25 years.

It is difficult to conjure up the effects of a "growing threat" from human-made orbital clutter and debris floating in the infinite vastness of outer space as significant enough to qualify as a national security risk. Nor would U.S. global dominance be required to sweep the cosmos clean of said debris. What could Trump be thinking in pushing this idea against the wishes of the top brass? Perhaps he is referring to something other than debris and clutter.

While outer space is a wide-open, limitless expanse that remains as clandestine as any black ops project, global citizens are familiar

with the noteworthy increase of reported extra terrestrial activity across the planet.

Especially intriguing are former astronauts who have commented on their experiences as well as members of the U.S. military who have described sightings that move at very high velocities with no visible signs of propulsion or that hover with no apparent means of lift and can change direction or speed on a dime.

Revealed in December 2017, the Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program (AATIP), which prepared a 500-page document of worldwide UFO sightings, was Congressionally funded by former Senator Harry Reid (D-NV). In a CNN interview, retired AATIP director Luis Elizondo, who resigned in protest over "excessive secrecy" said, "My personal belief is that there is very compelling evidence that we may not be alone."

Two events that dared challenge the government's decades of secrecy with open disclosure were two press conferences at the National Press Club in Washington featuring retired military personnel providing public comment on their direct experiences with an extra terrestrial world in their official capacity. The first press conference occurred on September, 10, 2001, one day before the 911 attacks and another on September 27, 2010. Both press conferences were organized by Dr. Steven Greer of the Disclosure Project, who also produced the videos Sirius and Unacknowledged.

In responding to the Directive, Greer claimed he has been "talking about this for years and has spoken to multiple witnesses who said that at least since the 1960s the U.S. has had military assets in space. They (Trump administration) are acknowledging something that is already there. However, what is not being talked about, even now, is that those military assets are tracking and targeting ET craft."

On the edge of human consciousness lies a more subtle, potentially less obvious presence than the usual political adversaries as the U.S. continues to lay specious claim to ownership of Outer Space.

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## Border Angels Fight Trump's Borderland Brutality

As Donald Trump's anti-immigrant policy intensifies, an organization founded in 1986 has stepped up its efforts to help families under attack, as Dennis J. Bernstein explains.

**By Dennis J Bernstein**



America's "National Pastime" used to be the heart of the matter for Enrique Morones. But in 1986, Morones turned his back on an impressive and lucrative career in Major League baseball, as the Vice President of Latino & International Marketing for the San Diego Padres, and became a "water carrier" on the desert. He soon founded the Border Angels, whose key purpose was the life and death delivery of water to those women and children and men who found themselves lost and stranded on the dessert, after fleeing their counties for a better safer life in El Norte.

Morones, the first person to gain dual United States and Mexican Citizenship, has since joined forces with the United Farm Workers, Ethel Kennedy (the widow of Robert Kennedy) and others to give voice and a human face to the struggle of undocumented people, now under extraordinary attack by a bluntly and actively anti-immigrant Trump administration.

In 2006, producers for the Flashpoints show traveled with Morones in a caravan that included thousands of activists, protesters and organizers across the entire country in the first "Marcha Migrante", an action that inspired many spirited protests and demonstrations across the country, and in what came to be known as the "immigrant spring."

I caught up with Morones in San Diego just after a protest at an ICE detention center, just a few blocks from the US/Mexico border, between San Diego and Tijuana. The prison itself is relatively new, built in the last five or ten years. It is a private prison run by the Corrections Corporation of America, the



largest prison company in the world. They warehouse over a thousand detainees in their San Diego facility.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Greetings Enrique Morones. Enrique, I have just heard about a young father who committed suicide after his three-year old son was taken away. Do you want to give us your sense of what is going on and how you have been responding to this kind of brutality?

**Enrique Morones:** Sadly, the situation with Trump continues to get worse. While he spreads his message of hate— not only calling us rapists and criminals now, but animals—we see how law enforcement has been stepping up their attacks on migrants. I don't know if you have seen the video which is making the rounds. Yesterday after the protests, the protesters were going to get something to eat and the border patrol surrounded them. They responded that they were not going to let themselves be harassed and eventually the border patrol left. It is important that we speak out, that we not be silent. We had the woman from Guatemala who was killed on the Texas border a couple of weeks ago, shot in the head. Of course, the border patrol is saying they had been aggressive—something which witnesses denied. Especially these attacks on children show the worst of the American spirit, since a society can be judged according to how it treats its children. To have these children separated from families, lost in the system, threatened to be separated if they are seeking asylum, is a total violation of human rights law. This past Saturday here in San Diego we held a mass entitled "Footprints of Tenderness" with US and Mexican Catholic and Episcopalian bishops. A caravan was launched from Friendship Park which will travel all the way to the tip of South America. It will take about a year. We want the faith community to be aware, the general public to be aware, the lawmakers to be aware. We know that Donald Trump is a lost cause, but there are people speaking out, like John McCain and some of the Democrats, and it is important that they all speak out. Because the whole world is watching and it is a shameful situation, what Trump and Sessions are doing. Racist members of law enforcement are feeling more empowered.

**DB:** Right now, the way I understand it, the US has a policy of systematically denying people's right to apply for asylum by splitting families, by brutalizing them, by causing so much suffering that they turn back around. This is really one step further than Obama.

**EM:** This is *twenty* steps further than Obama. It is just totally inhumane. Not only are they separating those seeking asylum, they are threatening the ones who are *thinking* of coming to the border. These are families who are escaping very

dangerous, violent situations in their home countries, mainly from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, but other countries as well, including Mexico. They are working their way up to the border to turn themselves in for asylum, which is a universal human right. These people under Trump seem to think that if they threaten to separate the children they are not going to come. Do they really expect these people to stay at home and watch their children being executed in front of them? Of course not. They are going to be working their way up to the northern border, hoping that they are not going to be that family separated from their children. None of the 11,000 people who have died because of Operation Gatekeeper expected to die. People are leaving because they have to leave, not because they want to. The current policy is similar to what happened to slave families that were brought here, to what the Nazis did. I never thought that this country would be doing this in this day and age. We need to rise up in protest, demanding that the people held in detention be treated humanely.

**DB:** How has the work of the Border Angels evolved? Part of the work that you do is put water in the desert where you know people are coming through. People have actually been arrested for being water carriers. Is it still necessary to bring water to the desert? Is the border patrol still undermining that work?



**EM:** As you know, we started putting water in the desert along the San Diego/Tijuana border, in the Imperial Valley and in Arizona in 1994, when Operation Gatekeeper began. We had groups going out there three or four times a month, with thirty or forty volunteers. By November 2016 we had five hundred volunteers showing up, so we had to set the limit at 100-150 people. And yes, it is still necessary. In the past five years we have seen a dramatic reduction in people crossing, with the economy recovering somewhat in Mexico. Now the largest group is coming from Central America. They typically cross along the Texas border, which is 75% of the Mexico/US border. But some cross here, too, into California or Arizona. We are busier than ever because of the hate from Trump. Even though fewer people are coming, it is more dangerous than ever. Hate rhetoric leads to hate acts. We see more hate crimes being committed. We are right across the street from an elementary school where moms are sometimes scared to walk their kids to school. The racist minority in this country are feeling more empowered.

**DB:** People like my colleague Miguel Molina are beginning to talk about “concentration camps,” about suffering that harkens back to World War II.

**EM:** These facilities are sometimes called “ICE coolers.” They are not made for

the detention of children or families. These predominantly women and children are not criminals. Of course, it is inhumane to treat *anyone* in this manner, even if they *are* criminals. They are arresting so many people, profiling people who haven't done anything wrong, who are documented. Now they are going to be putting them in real prisons and separating them from their children. So it is an inhumane situation. It is very difficult to get into the detention facilities to view the conditions. Even a couple congresspeople were not able to get in. Here are the people who make the laws and it is very suspicious when they are prohibited from seeing how the laws are being carried out.

**DB:** What kinds of special actions are you planning? Are there workshops for people to learn how to protect themselves? Are support groups being organized? How are people rising up to meet this kind of repression?

**EM:** Throughout the state of California and in other areas, we have organized rapid response teams to alert people to ICE raids in their communities. This is what the mayor of Oakland did and we applaud her for that. We also hand out "know your rights" cards to people so people know that they have the right to remain silent, to have an attorney, to ask to speak to the consulate of their country. Oftentimes those rights aren't being honored. When you see that something happens, say something. The badge doesn't give you a special privilege to be racist and abuse people. Law enforcement is taking advantage of this ugly prevailing mood and it is not acceptable. We are telling people not to wait until ICE knocks on your door. Set up a system beforehand so that if you *are* going to be deported, your children can be turned over to a family member. Once you are in custody, it is too late to do that. You have to set that up beforehand. That is one reason why children are being lost in the system.

**DB:** Finally, if you suddenly found yourself nose-to-nose with Trump, what would you tell him?

**EM:** I don't think I would be able to contain myself. I have spoken to presidents in the past, but I would never recognize Trump as my president. If I were invited to the White House, as I have been in the past, I would not go. I am all for dialogue when you are dealing with a sane person. I will go to Washington, as I have in the past, to protest, and I will meet with elected officials, but not with the likes of Trump or Mike Pence. Those people should be put in their place, behind bars and not in positions of great power.

*Click [here](#) to listen to this interview.*

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## Bolton Trying to Convince Trump to Topple Iran

John Bolton may have backed off wanting to bomb Iran, saying he's not the one to decide, but he's hardly given up trying to convince Trump to replace the regime in Tehran, as Gareth Porter explains.

By Gareth Porter



Now that the Trump administration has derailed the Iran nuclear deal, the old issue of regime change in Iran is back again. National Security Advisor John Bolton is obviously the chief regime-change advocate in the administration, and there is every reason to believe he has begun to push that policy with Donald Trump in his first month in the White House.

Bolton was part of the powerful neoconservative faction of national security officials in the George W. Bush administration that had a plan for supporting regime change in Iran, not much different from the one Bolton is reportedly pushing now. But it was a crackbrained scheme that involved the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) exiled terrorist organisation that never had Bush's support.

Bolton may find history repeating itself, with Trump resisting his plan for regime change, just as Bush did in 2003.

### Trump Calls for Change

Trump has appeared to flirt with the idea of Iranian regime change in the past. During the December protests in Iran, he said on Twitter that it was time for a change, noting: "The great Iranian people have been repressed for many years."

Trump's killing of the nuclear deal, however, stopped short of rhetoric signalling the aim of overthrowing the Islamic Republic. Instead, Trump suggested that "Iran's leaders" are "going to want to make a new and lasting deal, one that benefits all of Iran and the Iranian people". He added: "When they do, I am ready, willing and able."

A few days after the Trump announcement, an unnamed National Security Council (NSC) official avoided any hint of regime change, telling the neoconservative Washington Free Beacon: "Our stated policy is to change the Iranian regime's

behaviour.”

Now, Bolton has issued an even more explicit denial, telling ABC

News: “That is not the policy of the administration. The policy of the administration is to make sure Iran never gets close to deliverable nuclear action.”

And on CNN’s State of the Union, he said: “I’ve written and said a lot of things when I was a complete free agent. I certainly stand by what I said at the time, but those were my opinions then. The circumstance I’m in now is I’m the national security adviser to the president. I’m not the national security decision-maker.”

It’s not difficult to read between the lines: the implied message is that his views on regime change have not prevailed with Trump—so far.

### **Bolton: Bomb Iran**

Bolton has long been one of the most vocal supporters of such a policy, although he is better known as the primary advocate of bombing Iran. He has been one of the most enthusiastic clients among former U.S. officials who have associated themselves with MEK, which seeks to overthrow the Tehran regime with US backing.

Bolton has not only appeared at MEK rallies in Paris, along with other former U.S. officials on the take from the well-endowed paramilitary organisation. In July 2017, he declared that the Trump administration should adopt the goal of regime change in Iran, calling MEK a “viable” alternative to the regime. And his final line, delivered with his voice rising dramatically, noted that “before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran.”

It appears that Bolton was still pushing the idea within the administration earlier this month. *The Washington Free Beacon* reported on May 10 that a three-page paper outlining a regime-change strategy from a small far-right organisation called the Security Studies Group, with which Bolton is said to have close ties, was circulated among NSC officials. The quotes from the paper in the story make it clear that the strategy is based largely on seeking to exploit ethnic and religious conflicts in Iran.



The paper reportedly makes the point that ethnic minorities – such as Kurds, Azeris, Ahwazi Arabs and Baloch – represent one-third of Iran’s population, and argues that the Iranian regime’s “oppression of its ethnic and religious minorities has

created the conditions for an effective campaign to splinter the Iranian state into component parts”.

It adds: “U.S. support for their independence movements, both overt and covert, could force the regime to focus attention on them and limit its ability to conduct other malign activities.”

Those minorities have all had organisations that have carried out violent actions, including bombings and assassinations against Iranian officials, over the past decade, and such a strategy would presumably involve supporting a step-up in such activities – in other words, U.S. support for terrorist activities against Iranian government targets.

### **‘No Good Terrorist’**

But none of this is new. It was the official line of the powerful alliance between the neoconservatives and the Cheney-Rumsfeld axis within the Bush administration. By 2003, Douglas Feith, the uber-neoconservative former undersecretary of defense for policy, had developed a plan for giving MEK, whose army had been captured by U.S. troops in Iraq, a new name and using them for a covert paramilitary operation in Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran was offering to provide names and other data on al-Qaeda officials it had captured in return for US information on MEK. When former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld sought to protect MEK from such a deal, Bush’s response was: “But we say there is no such thing as a good terrorist.”

Despite the neocon fixation with supporting MEK, both the CIA and the Israelis have long regarded the idea that it could be an instrument for regime change in Iran as ridiculous. After the organization helped Saddam Hussein’s regime

suppress Shia and Kurdish uprisings, it lost any semblance of legitimacy inside Iran. After it relocated to Iraq, moreover, it was transformed into an authoritarian cult.

The former Israeli ambassador to Iran, Uri Lubrani, who was given a free hand to organise a programme for destabilising Iran, recognised long ago, as he told two Israeli journalists, that MEK has no capacity to do anything inside the country.

It was Lubrani who first advanced the argument that about a third of the total Iranian population were ethnic minorities, and that promoting their anti-Tehran activities could help to destabilise the government. Those groups have carried out terrorist bombings and other armed actions in various parts of Iran over the years, and it is well documented that Israel was supporting and advising the Baloch extremist organisation Jundallah on such operations. But the Israelis have used MEK mainly to put out disinformation on Iran's nuclear programme.

The policy paper Bolton is reportedly pushing states explicitly that the regime change policy should include the use of military force against Iran if necessary. That was the premise of the Cheney-Bolton plan for regime change in Iran, as former vice president Dick Cheney's Middle East adviser, David Wurmser, later revealed. And it is the game that Bolton, the enthusiast for bombing Iran, is apparently still playing.

*This article originally appeared on Middle East Eye.*

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## Haspel Could Be Subject to Arrest Abroad Under Universal Jurisdiction

Gina Haspel is the new CIA Director after the Senate voted on Thursday 54-44 to confirm her, with six Democrats agreeing. In this interview, Francis Boyle explains why Haspel could be at risk of arrest on trips abroad.

**By Dennis J Bernstein**



Francis Boyle is professor of international law at the University of Illinois College of Law. He is the author of many books on International Law and an outspoken critic of US policy in the Middle East. Boyle's books include *Foundations of World Order* and the sequel, *Destroying World Order*. In the following interview with Pacifica Radio host Dennis J Bernstein, Boyle warns that, among other things, given her background as key implementer of the US torture program, Gina Haspel is vulnerable to be arrested for war crimes and crimes against humanity if she travels abroad.

Dennis Bernstein spoke with Francis Boyle on May 10th, 2018. [The transcript has been updated to reflect Haspel's confirmation.]

**DB:** [We now have a new ] a new CIA director who likes to get her hands dirty and participate directly in torture. She has also been actively involved in making sure nobody finds out that torture takes place.

**FB:** "Bloody" Gina Haspel is her nickname at the CIA. She was directly involved in the extraordinary rendition program, which is a euphemism for the enforced disappearance of human beings and their consequent torture. This was in the complaint I filed against Bush and company in 2010 with the International Criminal Court for this crime against humanity.

Last fall the ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, said she is going to open up an investigation into the entire CIA extraordinary rendition program for violating the Rome Statute. Although the United States is not a party to the Rome Statute, these actions took place on the territorial sovereignty of Rome Statute states, and therefore the ICC does have jurisdiction. In my opinion, Gina Haspel is a presumptive war criminal and torturer. [We now] have a torturer and war criminal as head of the CIA.

As I have argued in anti-CIA cases here in the United States, the CIA is an organized criminal conspiracy like the SS and the Gestapo. We argued that successfully back in 1987 at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I was involved in large numbers of CIA protest cases back in the 1980's because of what was going on in Central America, with 35,000 dead in Nicaragua, 75,000 dead in El Salvador, and perhaps a quarter of a million in Guatemala. Most of those killed were Mayan Indians, which meant outright genocide.

**DB:** Will it be difficult for our director of the CIA to travel abroad? Maybe she has to be covert forever.

**FB:** That is correct. Under international law today—following a terrible decision by the International Court of Justice—heads of state and foreign ministers have



diplomatic immunity while there are in office. But that is not going to apply to the head of the CIA.

I have a whole dossier here against Bush, Jr. and the rest of them for the extraordinary rendition program. We scared him out of Switzerland over that. A Swiss prosecutor demanded that Bush be prosecuted if he showed up in Switzerland. I know that Amnesty International and the Center for Constitutional Rights also have extensive dossiers against high-level US officials involved in these torture programs, including Haspel. She would be a sitting duck for international human rights lawyers. The evidence is there.

We have a 600-page executive summary of the Senate Foreign Intelligence Committee's report on the extent of torture and extraordinary disappearances by the CIA. This is an official US government document. She was not personally named in there, but she was a high-level official who was personally involved. She certainly supervised the operation in Thailand. Under international law, there is a command responsibility. She is denying that she herself physically tortured anyone, but she supervised others doing the torturing. Under international criminal law, she is accountable for the criminal behavior she oversaw.

**DB:** She admitted at the hearing that she had the tapes of these torture sessions but she considered it prudent to destroy them.

**FB:** The Senate Committee had just announced their investigation so her boss, Jose Rodriguez, ordered her to destroy the tapes. Arguably, this would be obstruction of justice. [We now have] a notorious international criminal heading up the CIA. In my opinion, any senator who vote[d] to confirm her [became] an accessory after the fact to her crimes: torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and violations of the Geneva Conventions and the Convention against Torture.

**DB:** This is a very difficult time. We are all worried about our friend Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst who was brutalized while protesting the Haspel nomination. Obviously, they are very serious about shutting up anyone protesting torture.

**FB:** Ray arguably has the defense of prevention of crimes under international law. I am not saying it would be a winner, because it is always tough going into a federal court and defending anyone protesting and resisting criminal behavior by the United States government.

**Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [\*Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom\*](#). You can access the**

audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net). You can get in touch with the author at [dbernstein@igc.org](mailto:dbernstein@igc.org).

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## Trump Disregards Caravan Asylum Seekers' Legal Rights

As Central Americans fleeing oppression in their countries remain stalled in appalling conditions at the U.S. border, Donald Trump ramps up the xenophobic rhetoric, reports Marjorie Cohn.

**By Marjorie Cohn**



The 300 asylum seekers who arrived at the U.S. border on April 29 after a month-long, 2,000-mile journey have another grueling struggle ahead of them, according to the immigration attorneys who are donating their time to represent them.

More than three-quarters of asylum claims from Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans between 2012 and 2017 were denied, according to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University, and this year's caravan of asylum seekers are facing a climate made even more hostile by the xenophobic Trump administration.

Once the asylum applicants—who traveled in a caravan to the Tijuana-San Ysidro border from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala—establish that they face a credible fear of persecution in their home countries, their ordeals are just beginning.

Colleen Flynn, an immigration attorney with the National Lawyers Guild's Los Angeles chapter, said in an interview that because of retaliation by the Trump administration, even those who establish "credible fear" could face years of detention.

"Some will bond out, but many others will be unable to raise the money for high bonds," Flynn said. "There is a possibility their kids will be taken away."

In the face of these fears, Flynn said, the asylum seekers she met in Tijuana are "incredibly resilient, incredibly hopeful, really brave."

Hundreds of supporters, many of whom had marched 150 miles from Los Angeles, gathered on the U.S. side of the border in solidarity with the asylum seekers.

It was “a really moving sight to see people coming together at the border,” said Kath Rogers, executive director of the National Lawyers Guild’s Los Angeles chapter.

When the asylum seekers arrived at the border, however, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers informed them that the port of entry was “at capacity” and repeated that mantra throughout the day. When Gilbert Saucedo, an attorney, human rights advocate and co-president of the L.A. chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, asked the CBP officers, “‘Is that what you were told to say?’ they said ‘yes,’” Saucedo told me in an interview.

Pueblo Sin Fronteras, a group that has accompanied migrants and refugees on their journeys for 15 years, took issue with the officers, saying in a statement: “Customs and Border Protection is the largest law enforcement agency in the country, and is able to detain, transport and incarcerate thousands of people in a day, but is pretending that they don’t have the ‘capacity’ to accept 150 refugee parents and children whose arrival has been anticipated and communicated weeks in advance.”

The asylum seekers have a legal right to have their applications considered, and many of them have meritorious claims. Notwithstanding Trump’s bloviating, CBP officers began slowly processing the asylum requests. By the end of the fifth day, roughly half of the caravan asylum seekers had been taken to San Diego for processing.

Meanwhile, the remaining asylum seekers continue to wait. They are camping on the ground in unseasonably cool and drizzly weather. Mostly women and children, they are cold and hungry, despite some rations provided by their supporters.

“It just broke my heart to see them,” Saucedo said.

Flynn spoke of a group of women whose lives are endangered in their home countries because they are transgender. These women “really kept spirits up” among the asylum seekers, “singing, dancing, elevating the mood and keeping people’s hopes alive.”

### **Trump Tries to Keep Asylum Seekers Out**

Donald Trump tweeted on April 23 that he ordered the Department of Homeland Security “not to let these large Caravans of people into our Country,” adding, “It is a disgrace.”

Unsurprisingly, Trump demonstrated no compassion for those who made the dangerous trip by bus, train and on foot to escape persecution in their home countries, referring to them as “this problem.” On April 3, he tweeted, “The big

Caravan of People from Honduras ... had better be stopped before it gets there.” The caravan asylum seekers were “openly defying our border,” Trump tweeted on April 30, and wrote in a fundraising email to his supporters on April 26, “We need a strong, impenetrable WALL that will end this problem once and for all.”

Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Mississippi), ranking member of the House Committee on Homeland Security, disagreed with Trump’s assessment.

“It’s overkill,” Thompson told HuffPost. “You would have expected [Trump] to have been briefed by intelligence officers exactly who was headed this way ... We know who they are. We know where they are. And we even know why they’re coming. So to try to elevate this into some heightened sense of threat, it just didn’t measure up.”

Caravans of asylum seekers arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border annually. But this year, Trump began his Twitter and verbal assaults on the caravan before it reached Tijuana. “Are you watching that mess that’s going on right now with the caravan coming up?” he said at an April 29 rally in Michigan. “We have the worst laws anywhere in the world, we don’t have borders.”

Michael Knowles, president of the asylum officers union, told The San Diego Union-Tribune, “If they’re coming to seek asylum, they need to be given due process. We shouldn’t be impeded from doing our job, and those applicants should not be impeded from having their cases heard.”

Trump betrayed his ignorance of U.S. immigration law, tweeting, “These big flows of people are all trying to take advantage of DACA. They want in on the act!” In fact, the asylum seekers have nothing to do with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which allowed immigrants brought to the U.S. as children relief from deportation before Trump sought to end the program.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions, as contemptuous of immigrants as his boss, called the caravan “a deliberate attempt to undermine our laws and overwhelm our system.” Sessions short-circuited immigration court policies, vacating a Board of Immigration Appeals decision that required immigration judges to provide asylum seekers with a full hearing. Now, thanks to Sessions, judges can deny applications without testimony from the asylum seeker.

### **The Legal Right to Apply for Asylum**

The 1951 Refugee Convention requires the United States to accept and consider asylum applications. Applicants must show they are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

Once an applicant demonstrates a credible fear of persecution, which can be shown by evidence of past persecution, he or she must establish that fear stemmed from the applicant's membership in a particular social group or political opinion. These are the two categories that cover most of the caravan asylum seekers, immigration attorney Helen Sklar, a member of the L.A. chapter executive board of the National Lawyers Guild, said in an interview.

"Membership in a particular social group" requires that members of the group share a "common, immutable" trait that is "so fundamental to the identity or conscience of the member that he or she should not be required to change it."

The roughly 35 transgender women on the caravan will likely apply for asylum based on membership in the particular social group of being transgender, Sklar explained.

"Political opinion" is the category that applies to many of the asylum seekers, particularly those fleeing violence in Honduras. Most people in the caravan came from Honduras.

Sklar interviewed one asylum seeker who was subjected to persecution by the current Honduran regime because of her opposition to government policies. She reported being threatened and beaten at an anti-government demonstration.

U.S. policy, particularly during the Obama administration, helped create the conditions that caused the asylum seekers to undertake their long and perilous journey north. In 2009, the U.S. government supported a coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya and made life nearly unbearable for many Hondurans.

As Pamela Spees, senior staff attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights, wrote:

Honduras has been declared the most dangerous country in the world for land rights and environmental activists... It's not surprising then that the rising and pervasive violence and deep economic insecurity in Honduras and the region has resulted in unprecedented numbers of refugees and migrants fleeing to seek safety and security.

Sklar, who is one of about a dozen attorneys who have been helping the asylum seekers without remuneration, criticized the Trump administration for suggesting that the asylum seekers' motives are not legitimate.

"Who would undertake such hardship without a compelling need to find safety?" Sklar asked.

## Trump's Racist, Nativist Immigration Policy

Trump's verbal attacks on the asylum seekers did not occur in a vacuum. From instituting the Muslim Ban to attempting to end the DACA program, he has consistently appealed to his base by pursuing racist, nativist immigration policies.

Late last year, the Trump administration stopped accepting applications for a program that allowed people from Central America legally residing in the United States to bring their children here. As a result, 3,800 people—primarily children—who were being processed under that program are stranded in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Trump has also drastically reduced the admission of refugees into the U.S. and deployed National Guard troops to the border.

If he had his way, Trump would build a border wall and end the practice of family migration and the diversity visa lottery system. He would also halt the policy of releasing undocumented immigrants with notices to appear in court (a practice that he describes using the dehumanizing language of “catch and release”), opting instead to detain or deport them.

At his April 29 Michigan rally, Trump threatened to shut down the country if his wall did not get built.

“We need security. We need the wall ... if we don't get border security, we'll have no choice. We'll close down the country,” Trump declared.

Meanwhile, the asylum seekers brace for the next stage of their long struggle. “Our trip isn't over,” 17-year-old Jose Coello from Honduras said as he walked into the United States from Tijuana on May 2. “This is just the next step.”

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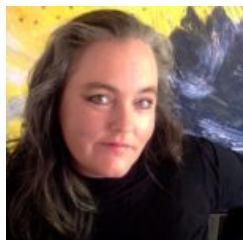
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## Syrian ‘Chemical Victims’ Suffered from

# Dust Inhalation, Reports Say

A report by the *Independent's* veteran Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk quotes doctors in Douma saying victims suffered from dust inhalation and that a member of the White Helmets caused panic by falsely shouting, "Gas!" in a triage center. The White Helmets were then bused out with other jihadists, as Caitlin Johnstone explains.

**By Caitlin Johnstone**



We are now being told (and I assure you I am not making this up) that if the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons doesn't find evidence that the Syrian government conducted a chemical weapons attack in Douma last week, it's because Russia hid the evidence.

"It is our understanding the Russians may have visited the attack site," reports U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Ward. "It is our concern that they may have tampered with it with the intent of thwarting the efforts of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission to conduct an effective investigation."

I guess the idea is that this international top-level investigative team on which tremendous credibility has been placed by the western world can be thwarted by Russians showing up with a Hoover and spraying some Febreze in the air like a teenage stoner when mom comes home? I'm not sure, but given the immense dearth of evidence we've been seeing in support of the establishment Douma narrative and the mounting pile of evidence contradicting it, it sure does sound fishy.

Now that the jihadist-occupied suburb of Douma has been retaken by the Syrian government, western journalists have been allowed in to poke around and start asking questions, and so far it isn't looking great for the propaganda machine.

## **Dust Not Gas**

The *Independent's* Robert Fisk has published a report which affirms the story so many westerners have been dismissing as Kremlin propaganda for days now after interviewing a doctor from the hospital of the area where the Douma attack was supposed to have occurred. Dr Assim Rahaibani told Fisk that what was in actuality an outbreak of respiratory distress among occupants of a dusty oxygen-deprived tunnel was made to look like the aftereffects of a chemical weapons attack when a member of the White Helmets started shouting about a gas attack in front of a bunch of video cameras. Everyone panicked and started hosing

themselves down, but in the video, according to Rahaibani, “what you see are people suffering from hypoxia—not gas poisoning.”

This report was independently backed up by a reporter from *One America News Network* named Pearson Sharp, who gave a detailed account of his interviews with officials, doctors, as well as many civilians on the street Sharp says he deliberately selected at random in order to avoid accusations of bias. Many people hadn't even heard that a chemical weapons attack had taken place, and the ones who had said it was staged by Jaysh al-Islam. The staff at the hospital, including a medic-in-training who was an eyewitness to the incident, gave the same story as the account in Fisk's report. (Fisk also reported that the White Helmets in Duma had joined jihadists on Syrian government buses on the way to Idlib province.)

### **Weakening Narrative**

The increasing confidence with which these unapproved narratives are being voiced and the increasing discomfort being exhibited by empire loyalists like Ambassador Ward indicate a weakening narrative in the greater propaganda campaign against the Assad government and its allies, but don't hold your breath for the part where Fox News and the BBC turn around and start asking critical questions of the governments that they are meant to be holding to account.

The journalists who have been advancing the establishment narrative on Syria aren't about to start reporting that they've gotten the entire Syria story backward and have been promoting a version of events manufactured for the benefit of CIA-MI6-Mossad agendas. You're not about to see CNN, who last year staged a fake scripted interview with a seven year-old Syrian girl to manufacture support for escalations against Assad, suddenly turn around and start asking if we're being told the full story about what's happening Syria.

Watch them closely. Watch how they steadfastly ignore the growing mountain of evidence and keep promoting the Syrian regime change agenda that the western empire has been working toward for decades. Watch them dismiss all evidence they can't ignore as Kremlin propaganda and shift the narrative whenever things start to look bad for them. Those riding the crest of the wave of establishment media are too far gone into the blob to ever admit error and change. The least among us aren't about to stop constructing a public reality tunnel which depicts them as heroes of truth, tear it all down, and start advancing a narrative which makes them look like fools at best and villains at worst. It will not happen. Luckily for us, it doesn't need to. Internet censorship is still far from closing the door on our ability to network and share information, and we've been very effective at sowing skepticism among the masses. The war propagandists are not nearly as good at their jobs as they want to believe, and we can beat them.



## Consent Required

They work so hard to manufacture support for war because they require that consent. If the oligarchs try to launch a war against a disobedient nation amidst very clear opposition from the public, they will shatter the illusion of freedom and democracy that their entire empire is built upon, and then they're exposed. Corporatist oligarchy has succeeded in weaving its web of dominance because its oppression has thus far remained hidden and its depravity disguised as humanitarianism. They cannot expose themselves by transgressing a loud NO from the public or else the masses will realize that everything they used to believe about their country, their government and their world is a lie.

They won't risk that. We can force them into retreating from open war by circulating facts and information and keeping a healthy level of skepticism circulating among the public. Watch them squirm, move goalposts and shift narratives, and point and yell about it whenever it happens. We can win the media war against the propagandists. We have truth on our side.

*This article first appeared on [Medium](#).*

**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](#). This article was re-published with permission.**

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# On the Gaza Protesters Murdered by Israeli Forces

An attack on protesting Palestinians on March 30 by the Israeli military left 18 dead and thousands injured and constitutes mass murder and a blatant war crime, argues Palestinian human rights attorney Diana Buttu in an interview with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The latest Israeli slaughter of Gazans falls into the category of shooting fish in a tank. Indeed, as tens of thousands of Gazans protested the longest occupation in modern history and demanded their historical Right to Return, last Friday, March 30, Israeli snipers raised their rifles repeatedly and, from behind a wide-buffer and an electrified fence, opened fire on the Palestinians.

The latest stats of killed and wounded from the so-called confrontation between Israeli sharpshooters and Palestinians is at least 18 Palestinians killed and over 1,000 wounded. On the Israeli side, zero casualties. Zero!

Diana Buttu is a Palestinian/Canadian lawyer based in the Occupied West Bank of Palestine. She is a former Palestinian negotiator. I spoke with her in Haifa on April 2nd, 2018.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Maybe you could begin with your best information in terms of what happened.

**Diana Buttu:** I can give you the rough numbers. 18 Palestinians are confirmed dead. Others are in very critical condition and unable to get the medical attention they need. Over [1,000] Palestinians were wounded. They are unable to receive treatment both because of the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip and because of the lack of electricity. Palestinian human rights organizations are calling for the wounded to receive treatment elsewhere, but so far the Israeli government has refused.

**Dennis Bernstein:** What do we know about how this unfolded? I heard in an NPR report that this was not just a protest, that these were militants.

**Diana Buttu:** We know that the Israeli government announced days in advance that they were going to be positioning snipers along the border. Now, there are multiple sets of borders in effect here. There is an electrified fence on the eastern and northern sides of the Gaza Strip. A cement wall is on the southern border with Egypt. The water is blockaded by the Israeli navy on the western side.

In addition to those physical borders, the Israeli army has been enforcing what they call a buffer zone, which is about 1,000 feet away from the electrified fence. We know that when Palestinians approached the buffer zone on the eastern side, the Israelis immediately started shooting Palestinian protesters.

From video footage we can see that people were shot in the back. Others were shot for carrying tires or for simply walking into these areas. These were individuals who posed no threat whatsoever. Even if they were attempting to cross the border, you don't use live fire to kill people who are crossing a border.

And secondly, the point of this was to highlight the fact that Palestinians cannot return. 80% of the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip does not come from the Gaza Strip. They are actually refugees driven out by the Israelis. While Israel keeps claiming that there were attempts to "infiltrate," in any case this is not a proper response.

The fact that Israel was positioning snipers on the border indicates that they were ready, willing and able to shoot protesters in the back. The head of the Israeli defense establishment has said that every one of these snipers should be commended.

**Dennis Bernstein:** How many Israeli soldiers were wounded and killed?

**Diana Buttu:** Zero. Again, this was not a question of the protesters posing any danger to any individual. It was the mere fact that Palestinians were out in protest.

I want to put this in its proper historical perspective. The reason they were out on March 30 is because this day, in 1976, the Israelis did the exact same thing to Palestinians who were citizens of Israel. At that time, Palestinians were protesting the confiscation of thousands of acres of Palestinian land by the Israeli government in order to make way for Jewish towns.

On that day in 1976 Israel shot and killed six unarmed Palestinian protesters. Here we are forty years later, with people commemorating the killings, Israel does the exact same thing, this time killing three times that number.

**Dennis Bernstein:** The Israelis have declared that there will be no investigation.

**Diana Buttu:** Yes, and this is nothing new. There has never been an investigation into the actions of the army. After the massacre at Jenin in March of 2002, when 52 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army, the government would not allow an investigation and announced that everything had been justified.

I do not expect any justice coming from the Israeli military establishment. Trump has made it very clear in the Security Council that there will never be any investigation of these 18 Palestinian deaths.

**Dennis Bernstein:** And this happens at a time when people in the Gaza Strip are suffering on many levels. This protest took a lot of courage, given the fact that everyday life is a struggle. People often refer to the Gaza Strip as one of the largest open-air prisons in the world.

**Diana Buttu:** It has gone beyond that. The analogy was perhaps true in 2005 but now it has gotten worse than that. In prison at least you have electricity, you are still fed three times a day. Israel is making sure that the Palestinians only get electricity two or three hours a day. There is a waiting list of some 30,000 people who want to be able to leave, who have valid visas but are not allowed to leave. Imports are curtailed by the Israelis.

You and I do not measure the quality of our lives by the amount of goods that we have. We assess the quality of our lives by the things we are able to do and the time we are able to spend with friends and loved ones. In the Gaza Strip, people are completely unable to visit one another.

I myself have not been able to enter the Gaza Strip since 2007, which means that I have left behind all of my friends. And I am one of the lucky ones. My friends have been unable to leave or even think of leaving. Life for people in Gaza is completely miserable, with unfit drinking water, with an electricity infrastructure that is barely functioning, with a healthcare system that is on the verge of collapse, with malnutrition rates soaring, with unemployment rates through the roof. It is little wonder that the UN has said that Gaza will be unlivable by 2020.

**Dennis Bernstein:** How far away are you from these friends who you are not able to visit?

**Diana Buttu:** About fifty miles. The only chance I have of seeing my friends is if they, by some miracle, are able to get a visa and exit and we meet in a third country. The last time this happened was several years ago when we happened to meet in the United States.

**Dennis Bernstein:** So the idea of a two-state solution in this context is really a crazy thought. A paper like *The New York Times* loves maps, but I have never seen a map of independent Palestine. This is the nature of occupation, in the context, wouldn't you say, of ethnic cleansing?

**Diana Buttu:** Absolutely. The ethnic cleansing of Palestine has been the one common thread since 1948. Politicians and diplomats have tried to mask it by calling for things like a two-state solution.

Part of the ethnic cleansing process is to get rid of Palestinians so that they don't have to see them. The tragedy is that no one is labeling it that. Instead they try to hide behind some diplomatic initiative or other.

Once we start looking at it as an ethnic cleansing process, we can move away from all these false attempts to come up with resolutions and put in place mechanisms to stop the process.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Where did the ammunition come from that was used to kill these 18 protesters and wounded some [1,000] more?

**Diana Buttu:** It's a mix. Mostly it is US weaponry. The question is, why is the United States allowing its weaponry to be used on peaceful protesters? Don't we have legislation in place to prevent such human rights abuses from happening?

But Israel gets to take a pass when it comes to the use of US weaponry.

My big fear is that these attacks on Gaza are like a live arms show. We saw after the 2014 massacre in Gaza that arms sales actually went up in Israel.

This is why it is important to push for a complete arms embargo.

**Dennis Bernstein:** My understanding is that many Palestinians have vowed to continue to protest and resist. Do you think there will be more live fire attacks?

**Diana Buttu:** There will definitely be more protests and Israel will definitely continue to kill Palestinians, because it can. Because so far all we have seen is a green light. We have seen European states express how deeply concerned they are, but this concern doesn't do anything for Palestinians.

There are plans to protest from Land Day, March 30, through May 15, the day that the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is commemorated. It is also the day that the US moves its embassy in violation of international law.

So we will see six weeks of protest taking place. And I certainly expect that the Israeli military machine is going to continue to take Palestinian lives, because no one is stopping them.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Have any reporters been calling you from MSNBC or NPR to get your perspective?

**Diana Buttu:** For the most part, I think that the killing of Palestinians has become so commonplace that it is no longer news. It seems that Trump's tweets are of more importance than 18 lives taken away so quickly, 18 families affected, and their friends and others.

The day before the march, a young artist wrote in the sand on the beaches in Gaza "# I will return" in Arabic. The next day he was one of those who lost their lives. The next day his friend wrote his name in the sand as a means of commemorating him. These are people with real lives, with dreams, with fears, with families. Instead we are reduced to numbers, not nearly as important as the 140 characters that your president tweets out.

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

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# Coming Attraction: Lunatic Loose in West Wing

As Uber-Hawk John Bolton prepares to take over as national security adviser on Monday, Ray McGovern looks back at when Bolton was one of the “crazies” in the George W. Bush administration.

By **Ray McGovern** *Special to Consortium News*

John Bolton’s March 22 appointment-by-tweet as President Donald Trump’s national security adviser has given “March Madness” a new and ominous meaning. There is less than a week left to batten down the hatches before Bolton makes U.S. foreign policy worse than it already is.

During a recent interview with *The Intercept*’s Jeremy Scahill (minutes 35 to 51) I mentioned that Bolton fits seamlessly into a group of take-no-prisoners zealots once widely known in Washington circles as “the crazies,” and now more commonly referred to as “neocons.”

Beginning in the 1970s, “the crazies” sobriquet was applied to Cold Warriors hell bent on bashing Russians, Chinese, Arabs – anyone who challenged U.S. “exceptionalism” (read hegemony). More to the point, I told Scahill that President (and former CIA Director) George H. W. Bush was among those using the term freely, since it seemed so apt. I have been challenged to prove it.

I don’t make stuff up. And with the appointment of the certifiable Bolton, the “the crazies” have become far more than an historical footnote. Rather, the crucible that Bush-41 and other reasonably moderate policymakers endured at their hands give the experience major relevance today. Thus, I am persuaded it would be best not to ask people simply to take my word for it when I refer to “the crazies,” their significance, and the differing attitudes the two Bushes had toward them.

George H. W. Bush and I had a longstanding professional and, later, cordial relationship. For many years after he stopped being president, we stayed in touch – mostly by letter. This is the first time I have chosen to share any of our personal correspondence. I do so not only because of the ominous importance of Bolton’s appointment, but also because I am virtually certain the elder Bush would want me to.

Scanned below is a note George H. W. Bush sent me eight weeks before his son, egged on by the same “crazies” his father knew well from earlier incarnations, launched an illegal and unnecessary war for regime change in Iraq – unleashing

chaos in the Middle East.

1-22-03

GEORGE BUSH

Dear Ray,

It is only "meet and right" that you speak out.

Thanks for your letter. Please do not worry that "crazies" have any influence on POTUS 43. I will admit that early reporting indicated that but it was not true then nor is it true now.

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### Shut Out of the Media

By January 2003, it was clear that Bush-43 was about to launch a war of aggression – the crime defined by the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal as “the supreme international crime differing from other war crimes only in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” (Think torture, for example.) During most of 2002, several of us former intelligence analysts had been comparing notes, giving one another sanity checks, writing op-eds pointing to the flimsiness of the “intelligence” cobbled together to allege a weapons-of-mass-destruction “threat” from Iraq, and warning of the catastrophe that war on Iraq would bring.

Except for an occasional op-ed wedged into the Christian Science Monitor or the Miami Herald, for example, we were ostracized from “mainstream media.” *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* were on a feeding frenzy from the government trough and TV pundits were getting high ratings by beating the drum for war. Small wonder the entire media was allergic to what we were saying, despite our many years of experience in intelligence analysis. Warnings to slow down and think were the last thing wanted by those already profiteering from a war on the near horizon.

The challenge we faced was how to get through to President George W. Bush. It had become crystal clear that the only way to do that would be to do an end run around “the crazies” – the criminally insane advisers that his father knew so well – Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Undersecretary of State John Bolton.

### **Bolton: One of the Crazies**

John Bolton was Cheney’s “crazy” at the State Department. Secretary Colin Powell was pretty much window dressing. He could be counted on not to complain loudly – much less quit – even if he strongly suspected he was being had. Powell had gotten to where he was by saluting sharply and doing what superiors told him to do. As secretary of state, Powell was not crazy – just craven. He enjoyed more credibility than the rest of the gang and rather than risk being ostracized like the rest of us, he sacrificed that credibility on the altar of the “supreme international crime.”

In those days Bolton did not hesitate to run circles around – and bully – the secretary of state and many others. This must be considered a harbinger of things to come, starting on Monday, when the bully comes to the china shop in the West Wing. While longevity in office is not the

hallmark of the Trump administration, even if Bolton’s tenure turns out to be short-lived, the crucial months immediately ahead will provide Bolton with ample opportunity to wreak the kind of havoc that “the crazies” continue to see as enhancing U.S. – and not incidentally – Israeli influence in the Middle East. Bear in mind, Bolton still says the attack on Iraq was a good idea. And he is out to scuttle the landmark agreement that succeeded in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon any time soon.

### **Trying to Head Off War**

In August 2002, as the Bush-43 administration and U.S. media prepared the country for war on Iraq, the elder Bush’s national security advisor, Gen. Brent Scowcroft, and Secretary of State James Baker each wrote op-eds in an attempt to wean the younger Bush off the “crazies’” milk. Scowcroft’s *Wall Street Journal* op-ed of August 15 was as blunt as its title, “Don’t Attack Saddam.” The cautionary thrust of Baker’s piece in the *New York Times* ten days later, was more diplomatic but equally clear.

But these interventions, widely thought to have been approved by Bush-41, had a predictable opposite effect on the younger Bush, determined as he was to become the “first war president of the 21st Century” (his words). It is a safe bet also that Cheney and other “crazies” baited him with, “Are you going to let



Daddy, who doesn't respect ANY of us, tell you what to do?"

All attempts to insert a rod into the wheels of the juggernaut heading downhill toward war were looking hopeless, when a new idea occurred. Maybe George H. W. Bush could get through to his son. What's to lose? On January 11, 2003 I wrote a letter to the elder Bush asking him to speak "privately to your son George about the crazies advising him on Iraq," adding "I am aghast at the cavalier way in which the [Richard] Perles of the Pentagon are promoting the use of nuclear weapons as an acceptable option against Iraq."

My letter continued: "That such people have the President's ear is downright scary. I think he needs to know why you exercised such care to keep such folks at arms length. (And, as you may know, they are exerting unrelenting pressure on CIA analysts to come up with the "right" answers. You know how that goes!)"

In the letter I enclosed a handful of op-eds that I had managed to get past 2nd-tier mainstream media censors. In those writings, I was much more pointed in my criticism of the Bush/Cheney administration's approach to Iraq than Scowcroft and Baker had been in August 2002.

Initially, I was encouraged at the way the elder Bush began his January 22, 2003 note to me: "It is only 'meet and right' that you speak out." As I read on, however, I asked myself how he could let the wish be father to the thought, so to speak. (Incidentally, "POTUS" in his note is the acronym for "President of the United States;" number 43, of course, was George Jr.)

The elder Bush may not have been fully conscious of it, but he was whistling in the dark, having long since decided to leave to surrogates like Scowcroft and Baker the task of highlighting publicly the criminal folly of attacking Iraq. The father may have tried privately; who knows. It was, in my view, a tragedy that he did not speak out publicly. He would have been very well aware that this was the only thing that would have had a chance of stopping his son from committing what the Nuremberg Tribunal defined as "the supreme international crime."

It is, of course, difficult for a father to admit that his son fell under the influence – this time not alcohol or drugs, but rather the at least equally noxious demonic influence of "the crazies," which Billy Graham himself might have found beyond his power to exorcise. Maybe it is partly because I know the elder Bush personally, but it does strike me that, since we are all human, some degree of empathy might be in order. I simply cannot imagine what it must be like to be a former President with a son, also a former President, undeniably responsible for such widespread killing, injury and abject misery.

## Speaking Out – Too Late

It was a dozen years too late, but George H.W. Bush finally did give voice to his doubts about the wisdom of rushing into the Iraq War. In Jon Meacham's biography, "Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush," the elder Bush puts most of the blame for Iraq on his son's "iron-ass" advisers, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, while at the same time admitting where the buck stops. With that Watergate-style "modified, limited hangout," and his (richly deserved) criticism of his two old nemeses, Bush-41 may be able to live more comfortably with himself, hoping to get beyond what I believe must be his lingering regret at not going public when that might have stopped "arrogant" Rumsfeld and "hardline" Cheney from

inflicting their madness on the Middle East. No doubt he is painfully aware that he was one of the very few people who might have been able to stop the chaos and carnage, had he spoken out publicly.

Bush-41's not-to-worry note to me had the opposite effect with those of us CIA alumni alarmed at the gathering storm and the unconscionable role being played by those of our former CIA colleagues still there in manufacturing pre-Iraq-war "intelligence." We could see what was going on in real time; we did not have to wait five years for the bipartisan conclusions of a five-year Senate Intelligence Committee investigation. Introducing its findings, Chairman Jay Rockefeller said: "In making the case for war, the Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent."

Back to January 2003: a few days after I received President Bush's not-to-worry note of January 22, 2003, a handful of us former senior CIA officials went forward with plans to create Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs). We had been giving one another sanity checks before finalizing draft articles about the scarcely believable things we were observing – including unmistakable signs that our profession of intelligence analysis was being prostituted. On the afternoon of February 5, 2003, after Powell misled the UN Security Council, we issued our first (of three) VIPs Memoranda for the President before the war. We graded Powell "C" for content, and warned President George W. Bush, in effect, to beware "the crazies," closing with these words:

"After watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion ... beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic."

**Team B**

When Gerald Ford assumed the presidency in August 1974, the White House was a center of intrigue. Serving as Chief of Staff for President Ford, Donald Rumsfeld (1974-75), with help from Dick Cheney (1975-76), engineered Bush's nomination to become CIA Director. This was widely seen as a cynical move to take Bush out of contention for the Republican ticket in 1976 and possibly beyond, since the post of CIA director was regarded as a dead-end job and, ideally, would keep you out of politics. (Alas, this did not turn out the way Rumsfeld expected – damn those “unknown unknowns.”)

If, at the same time, Rumsfeld and Cheney could brand GHW Bush soft on communism and brighten the future for the Military-Industrial Complex, that would put icing on the cake. Rumsfeld had been making evidence-impooverished speeches at the time, arguing that the Soviets were ignoring

the AMB Treaty and other arms control arrangements and were secretly building up to attack the United States. He and the equally relentless Paul Wolfowitz were doing all they could to create a much more alarming picture of the Soviet Union, its intentions, and its views about fighting and winning a nuclear war. Sound familiar?

Bush arrived at CIA after U.S.-Soviet detente had begun to flourish. The cornerstone Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was almost four years old and had introduced the somewhat mad but stabilizing reality of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Crazies and neocons alike lived in desperate fear of losing their favorite enemy, the USSR. Sound familiar?

Bush was CIA Director for the year January 1976 to January 1977, during which I worked directly for him. At the time, I was Acting National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe where post-WWII certainties were unravelling and it was my job to get intelligence community-wide assessments to the White House – often on fast breaking events. We almost wore out what was then the latest technology – the “LDX” (for Long Distance Xerography) machine – sending an unprecedentedly high number of “Alert Memoranda” from CIA Headquarters to the White House. (“LDX,” of course, is now fax; there was no Internet.)

As ANIO, I also chaired National Intelligence Estimates on Italy and Spain. As far as I could observe from that senior post, Director Bush honored his incoming pledge not to put any political gloss on the judgments of intelligence analysts.

Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, of course, had made no such pledge. They persuaded President Ford to set up a “Team B” analysis, contending that CIA and intelligence community analyses and estimates were naively rosy. Bush's predecessor as CIA director, William Colby, had turned the proposal down flat, but he had no political ambitions. I suspect Bush, though, saw a Rumsfeld trap

to color him soft on the USSR. In any case, against the advice of virtually all intelligence professionals, Bush succumbed to the political pressure and acquiesced in the establishment of a Team B to do alternative analyses. No one was surprised that these painted a much more threatening and inaccurate picture of Soviet strategic intentions.

Paul Warnke, a senior official of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at the time of Team B, put it this way:

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“Whatever might be said for evaluation of strategic capabilities by a group of outside experts, the impracticality of achieving useful results by ‘independent’ analysis of strategic objectives should have been self-evident. Moreover, the futility of the Team B enterprise was assured by the selection of the panel’s members. Rather than including a diversity of views ... the Strategic Objectives Panel was composed entirely of individuals who made careers of viewing the Soviet menace with alarm.”

The fact that Team B’s conclusions were widely regarded as inaccurate did not deter Rumsfeld. He went about promoting them as valid and succeeded in undermining arms control efforts for the next several years. Two days before Jimmy Carter’s inauguration Rumsfeld fired his parting shot, saying, “No doubt exists about the capabilities of the Soviet armed forces” and that those capabilities “indicate a tendency toward war fighting ... rather than the more modish Western models of deterrence through mutual vulnerability.”

### **GHW Bush in the White House**

When George H. W. Bush came into town as vice president, he got President Reagan’s permission to be briefed with “The President’s Daily Brief” and I became a daily briefer from 1981 to 1985. That job was purely substantive. Even so, my colleagues and I have been very careful to regard those conversations as sacrosanct, for obvious reasons. By the time he became president in 1989, he had come to know, all too well, “the crazies” and what they were capable of. Bush’s main political nemesis, Donald Rumsfeld, could be kept at bay, and other “crazies” kept out of the most senior posts – until Bush the younger put them in positions in which they could do serious damage. John Bolton had been *enfant terrible* on arms control, persuading Bush-43 to ditch the ABM Treaty. On Monday, he can be expected to arrive at the West Wing with his wrecking ball.

### **Even Jimmy Carter Speaks Out**

Given how difficult Rumsfeld and other hardliners made it for President Carter to work with the Russians on arms control, and the fact that Bolton

has been playing that role more recently, Jimmy Carter's comments on Bolton – while unusually sharp – do not come as a complete surprise. Besides, experience has certainly shown how fo

olish it can be to dismiss out of hand what former presidents say about their successors' appointments to key national security positions. This goes in spades in the case of John Bolton.

Just three days after Bolton's appointment, the normally soft-spoken Jimmy Carter became plain-spoken/outspoken Jimmy Carter, telling USA Today that the selection of Bolton "is a disaster for our country." When asked what advice he would give Trump on North Korea, for example, Carter said his "first advice" would be to fire Bolton.

In sum, if you asked Bush-41, Carter's successor as president, how he would describe John Bolton, I am confident he would lump Bolton together with those he called "the crazies" back in the day, referring to headstrong ideologues adept at blowing things up – things like arms agreements negotiated with painstaking care, giving appropriate consideration to the strategic views of adversaries and friends alike. Sadly, "crazy" seems to have become the new normal in Washington, with warmongers and regime-changers like Bolton in charge, people who have not served a day in uniform and have no direct experience of war other than starting them.

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## How Many People Has the U.S. Killed in its Post-9/11 Wars? Part 2: Afghanistan and Pakistan

The numbers of casualties of U.S. wars since Sept. 11, 2001 have largely gone uncounted, but coming to terms with the true scale of the crimes committed remains an urgent moral, political and legal imperative, argues Nicolas J.S. Davies, in part two of his series.

**By Nicolas J.S. Davies**

In the first part of this series, I estimated that about 2.4 million Iraqis have been killed as a result of the illegal invasion of their country by the United States and the United Kingdom in 2003. I turn now to Afghan and Pakistani deaths in the ongoing 2001 U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. In part three, I will examine U.S.-caused war deaths in Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. According to Ret. U.S. General Tommy Franks, who led the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan in reaction to 9/11, the U.S. government does not keep track of civilian casualties that it causes. “You know, we don’t do body counts,” Franks once said. Whether that’s true or a count is covered up is difficult to know.

As I explained in part one, the U.S. has attempted to justify its invasions of Afghanistan and several other countries as a legitimate response to the terrorist crimes of 9/11. But the U.S. was not attacked by another country on that day, and no crime, however horrific, can justify 16 years of war – and counting – against a series of countries that did not attack the U.S.

As former Nuremberg prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz told NPR a week after the terrorist attacks, they were crimes against humanity, but not “war crimes,” because the U.S. was not at war. “It is never a legitimate response to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done.” Ferencz explained. “We must make a distinction between punishing the guilty and punishing others. If you simply retaliate en masse by bombing Afghanistan, let us say, or the Taliban, you will kill many people who don’t believe in what has happened, who don’t approve of what has happened.”

As Ferencz predicted, we have killed “many people” who had nothing to do with the crimes of September 11. How many people? That is the subject of this report.

## **Afghanistan**

In 2011, award-winning investigative journalist Gareth Porter was researching night raids by U.S. special operations forces in Afghanistan for his article, “How McChrystal and Petraeus Built an Indiscriminate Killing Machine.” The expansion of night raids from 2009 to 2011 was a central element in Barack Obama’s escalation of the U.S. War in Afghanistan. Porter documented a gradual 50-fold ramping up from 20 raids per month in May 2009 to over 1,000 raids per month by April 2011.

But strangely, the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported a decrease in the numbers of civilians killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2010, including a decrease in the numbers of civilians killed in night raids from 135 in 2009 to only 80 in 2010.

UNAMA's reports of civilian deaths are based on investigations by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), so Noori Shah Noori, an Afghan journalist working with Porter on the article, interviewed Nader Nadery, a Commissioner of the AIHRC, to find out what was going on.

Nadery explained to Noori, "...that that figure represented only the number of civilian deaths from 13 incidents that had been fully investigated. It excluded the deaths from 60 other incidents in which complaints had been received, but had not yet been thoroughly investigated."

"Nadery has since estimated that the total civilian deaths for all 73 night raids about which it had complaints was 420," Porter continued. "But the AIHRC admits that it does not have access to most of the districts dominated by the Taliban and that people in those districts are not aware of the possibility of complaining to the Commission about night raids. So, neither the AIHRC nor the United Nations learns about a significant proportion – and very likely the majority – of night raids that end in civilian deaths."

UNAMA has since updated its count of civilians killed in U.S. night raids in 2010 from 80 to 103, still nowhere close to Nadery's estimate of 420. But as Nadery explained, even that estimate must have been a small fraction of the number of civilian deaths in about 5,000 night raids that year, most of which were probably conducted in areas where people have no contact with UNAMA or the AIHRC.

As senior U.S. military officers admitted to Dana Priest and William Arkin of *The Washington Post*, more than half the raids conducted by U.S. special operations forces target the wrong person or house, so a large increase in civilian deaths was a predictable and expected result of such a massive expansion of these deadly "kill or capture" raids.

The massive escalation of U.S. night raids in 2010 probably made it an exceptional year, so it is unlikely that UNAMA's reports regularly exclude as many uninvestigated reports of civilian deaths as in 2010. But on the other hand, UNAMA's annual reports never mention that their figures for civilian deaths are based only on investigations completed by the AIHRC, so it is unclear how unusual it was to omit 82 percent of reported incidents of civilian deaths in U.S. night raids from that year's report.

We can only guess how many reported incidents have been omitted from UNAMA's other annual reports since 2007, and, in any case, that would still tell us nothing about civilians killed in areas that have no contact with UNAMA or the AIHRC.

In fact, for the AIHRC, counting the dead is only a by-product of its main function, which is to investigate reports of human rights violations in Afghanistan. But Porter and Noori's research revealed that UNAMA's reliance on investigations completed by the AIHRC as the basis for definitive statements about the number of civilians killed in Afghanistan in its reports has the effect of sweeping an unknown number of incomplete investigations and unreported civilian deaths down a kind of "memory hole," writing them out of virtually all published accounts of the human cost of the war in Afghanistan.

UNAMA's annual reports even include colorful pie-charts to bolster the false impression that these are realistic estimates of the number of civilians killed in a given year, and that pro-government forces and foreign occupation forces are only responsible for a small portion of them.

UNAMA's systematic undercounts and meaningless pie-charts become the basis for headlines and news stories all over the world. But they are all based on numbers that UNAMA and the AIHRC know very well to be a small fraction of civilian deaths in Afghanistan. It is only a rare story like Porter's in 2011 that gives any hint of this shocking reality.

In fact, UNAMA's reports reflect only how many deaths the AIHRC staff have investigated in a given year, and may bear little or no relation to how many people have actually been killed. Seen in this light, the relatively small fluctuations in UNAMA's reports of civilian deaths from year to year in Afghanistan seem just as likely to represent fluctuations in resources and staffing at the AIHRC as actual increases or decreases in the numbers of people killed.

If only one thing is clear about UNAMA's reports of civilian deaths, it is that nobody should ever cite them as estimates of total numbers of civilians killed in Afghanistan – least of all UN and government officials and mainstream journalists who, knowingly or not, mislead millions of people when they repeat them.

### **Estimating Afghan Deaths Through the Fog of Official Deception**

So the most widely cited figures for civilian deaths in Afghanistan are based, not just on "passive reporting," but on misleading reports that knowingly ignore many or most of the deaths reported by bereaved families and local officials, while many or most civilian deaths are never reported to UNAMA or the AIHRC in the first place. So how can we come up with an intelligent or remotely accurate estimate of how many civilians have really been killed in Afghanistan?

Body Count: Casualty Figures After 10 Years of the "War On Terror", published in



2015 by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), a co-winner of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize, estimated deaths of combatants and civilians in Afghanistan based on UNAMA's reports and other sources. *Body Count's* figures for numbers of Afghan combatants killed seem more reliable than UNAMA's undercounts of civilian deaths.

The Afghan government reported that 15,000 of its soldiers and police were killed through 2013. The authors of *Body Count* took estimates of Taliban and other anti-government forces killed in 2001, 2007 and 2010 from other sources and extrapolated to years for which no estimates were available, based on other measures of the intensity of the conflict (numbers of air strikes, night raids etc.). They estimated that 55,000 "insurgents" were killed by the end of 2013.

The years since 2013 have been increasingly violent for the people of Afghanistan. With reductions in U.S. and NATO occupation forces, Afghan pro-government forces now bear the brunt of combat against their fiercely independent countrymen, and another 25,000 soldiers and police have been killed since 2013, according to my own calculations from news reports and this study by the Watson Institute at Brown University.

If the same number of anti-government fighters have been killed, that would mean that at least 120,000 Afghan combatants have been killed since 2001. But, since pro-government forces are armed with heavier weapons and are still backed by U.S. air support, anti-government losses are likely to be greater than those of government troops. So a more realistic estimate would be that between 130,000 and 150,000 Afghan combatants have been killed.

The more difficult task is to estimate how many civilians have been killed in Afghanistan through the fog of UNAMA's misinformation. UNAMA's passive reporting has been deeply flawed, based on completed investigations of as few as 18 percent of reported incidents, as in the case of night raid deaths in 2010, with no reports at all from large parts of the country where the Taliban are most active and most U.S. air strikes and night raids take place. The Taliban appear to have never published any numbers of civilian deaths in areas under its control, but it has challenged UNAMA's figures.

There has been no attempt to conduct a serious mortality study in Afghanistan like the 2006 Lancet study in Iraq. The world owes the people of Afghanistan that kind of serious accounting for the human cost of the war it has allowed to engulf them. But it seems unlikely that that will happen before the world fulfills the more urgent task of ending the now 16-year-old war.

Body Count took estimates by Neta Crawford and the Costs of War project at Boston University for 2001-6, plus the UN's flawed count since 2007, and

multiplied them by a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 8, to produce a range of 106,000 to 170,000 civilians killed from 2001 to 2013. The authors seem to have been unaware of the flaws in UNAMA's reports revealed to Porter and Noori by Nadery in 2011.

But *Body Count* did acknowledge the very conservative nature of its estimate, noting that, "compared to Iraq, where urbanization is more pronounced, and monitoring by local and foreign press is more pronounced than in Afghanistan, the registration of civilian deaths has been much more fragmentary."

In my 2016 article, "Playing Games With War Deaths," I suggested that the ratio of passive reporting to actual civilian deaths in Afghanistan was therefore more likely to fall between the ratios found in Iraq in 2006 (12:1) and Guatemala at the end of its Civil War in 1996 (20:1).

### **Mortality in Guatemala and Afghanistan**

In fact, the geographical and military situation in Afghanistan is more analogous to Guatemala, with many years of war in remote, mountainous areas against an indigenous civilian population who have taken up arms against a corrupt, foreign-backed central government.

The Guatemalan Civil War lasted from 1960 to 1996. The deadliest phase of the war was unleashed when the Reagan administration restored U.S. military aid to Guatemala in 1981, after a meeting between former Deputy CIA Director Vernon Walters and President Romeo Lucas García, in Guatemala.

U.S. military adviser Lieutenant Colonel George Maynes and President Lucas's brother, General Benedicto Lucas, planned a campaign called Operation Ash, in which 15,000 Guatemalan troops swept through the Ixil region massacring indigenous communities and burning hundreds of villages.

CIA documents that Robert Parry unearthed at the Reagan library and in other U.S. archives specifically defined the targets of this campaign to include "the civilian support mechanism" of the guerrillas, in effect the entire rural indigenous population. A CIA report from February 1982 described how this worked in practice in Ixil:

"The commanding officers of the units involved have been instructed to destroy all towns and villages which are cooperating with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor [the EGP] and eliminate all sources of resistance," the report said. "Since the operation began, several villages have been burned to the ground, and a large number of guerrillas and collaborators have been killed."

Guatemalan President Rios Montt, who died on Sunday, seized power in a coup in

1983 and continued the campaign in Ixil. He was prosecuted for genocide, but neither Walters, Mayne nor any other American official have been charged for helping to plan and support the mass killings in Guatemala.

At the time, many villages in Ixil were not even marked on official maps and there were no paved roads in this remote region (there are still very few today). As in Afghanistan, the outside world had no idea of the scale and brutality of the killing and destruction.

One of the demands of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (ORPA) and other revolutionary groups in the negotiations that led to the 1996 peace agreement in Guatemala was for a genuine accounting of the reality of the war, including how many people were killed and who killed them.

The UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission documented 626 massacres, and found that about 200,000 people had been killed in Guatemala's civil war. At least 93 percent were killed by U.S.-backed military forces and death squads and only 3 percent by the guerrillas, with 4 percent unknown. The total number of people killed was 20 times previous estimates based on passive reporting.

Mortality studies in other countries (like Angola, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda) have never found a larger discrepancy between passive reporting and mortality studies than in Guatemala.

Based on the discrepancy between passive reporting in Guatemala and what the U.N. ultimately found there, UNAMA appears to have reported less than 5 percent of actual civilian deaths in Afghanistan, which would be unprecedented.

Costs of War and UNAMA have counted 36,754 civilian deaths up to the end of 2017. If these (extremely) passive reports represent 5 percent of total civilian deaths, as in Guatemala, the actual death toll would be about 735,000. If UNAMA has in fact eclipsed Guatemala's previously unsurpassed record of undercounting civilian deaths and only counted 3 or 4 percent of actual deaths, then the real total could be as high as 1.23 million. If the ratio were only the same as originally found in Iraq in 2006 (14:1 – before Iraq Body Count revised its figures), it would be only 515,000.

Adding these figures to my estimate of Afghan combatants killed on both sides, we can make a rough estimate that about 875,000 Afghans have been killed since 2001, with a minimum of 640,000 and a maximum of 1.4 million.

## **Pakistan**

The U.S. expanded its war in Afghanistan into Pakistan in 2004. The CIA began launching drone strikes, and the Pakistani military, under U.S. pressure, launched a military campaign against militants in South Waziristan suspected of links to Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. Since then, the U.S. has conducted at least 430 drone strikes in Pakistan, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, and the Pakistani military has conducted several operations in areas bordering Afghanistan.

The beautiful Swat valley (once called “the Switzerland of the East” by the visiting Queen Elizabeth of the U.K.) and three neighboring districts were taken over by the Pakistani Taliban between 2007 and 2009. They were retaken by the Pakistani Army in 2009 in a devastating military campaign that left 3.4 million people as refugees.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reports that 2,515 to 4,026 people have been killed in U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, but that is a small fraction of total war deaths in Pakistan. Crawford and the Costs of War program at Boston University estimated the number of Pakistanis killed at about 61,300 through August 2016, based mainly on reports by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) in Islamabad and the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) in New Delhi. That included 8,200 soldiers and police, 31,000 rebel fighters and 22,100 civilians.

Costs of War’s estimate for rebel fighters killed was an average of 29,000 reported by PIPS and 33,000 reported by SATP, which SATP has since updated to 33,950. SATP has updated its count of civilian deaths to 22,230.

If we accept the higher of these passively reported figures for the numbers of combatants killed on both sides and use historically typical 5:1 to 20:1 ratios to passive reports to generate a minimum and maximum number of civilian deaths, that would mean that between 150,000 and 500,000 Pakistanis have been killed.

A reasonable mid-point estimate would be that about 325,000 people have been killed in Pakistan as a result of the U.S. War in Afghanistan spilling across its borders.

Combining my estimates for Afghanistan and Pakistan, I estimate that about 1.2 million Afghans and Pakistanis have been killed as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

**Nicolas J.S. Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapter on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader*.**

