

The 'War on Terror' Has Been Lost

After 14 years, trillions of dollars spent and hundreds of thousands of people dead with violence expanding, not abating perhaps it's finally time to admit that the Bush-Obama "War on Terror" has been lost and that a new strategy addressing root causes is required, as Nat Parry describes.

By Nat Parry

Last week's attacks in Paris offered a painful and tragic reminder that despite the unprecedented counterterrorism measures implemented since the attacks on New York and Washington 14 years ago, citizens in the West remain as vulnerable as ever to the threat of extremist violence. This may come as a bit of a shock to those who may have expected that the massive investment in fighting terrorism would have resulted in more safety and security by now.

With trillions of dollars spent on overseas military adventures, unprecedented "homeland security" and mass surveillance, and countless lives lost in U.S. wars, it's not unreasonable to have thought that perhaps more measurable progress would have been made in countering the terrorist threat against the United States.

But with transportation agencies, football stadiums and tourist destinations across the U.S. now bolstering security following the attacks in Paris and with the Islamic State, or ISIS, promising more attacks to come in New York and Washington it is clear how vulnerable Americans remain to the threat of jihadist terrorism, despite all these sacrifices over the past decade and a half.

Efforts to contain terrorism certainly had precedents before President George W. Bush declared a wide-ranging and open-ended "War on Terror" in an address to Congress on Sept. 20, 2001, but the groundwork that was set in the weeks and months after 9/11 has come to define the overall approach to this Twenty-first Century challenge an approach that can now clearly be called an abject failure.

Despite some tactical differences between the Bush and Obama administrations in the way the war has been waged with a preference now on drone assassinations, for example, rather than full-scale invasions the "War on Terror" has essentially followed the same logic of pursuing something like total victory by eliminating every terrorist no matter where they are, with an unfortunately high tolerance for killing large numbers of innocent bystanders in the process.

Any honest appraisal of this effort would now conclude that the overall approach has borne out just as badly as the most pessimistic critics asserted back in 2001 and 2002, when the foundation was being laid for what Secretary of Defense

Donald Rumsfeld later dubbed the “Long War.”

Early Critics

With new organizations forming in the days after 9/11 with slogans such as “war is not the answer,” voices were being raised to assert that defeating terrorism required first of all that the United States stop engaging in it, based on the Hippocratic principle of “First do no harm.” The U.S. was also urged to devote at least as much attention to addressing the root causes of violent extremism as it was to addressing the military aspect of defeating jihadists on the battlefield. Among the principal causes identified included fighting global poverty and promoting human rights.

While the Bush administration announced in March 2002 that weapons and U.S. military advisers were being sent to countries such as Indonesia, Nepal, Jordan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to mount proxy fights against terrorists, development advocates complained that no comparable effort was being made to alleviate the harsh economic conditions that provide the conditions in which extremism flourishes. Human rights organizations also warned that political repression carried out by some U.S. allies was doing more to fuel terrorism than to contain it.

In an open letter to Bush published on March 7, 2002, Human Rights Watch singled out Uzbekistan in particular as being an undeserving ally, urging the U.S. to reconsider its diplomatic and military support for the Central Asian dictatorship. The rights group warned, “In terms of human rights, Uzbekistan is barely distinguishable from its Soviet past, and [Uzbek] President [Islam] Karimov has shown himself to be an unreconstructed Soviet leader. You have to wonder whether this kind of record makes for a trusted ally or a foreign policy burden.”

Human Rights Watch also criticized expanding aid to Indonesia, where extra-judicial executions, torture and arbitrary detention were commonplace. It argued that increasing aid to Indonesia would “effectively reward the security forces for bad behavior.”

Yet, the Bush administration showed little interest in the correlation between human rights, political repression and militant extremism, a trend that has largely continued through today. In a visit to Central Asia earlier this month, for example, Secretary of State John Kerry met with autocratic rulers and officials from several countries considered some of the world’s worst rights offenders.

Although he had been urged by the human rights community to press the leaders on

their records, Kerry largely downplayed human rights as he sought deeper U.S. ties with the region. As Reuters reported, “he took pains to avoid direct public criticism as he pursued security and economic concerns at the top of his agenda.”

Development Agenda

Back in 2002, when the “War on Terror” was being rolled out, calls for more engagement on development aid grew louder, with some of the strongest pleas coming directly from World Bank President James Wolfensohn.

In a speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center, Wolfensohn argued that to combat terrorism, global poverty and other international problems must be addressed. “We will not create a safer world with bombs or brigades alone,” he said. Poverty “can provide a breeding ground for the ideas and actions of those who promote conflict and terror.”

Yet, when it comes to fighting global poverty, the U.S. has continued to display a seeming indifference to making this a priority, whether as part of a larger campaign against violent extremism or simply on humanitarian grounds.

Despite pressure placed on the U.S. following 9/11 to make development aid a central plank in the broader campaign against terrorism, the Bush administration resisted calls to increase funding for aid to the world’s poorest nations. Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill insisted that foreign aid wasn’t proven to be effective, and so the U.S. blocked efforts by Great Britain and other countries to raise the level of aid going from international development organizations to poor nations.

After sustained criticism, the Bush administration reluctantly announced an increase in aid by \$5 billion spread over several years. This would represent only a modest rise, however, in the U.S. contribution as measured by its percentage of GDP, which at that time was only 0.1 percent far short of the 0.7 percent that the United Nations had set for the minimal target of industrialized countries.

The UN has explained its 0.7 target as the minimum necessary towards promoting international security and stability, and has urged that meeting this target be considered a requisite for membership on the UN Security Council. For what it’s worth, however, current development aid by the United States stands at just 0.19 percent of its GDP, far behind the global leaders of Norway and Sweden, which donate 1.07 percent and 1.03 percent of their GDPs, respectively.

Climate Change Connection

Besides poverty and human rights, tackling climate change also emerged as an issue related closely to countering the long-term terrorist threat, but for years this connection was essentially ignored by high-level policymakers. While President Obama has just recently prioritized climate change, the Council on Foreign Relations for one was warning as far back as 2007 that climate change was contributing significantly to the terrorist threat.

The report noted for example that “declining food production, extreme weather events, and drought from climate change could further inflame tensions in Africa, weaken governance and economic growth, and contribute to massive migration and possibly state failure, leaving ‘ungoverned spaces’ where terrorists can organize.”

These concerns have since been reiterated by everyone from the Pentagon, which calls climate change a “threat multiplier” because it “has the potential to exacerbate many of the challenges we are dealing with today from infectious disease to terrorism,” to Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who recently stated that “climate change is directly related to the growth of terrorism.”

Although Sanders was attacked for allegedly overstating a “direct” relationship between global warming and terrorism, there is indeed a mountain of evidence to support the assertion that there is at least a very strong correlation between these two trends.

In fact, it is well-documented that the current conflict in Syria, which has facilitated the rise of ISIS, was triggered by a series of socio-economic, political and environmental factors, including climate change. According to a recent report called “A New Climate for Peace,” an independent study commissioned by the foreign ministers of the G7 nations, a severe drought that hit Syria in 2006 was exacerbated by resource mismanagement and the impact of climate change on water and crop production.

“Herders in the northeast lost nearly 85 percent of their livestock, affecting 1.3 million people,” the report explained. “Nearly 75 percent of families that depend on agriculture suffered total crop failure.”

The widespread loss of livelihoods and food sources compelled farmers and rural families to migrate to overcrowded cities, stressing urban infrastructure and basic services, and increasing urban poverty. “More than 1 million people were food insecure, adding substantial pressure to pre-existing stressors, such as grievances and government mismanagement,” the G7 report pointed out. “This food insecurity was one of the factors that pushed the country over the threshold into violent conflict.”

U.S. Interventions

This violent conflict in turn was aggravated by previous and ongoing American meddling in the region. As the U.S. intelligence community had warned in 2006, a whole new generation of Islamic radicalism was spawned by the 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The consensus view of 16 U.S. spy services was that “the Iraq war has made the overall terrorism problem worse.” Part of this problem becoming worse was the rise of ISIS, which emerged in Iraq as a direct result of the U.S. occupation.

The *Washington Post* reported in April 2015 that the core of ISIS is primarily made up of ex-Baathist military officials who were summarily disbanded from the Iraqi Army following the U.S. invasion. The organization grew largely thanks to the sectarian policies of U.S.-backed Prime Minister Nouri Maliki in stripping power from the Sunnis in favor of Shiite militias. The early growth of ISIS was further facilitated by the mass detentions of Iraqis in prisons such as Camp Bucca, which provided a fertile networking and recruiting opportunity.

As journalist Glenn Greenwald explained the process on Thursday’s episode of Democracy Now, “the reason there is such a thing as ISIS is because the U.S. invaded Iraq and caused massive instability, destroyed the entire society, destroyed all of the infrastructure, destroyed all order, and it was in that chaos that ISIS was able to emerge.”

After finally withdrawing from a devastated and traumatized Iraq in 2010, the U.S. then turned its attention to Libya, and decided to overthrow the government of Muammar Gaddafi through a massive bombing campaign. Following Gaddafi’s ouster, his caches of weapons ended up being shuttled to rebels in Syria, fueling the civil war there. The U.S. also began directly arming groups attempting to overthrow Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, with these weapons often ending up in the hands of jihadists such as the al-Nusra Front and ISIS.

Some of this was done in the full expectation that the policies would result in emboldening the extremists of groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda. According to a classified 2012 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency memorandum, extremists were the driving forces in the Syrian civil war. As the memo stated, “the Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood and [al-Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria.”

And yet, the U.S. was helping coordinate arms transfers to these same groups, leading directly to the rise of Islamic extremism there. These policies later morphed into efforts to promote “moderate rebels,” with no more success.

A \$500 million Pentagon program meant to train and support moderate fighters was

abandoned earlier this year after news emerged that the first group of U.S.-trained Syrian fighters was handily defeated by al-Nusra in late July. The Islamists apparently attacked the group and took an unspecified number hostage, with the remaining fighters fleeing and still unaccounted for.

Congressional hawks like Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, withdrew their support for the program just a year after Congress authorized it. "It's a bad, bad sick joke," said McCain of the program, while Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Connecticut, called it "a bigger disaster than I could have ever imagined."

'Do You Realize What You've Done?'

These counter-productive strategies have not gone unnoticed by some world leaders, most of whom however are too polite to bring up the failures in public settings. One who does not play along by these unspoken diplomatic rules though is Russian President Vladimir Putin. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September, he directly challenged the architects of these policies, in what was surely seen in Washington as a major breach of etiquette.

"It would suffice to look at the situation in the Middle East and North Africa," Putin said before the world. "Certainly political and social problems in this region have been piling up for a long time, and people there wish for changes naturally."

He continued: "But how did it actually turn out? Rather than bringing about reforms, an aggressive foreign interference has resulted in a brazen destruction of national institutions and the lifestyle itself. Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, we got violence, poverty and social disaster. Nobody cares a bit about human rights, including the right to life."

He then issued a direct appeal to U.S. policymakers: "I cannot help asking those who have caused the situation, do you realize now what you've done? But I am afraid no one is going to answer that. Indeed, policies based on self-conceit and belief in one's exceptionalism and impunity have never been abandoned."

As Putin suggested, there is little indication that much will change considering the recent past, with the central logic of the "War on Terror" having endured for 14 years now with no signs of it being revised in any substantial way.

In his address to Congress on Sept. 20, 2001, Bush declared that "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated" a general policy that seems to remain in place today.

What we have seen transpire since Bush laid out his plan is precisely what many

warned would happen: as one terrorist group is “defeated,” another one pops up to fill the void, a cycle that could conceivably go on forever, and by definition would doom the United States to a state of war and retribution for eternity. And although Obama has at times attempted to reassure Americans that the war was drawing to an end, his assurances often did more to confuse than to clarify.

Curious Memorial Day ‘Victory’ Speech

Last May, for example, Obama marked Memorial Day by noting that it was the first one since 9/11 that America was celebrating without being involved in a “major ground war.”

“For many of us, this Memorial Day is especially meaningful,” Obama said at Arlington National Cemetery on May 25. “It is the first since our war in Afghanistan came to an end. Today is the first Memorial Day in 14 years that the United States is not engaged in a major ground war.”

The statement made headlines as a milestone in the U.S.’s post-9/11 war footing a de facto declaration by the U.S. president that, perhaps, the war is over. But, as some media outlets pointed out, there was an element of disingenuousness to the announcement.

“American troops remain mired and at risk in [Iraq and Afghanistan], training and advising Iraqi forces against the Islamic State and Afghan forces fighting the Taliban,” noted the *Washington Post*.

Reuters pointed out that “U.S. forces are now involved in air campaigns against Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria as well as training missions in Iraq and Afghanistan,” noting however that Obama has been “reluctant to relaunch ground operations in Iraq.”

Nevertheless, at the time Obama announced this milestone in winding down the “War on Terror,” 3,000 American military personnel were in Iraq working with the Iraqi army and U.S. airstrikes continued to pound ISIS targets. About 14,000 bombs had been dropped on Iraq and Syria since Sept. 2014, killing an estimated 12,500 fighters, according to Pentagon sources and hundreds of civilians, according to independent monitors.

In Afghanistan, although the end of combat operations was formally announced last December, American forces “are playing a direct combat role” in secretive raids against al-Qaeda targets, *The New York Times* reported in February 2015.

In March 2015, it was announced that the United States will maintain nearly 10,000 service members in Afghanistan at least until 2016. This of course was

revised again just last month, when Obama seemingly abandoned his longstanding goal of ending the war in Afghanistan, saying that he would leave 5,500 U.S. forces in the country beyond his departure from office in January 2017.

With all this in mind, Obama's statement on Memorial Day earlier this year may have raised more questions than it answered. For one thing, what does "major" mean? Is saying that we are not in a "major ground war" an acknowledgement that the U.S. is no longer at war, or is it a tacit confirmation that we are in a minor ground war? If we are not at war, does that mean we are in a state of peace? If so, can pre-9/11 civil liberties, constitutional principles and privacy rights be restored, or are those gone for good?

Of course, all of these questions assume that terms like "war and peace" still have some commonly understood meanings, which is a dubious assumption 14 years into this ill-defined war. While some of us may retain memories of periods of relative peace, these are not memories that can be expected of all Americans.

Indeed, an entire generation of young people has now come of age in the era of the "War on Terror." To put this into perspective: the 18-year-olds currently enlisting in the United States Armed Forces and being deployed to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban or being sent to Guantanamo to guard the prisoners who continue to languish there were just preschoolers when the Twin Towers came crashing down, and can scarcely remember a time at which their country was not "at war."

While many Americans might still consider the not-so-new normal of war, militaristic displays at sporting events, routine scapegoating of Muslims, and the relinquishing of individual privacy and civil liberties to be somehow "weird," to millions of young people, there is nothing weird about it.

While some of us may expect or quietly hope for a return to a time of peace, a time when we can expect both personal safety and individual liberty, it is sobering to realize that this expectation cannot possibly exist for those born and bred in this environment. After all, how can people expect to return to a normalcy that they have never known?

The sad fact is, normalcy to many Americans now means precisely this atmosphere of permanent war, militarism and hyper-security. But perhaps even sadder is that the tradeoff that we have been expected to make in terms of sacrificing blood and treasure in exchange for security and peace of mind now increasingly appears to be a false promise, a mirage on the horizon that always seems to disappear the further we travel across the desert of the "War on Terror."

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[Bush.](https://essentialopinion.wordpress.com/2015/11/20/the-bject-failure-of-the-war-on-terror/) [This story originally appeared at Essential Opinion, <https://essentialopinion.wordpress.com/2015/11/20/the-bject-failure-of-the-war-on-terror/>]

Separating War from the Vets

From the Archive: On Veterans Day, Americans make a point of thanking men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. But this appreciation has the effect of shielding today's perpetual warfare from the critical examination it deserves, as former Marine Matthew Hoh noted in 2012.

By Matthew Hoh (Originally published on Nov. 15, 2012)

I get lots of notes thanking me for my service on Veterans Day. I am grateful and appreciative. My friends, both veterans and active duty service members, receive the same affections of respect and esteem and, of course, value those sentiments.

There comes a time, however, when a line is breached. I have difficulty receiving a message from a teacher thanking me for what I have done for my country. I blush at the handshakes, emails, Facebook posts, Twitter tweets and banners from police officers, firefighters, nurses, nonprofit organizers and volunteers, clergy, utility workers and good parents; people who do more on a daily basis for our nation than I have ever done.

Please understand me. What these men and women do everyday contributes more to the well being and welfare of this nation than anything done overseas over the last decade in our country's name. (With the exception of a relatively small, dedicated cadre who have actually dealt with the several dozen or few hundred terrorists that truly threaten the United States.)

I have no greater pride than in the Marines and Sailors I led in Iraq. They were consummate professionals: tough, disciplined and compassionate. They took care of one another, adhered to vague, illogical and unfair rules of engagement and followed, to the best they could, a mission even more vague, illogical and unfair.

What they did, they did for one another and they would do so again. They deserve the admiration of a nation for their performance and their conduct in situations impossible to understand unless you were there. However, their performance in their duties must be divorced and recognized separately from the misbegotten and politically expedient narrative that we live in a safer America today because of

an invasion of Iraq and an 11-year occupation of Afghanistan.

What allows for this unquestioning acceptance of a patriotic and romantic yet specious narrative? Maybe it is the fear resident from the horror of the September 11 attacks? An act carried out by what history will detail to have been a band of madmen and not a force worthy of a war or the designation as an existential threat.

Maybe it is a form of collective guilt, shame or inferiority for not having served? This attitude within the American public has manifested itself in elected officials and prevents questioning, critical thought or oversight pertaining to anything military in Washington, DC.

Maybe it is a fawning media? Desperate for ratings, pressured by competition and needful of access, the media has been easily suckered by the world's largest and best-trained public relations machine, run by the Pentagon.

Maybe it is even a growth in the general knowledge and understanding of war by the American public? I mean, who needs a draft, because, thanks to video games: "There's a soldier in all of us."

Whatever the reason, it is tragic and absurd that we confuse the hard work and selfless sacrifice of most veterans with overly simplistic, factually lazy and politically manipulative stories of freedom and liberty, of defense of economic prosperity, or of holding back barbarians at our gates.

I am quite certain Godwin's Law is in effect as many read this, but for every analogy or comparison to World War II and Nazi Germany in modern American foreign policy discourse, a referencing of the tragedies of Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia would be more appropriate. For these conflicts are not just closer in time and generation, but are more similar in their substance and form, and in their loss and inconclusiveness, to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq than the Good War is to the Afghan and Iraq Wars.

Do not be misled, we lost the Iraq War and we are losing the Afghan War. Not that either of those wars were worth winning, which, of course, is little consolation to the families of the dead and maimed.

Despite these losses; despite the disgraces of Generals McChrystal, Caldwell, Petraeus and Allen, all undone by vainglorious stupidity; despite the level of the Pentagon's fiscal profligacy, one without equal in the modern world; and despite a suicide epidemic that only the satirical publication The Onion seems willing to take head on, the military is the most widely respected institution in the United States.

Veterans deserve a great share of the responsibility for such foolishness. For too long we have been placed on a pedestal, immune from criticism or investigation, in some cases receiving adoration and reverence approaching clerical or pontifical status among the American public.

Have we, those no longer in service, met our obligations to those still serving and to those who will serve? Have we honestly and critically examined our most recent histories and reported, candidly, what we saw, what we did, what we accomplished, whether or not it was worth it, and what it meant?

Maybe it is too soon for such introspection. Many of the more poignant, sincere and astute recollections and summaries of war have been published decades after the homecomings. Perhaps it is just too soon for many of us. However, as a friend of mine reminds me, for veterans to not speak genuinely, but rather to silently and graciously accept accolades of unwarranted praise and glory, ensures propaganda lives on as history.

Maybe in time my generation will produce memoirists like Kotolwitz, Sledge or Fussel, novelists like Vonnegut, Heller or Mailer, or films like *Paths of Glory*, *MASH* or *The Deer Hunter*. With a few exceptions, most reporting of the Afghan and Iraq wars by veterans has been simply that: reporting.

This absence of critical examination and of serious questioning of the wars by veterans has allowed for an infirmity to take hold within the American people that disallows for questioning warriors and, to the benefit of a few, expedites policies of perpetual war.

Thank you for your sympathies on the hardship of war, they are right and deserved. However, please truly consider the merit of crediting the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq for the continuing liberties, freedoms and welfare of the United States. I did not see any al Qaeda in Afghanistan or weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, nor do I know many Afghans who are benefiting from Karzai's kleptocracy or Iraqis who are grateful for the horrors of civil war.

Rather than receive thanks undeserved, I would prefer we hold ourselves accountable for our mistakes and our failures. Until that time, I will read the below poem each Veterans Day. I have seen more of what it speaks of in war and its aftermath than I ever did of any freedom or liberty.

SUICIDE IN THE TRENCHES

By Siegfried Sassoon

I knew a simple soldier boy Who grinned at life in empty joy, Slept soundly through the lonesome dark, And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum, With crumps and lice and lack of rum, He put a bullet through his brain. No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye Who cheer when soldier lads march by, Sneak home and pray you'll never know The hell where youth and laughter go.

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Obama Bends to 'Endless' Afghan War

By failing to challenge many of Official Washington's "group thinks" on the war policy, President Obama has become captive to them as reflected in his decision to extend the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan despite little or no prospect of success, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

It probably was inevitable, as a matter of how Washington as a whole approaches such things these days, that President Barack Obama would make his decision about keeping 5,500 troops in Afghanistan into 2017. There is too much of an expectation that when internal violence prevails in a country in which the United States has had as much past involvement as it has had in Afghanistan, the United States should have its military forces on the scene to try to do something about it, no matter how dim are the prospects for accomplishing much there.

Things have not always been so. It is a departure for the United States to make a habit out of indefinitely stationing significant numbers of its military personnel amid other people's internal strife. This is not entirely a recent phenomenon; the United States did similar things, for example, in Nicaragua during the first third of the Twentieth Century and later on a much larger scale in Vietnam. But those instances are rightly regarded as failures, they did not have the makings of a habit, and they were not associated with the sort of

political expectations about such things that are as persistent and widespread as those that prevail today.

Perhaps the record of long-term stationing of U.S. forces since World War II in such allied countries as Germany and South Korea has obscured how much of a departure are the sorts of long-term deployments we see today in the Middle East and South Asia. But that earlier stationing of forces was mostly about deterring external aggression, which is a very different business from doing something about internal disorder.

In the former, if nothing happens over a long time while U.S. forces are overseas, that might be a mark of success; in the latter, if the status quo, which is a violent status quo, persists, that is definitely a failure.

The costs of stationing forces in allied countries for deterrence purposes are mostly limited to direct monetary costs, except for occasional blips such as local resistance to the Marine base on Okinawa. Inserting forces into internal conflicts, however, entails an assortment of consequences that make for greater and broader costs and risks to the United States and that can make the whole undertaking counterproductive.

Those consequences, besides the obvious one of U.S. casualties, include the ill will that time and again in such situations has been incurred by destructive effects, however inadvertent or unintended, of the use of U.S. military force in internal conflicts. They include extremist and terrorist responses stimulated by such ill will. And they include the moral hazard involved in the United States carrying burdens that will have to be borne by locals if a local conflict is ever to be settled.

However logical the decision about retaining U.S. troops in Afghanistan may seem, and in a tactical sense may be, the decision leaves unanswered some important questions of a longer-term and more strategic nature. One is: if the United States has been unable to achieve its goals in Afghanistan with 14 years of direct military involvement, why should one think that additional time there will bring about any different result?

A related question is: how much longer *will* it take to achieve whatever we are trying to achieve? The President said, "I do not support the idea of endless war." But we are left to wonder what to make of the comment by his Secretary of Defense, "Is it going to be 5,500 forever? I mean, there I can only say this, that is our best estimate now of what we should plan for and are planning for and budgeting for for 2017." Secretary Ashton Carter has acknowledged but failed to answer an important question.

Yet another strategic question is how Afghanistan figures into the larger picture of U.S. interests and grand strategy. Yes, there has been a lot of violence and instability there lately, but how exactly does that relate to U.S. interests, and interests important enough to warrant incurring the costs of an indefinite U.S. troop presence there?

The intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 was a direct response to a major terrorist attack against the United States, and counterterrorism is usually invoked as the main rationale for still being there. But that invocation ignores the large differences between Al Qaeda's situation in Afghanistan prior to 9/11 and what exists there now, the lack of any uniqueness of Afghanistan as a haven for terrorists, and the fact that havens in faraway places are not one of the more important determinants of terrorist threats to the United States. The transition from a retaliatory counterterrorist operation to a nation-building expedition in Afghanistan has never really been explained and justified.

Much of the instant analysis about President Obama's new decision on troops in Afghanistan has been making reference to one of the more dangerous and misleading notions lingering from the Iraq War, which is that the ending of that U.S. military expedition in 2011 was somehow responsible for messes in Iraq that followed, that the messes would have been prevented by extending the U.S. military presence in Iraq, and that Mr. Obama in effect acknowledged a mistake by later reinserting some U.S. troops there.

This theme has long been pushed by political opponents of Mr. Obama and by many of those, an overlapping group, still trying to work off their cognitive dissonance for having promoted the launching of the Iraq War, but the theme has appeared in mainstream media in ways that come close to treating it as an accepted conclusion rather than just an accusation.

The Obama administration is correct in noting the important differences between Iraq then and Afghanistan now, with the Iraqi government being determined then that the U.S. military presence should end and the Obama administration implementing a withdrawal schedule that its predecessor had already negotiated.

But some similarities between the two situations are also important. The same question about the 14 years of involvement in Afghanistan can be asked about the 8 ½ years of military involvement in Iraq. The expedition in Iraq reached a peak of about 166,000 U.S. troops, substantially more than ever were in Afghanistan. If that level and duration of a U.S. expeditionary force were not sufficient to accomplish whatever the United States was supposed to accomplish in Iraq, why should we believe that the much smaller levels of a continuing force that were being talked about in 2011 would have been more likely to accomplish it?

The vaunted “surge” in Iraq demonstrably failed in its objective of enabling the contending political forces in Iraq to reach an accommodation. That is why, although a force as large and powerful as the U.S. force was then will naturally be able to put a temporary clamp on violence and disorder, the effect was not destined to last.

The surge enabled the Bush administration to shove the demons of Iraq far enough into the closet to be able to slam the door and keep it shut just long enough to hand over the problem to its successor. President Obama is now being accused, with some validity, although at lower cost to American lives and resources, of doing something similar with Afghanistan.

Mr. Obama no doubt is sincere when he says he does not support endless war. He is bowing to the kind of thinking that is keeping U.S. troops in Afghanistan indefinitely rather than being a promoter of such thinking. But the United States has already been sliding into endless war, and this sort of thinking, including especially the myth of a missed victory opportunity in Iraq, has been greasing the slope.

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Kicking War Cans Down the Road

Exclusive: By playing along with Official Washington’s false hopes and its endless chest-thumping President Obama has trapped himself into a pointless war policy in the Middle East, now deciding to pass America’s failing Afghan War onto his successor, notes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

President Lyndon Johnson, whose record on civil rights, Medicare, the “war on poverty” and the environment made him one of the most progressive leaders in American history, destroyed his legacy by sinking the country ever deeper into the Vietnam War. President Barack Obama risks doing the same by refusing to summon the courage to end America’s fruitless and costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In October 2011, the White House famously declared, “President Obama has ended the war in Iraq . . . this moment represents more than an accomplishment for the

President. It marks a monumental change of focus for our military and a fundamental shift in the way that our nation will engage in the world.”

Afghanistan was next on the promised list of ended wars. In January 2014, Obama boasted, “When I took office, nearly 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, all our troops are out of Iraq. . . . With Afghan forces now in the lead for their own security, our troops have moved to a support role. Together with our allies, we will complete our mission there by the end of this year, and America’s longest war will finally be over.”

Instead, Obama is making our longest wars last ever longer. This May, as the corrupt, sectarian government in Baghdad continued to lose ground to the Islamic State, President Obama told Congress that he was extending a “national emergency” because the situation in Iraq continued “to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.” Since then he has reintroduced about 3,000 troops to Iraq, about the same number the Kennedy administration had in Vietnam in 1961.

Now President Obama has executed the same reversal in Afghanistan, announcing that he will retain 5,500 combat troops in the country through the end of his second term. Since Taliban forces routed far larger numbers of Afghan troops in the northern city of Kunduz in September, the administration concluded that government forces “are still not as strong as they need to be,” in Obama’s words. “In key areas of the country the security situation is still very fragile and in some places there’s risk of deterioration.”

He won’t get any argument about that. After more than 14 years and a U.S. investment of more than \$65 billion, the Kabul regime still cannot command reliable support across much of the country. The Taliban now enjoy their greatest reach since 2001. Government forces are suffering record casualties. Rampant corruption, human rights abuses, and resentment toward foreign troops all feed steady Taliban gains.

As the New York Times reported recently, “faith in the government and the warlords who were allied with the government, never strong, has rapidly diminished. Militias and Afghan local police forces installed by the American Special Forces . . . extorted protection money from farmers, and committed rapes and robberies. . . . Over time, as villages threw their lot in with the Taliban, the insurgents’ cordon around Kunduz grew tighter. By last year the city felt so under siege that police officers were resistant to driving in a marked government vehicle for fear a Taliban fighter on a motorbike would slap a magnetic bomb on it.”

The situation in Afghanistan is frighteningly reminiscent of South Vietnam

decades ago: completely untenable. Politicians know it today as they knew it then.

In a May 27, 1964 phone conversation with President Johnson, his dear friend, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, famously warned that sending more troops to Vietnam would “be the most expensive adventure this country ever went into. . . . It doesn’t make much sense to do it. . . . We’re in the quicksands up to our very neck.” Johnson knew it, but said, “I don’t see any other way out of it.”

Johnson remembered how Republicans had beaten up the Truman administration for “losing” China. To avoid political pain at home, he simply refused to admit defeat abroad. As he told Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in November 1963, “I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”

So, like a gambler who can’t bring himself to admit he has a losing hand, Johnson doubled down, costing the lives of countless Indochinese and some 58,000 Americans.

Like Johnson President, Obama publicly claims, without a shred of evidence, that the failure of Afghan government forces “would endanger the security of us all.” Behind such rhetoric, his policy is based on the same fundamental premise that guided Johnson: he won’t be the first American president to lose a war in Afghanistan or Iraq.

His policy is just as bankrupt in 2015 as Johnson’s was in 1965. Obama doesn’t offer any credible plan to win in either country. Unlike Presidents Johnson and Nixon, he doesn’t even offer any promises of negotiating an honorable settlement at the peace table. He is simply and transparently kicking the can down the road for his successor.

New York Times columnist Roger Cohen, who himself is deeply ambivalent about the wisdom of intervention, noted recently that Obama’s ambition to reduce America’s military footprint in the world has proven “unthinkable because most Americans are still hard-wired to American exceptionalism, the notion that America is not America if it gives up on spreading liberty.

“So it becomes hard to find a foreign-policy language that’s aligned to reality but does not smack of ‘declinism’, fatal for any politician. Republican bloviating about ‘weakling’ Obama notwithstanding, any future president will face this foreign-policy dilemma: The distance between America’s idea of itself and what it can plausibly achieve is widening.”

Doing the right thing is “unthinkable” only because Obama has never made the case to the American public that U.S. security is not fundamentally threatened

in either theater, and that no reasonable investment of soldiers or money will change dynamics on the ground. Obama's failure to reframe the issue traps him into taking ownership of both wars and continuing them indefinitely.

His failure comes at a high cost today and in the future. The direct budgetary impact of our ongoing intervention in Afghanistan alone will be at least \$15 billion a year. In addition, U.S. air strikes and night raids will continue killing hundreds of innocent civilians, like the bombing of the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, turning the population ever more against the alien forces in their midst.

President Obama, it must be acknowledged, is simply following the advice pushed on him by the usual bipartisan Establishment suspects, the likes of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, President Bush's National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, and his own former Defense Secretaries Chuck Hagel and Leon Panetta, as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Lacking any personal military experience or deep foreign policy background, Obama finds it hard to resist such advice. He made the same mistake when he listened to General David Petraeus and others who sold him on the Afghan "surge." But if 100,000 troops couldn't win the war against the Taliban, 5,500 certainly won't.

Some proponents of continued military intervention claim the aim is no longer victory over the Taliban but continued drone strikes and commando raids against newly emerging Islamic State and al-Qaeda forces. The reality is that the longer the United States continues intervening in the Islamic world, the more it will continue contributing to the growth of radical, militant Islamists. Left to their own devices, the Taliban are more likely than the United States to be able to suppress such foreign rivals.

President Obama missed the opportunity to cut America's losses early in his first administration, before taking ownership of the wars bequeathed him by President George W. Bush. Now that he is a lame duck, with no electoral challenges facing him, he could do the right thing for the country and his successor by pulling the plug on our failed military interventions and, as promised in 2011, begin a "fundamental shift in the way that our nation will engage in the world."

Jonathan Marshall is an independent researcher living in San Anselmo, California. Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran"; "Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor"; "The Saudis' Hurt Feelings"; "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster"; "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; and "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil

The Kunduz Hospital Atrocity

The U.S. bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, blipped on and off the mainstream media's radar, catalogued as just one more unfortunate mistake in the last 14 years of war. But there is probable cause to treat the atrocity as a war crime, writes Marjorie Cohn for TeleSUR.

By Marjorie Cohn

In one of the most despicable incidents of the United States' 14-year war in Afghanistan, U.S. troops bombed a hospital in Kunduz, killing 22 people, including patients, three children, and medical personnel from Doctors Without Borders, or MSF. Thirty-seven people were injured, including 19 staff members in the Oct. 3 attack.

U.S. forces knew they were targeting a hospital because MSF, as it does in all conflict contexts, had provided its exact GPS coordinates on multiple occasions over the past months, including most recently on Sept. 29. There was a nine-foot flag on the roof that identified the building as a hospital. After the first strike, MSF contacted U.S. officials and reported the hospital was being bombed and begged them to halt the attack. Nevertheless, the U.S. AC-130 gunship continued to pummel the hospital repeatedly for more than one hour.

"Our patients burned in their beds," said MSF International President Joanne Liu. "Doctors, nurses and other staff were killed as they worked." She added, "Our colleagues had to work on each other. One of our doctors died on an improvised operating table an office desk while his colleagues tried to save his life."

In attempting to explain why they had bombed a hospital, U.S. military leaders changed their story four times. On Saturday, the day of the bombing, U.S. spokesman Col. Brian Tribus said the strike occurred "against individuals threatening the force. The strike may have resulted in collateral damage to a nearby medical facility."

On Sunday, Gen. John Campbell, U.S.-NATO commander in Afghanistan, claimed the strike occurred "against insurgents who were directly firing upon U.S. service members in the vicinity of a Doctors Without Borders medical facility."

On Monday, Campbell announced, "Afghan forces advised that they were taking fire

from enemy positions and asked for air support” and “several civilians were accidentally struck.” By Tuesday, Campbell said, “the decision to provide aerial fire was a U.S. decision, made within the U.S. chain of command. A hospital was mistakenly struck. We would never intentionally target a medical facility.”

Since the Pentagon has access to video and audio recordings taken from the gunship, they must know what actually occurred. Daily Beast reported that the recordings contain conversations among the crew as they were firing on the hospital, including communications between the crew and U.S. soldiers on the ground. Moreover, AC-130 gunships fly low to the ground so the crew can assess what they are hitting.

But members of Congress who oversee the Pentagon have been denied access to the classified recordings.

Article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states, “Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be respected and protected by the parties to the conflict.”

International law expert Mary Ellen O’Connell, a professor at Notre Dame Law School, said, “The critical question for determining if U.S. forces committed a war crime was whether they had notified the hospital ahead of the strike if they understood the Taliban to be firing from the hospital.”

MSF has said they were never notified that the hospital would be bombed. “Not a single member of our staff reported any fighting inside the MSF hospital compound prior to the U.S. airstrike on Saturday morning,” according to MSF General Director Christopher Stokes.

Parties to a military conflict have a duty to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and civilians and their facilities cannot be targeted. If the hospital were being used for military purposes, the strike must be proportionate to the military advantage sought, and the U.S. forces had a duty to warn the people inside the hospital that it would be struck. No one in the hospital said it was being used for military purposes, and even if it was, the U.S. forces never warned those in the hospital before striking it.

The U.S. strike was a precise attack on the hospital, because no other buildings in the MSF compound were hit. MSF executive director Jason Cone said, “I want to reiterate that the main hospital building where medical personnel were caring for patients was repeatedly and very precisely hit during each aerial raid while the rest of the compound was left mostly untouched. So we see this as a targeted

event.”

MSF is demanding an independent investigation by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC), established under Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. But the United States must consent to the investigation. The U.S. government says there are enough investigations one by the Pentagon, one by a joint U.S.-Afghan group, and one by NATO. But none of these is independent and impartial.

Historian and investigative journalist Gareth Porter has written three articles about three different internal investigations the U.S. military used to cover-up operations that should have led to criminal prosecutions against U.S. officers. Why should we believe that this will be any different?

The Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court provides several bases for war crimes prosecution. They include willful killing; willfully causing great suffering or serious bodily injury; intentional attacks against civilian or civilian objects; intentional attacks with knowledge they will cause death or injury to civilians when clearly excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage; and intentionally attacking medical facilities which are not military objectives.

Although the United States is not a party to the Statute, there could be jurisdiction over U.S. leaders if the Security Council referred the matter to the Court. That will not happen because the United States would veto such a referral.

If U.S. leaders are found on the territory of a country that is a party to the Statute, that country could send them to The Hague, Netherlands, for prosecution. But the Bush administration blackmailed 100 countries into signing “bilateral immunity agreements,” promising they would not send U.S. nationals to The Hague on penalty of losing U.S. foreign aid.

Other countries can prosecute foreign nationals under the well-established doctrine of “universal jurisdiction.” But since Bush initiated his war on Iraq, no nation has been willing to incur the wrath of the United States by maintaining such an action against a U.S. leader.

Nick Turse and Bob Dreyfuss documented the killing of as many as 6,481 Afghan civilians by U.S. forces from October 2001 through 2012. The U.S. government has killed large numbers of civilians in its drone attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen. But President Obama rarely apologizes to or compensates the victims. It is only because a Western-based organization was hit and the attendant media coverage has been so overwhelming that led Obama

to apologize to MSF.

MSF's advance provision of the hospital's coordinates to U.S. forces, its notifications during the bombing, its denial that any fire was coming from the hospital, and the Pentagon's shifting rationales for the bombing constitute probable cause that a war crime was committed.

Obama should consent to a full, independent, impartial investigation of the hospital bombing by IHFFC. If that investigation shows that war crimes probably occurred, appropriate prosecutions of the U.S. chain of command should ensue.

Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. See www.marjoriecohn.com. [This article was originally published by teleSUR:

["http://www.telesur.tv/english/opinion/The-Kunduz-Hospital-Bombing-20151013-0018.html"](http://www.telesur.tv/english/opinion/The-Kunduz-Hospital-Bombing-20151013-0018.html)]

Afghan Doctor Slaughter Pulls Back Curtain

The apparent U.S. slaughter of at least 22 people at an Afghan hospital, including Doctors Without Borders medical staff, is part of the grim reality of indiscriminate death when U.S. Special Forces undertake their secret raids and often toss aside the rules of warfare, reports Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

On Dec. 26, 2009, a U.S. Special Operations team flew from Kabul to Ghazi Khan village in the Narang district of Kunar province. They attacked three houses, where they killed two adults and eight children. Seven of the children were handcuffed before they were shot. The youngest was 11 or 12, three more were 12, and one was 15. Both the United Nations and the Afghan government conducted investigations and confirmed all the details of the attack.

U.S. officials conducted their own inquiry, but no report was published and no U.S. military or civilian officials were held accountable. Finally, more than five years later, a New York Times report on Joint Special Operations Command's (JSOC) Seal Team 6 named it as the U.S. force involved. But JSOC operations are officially secret and, to all practical purposes, immune from

accountability. As a senior U.S. officer told the *Times*, “JSOC investigates JSOC, that’s part of the problem.”

Accountability for the U.S. attack on the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz on Saturday, killing at least 22 people, is likely to be just as elusive. The bilateral security agreement that President Karzai refused to sign, but which President Ghani signed in September 2014, provides total immunity from Afghan law for U.S. forces and officials. So whoever should be held legally responsible for the massacre at the hospital will only be subject to accountability under U.S. military and civilian legal systems, which routinely fail to prosecute anyone for similar war crimes.

What makes this attack unique is not that U.S.-led forces attacked a hospital or killed civilians, but that, for the first time in many years, a Western NGO found itself operating behind enemy lines in territory controlled by Anti-Coalition Forces (ACF) or Taliban. Doctors Without Borders (or MSF for its French initials) thus found itself subject to U.S. rules of engagement under which Afghans have lived and died in their thousands for the past 14 years, effectively excluded from the protections formally guaranteed to civilians, the wounded and medical facilities by the Geneva Conventions.

While UN officials have condemned the attack on MSF in Kunduz, the UN itself has been complicit in the under-reporting of civilian casualties in ACF-held territory in Afghanistan. The UN has issued reports on civilian casualties based only on the small number of civilian deaths that it has fully investigated. When Western officials and media have cited these numbers as estimates of total civilian deaths in Afghanistan, the UN has failed to correct that misleading and dangerous impression.

For instance, when the UN documented 80 civilian killings in U.S. night raids in 2010, this was based on completed investigations of only 13 of the 73 incidents reported to the UN that year. Nader Nadery of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, who worked on the UN report, estimated that 420 civilians were killed in all 73 incidents.

But Nadery still failed to make it clear that these 73 incidents were only the ones reported to the UN, which had little or no access to ACF-held areas that were targeted by thousands of U.S. night raids and the bulk of 5,100 U.S. air strikes in 2010. U.S. officials and the Western media have used these absurdly low estimates of civilian casualties in Afghanistan to whitewash the deadly effects of 60,000 U.S. air strikes and thousands of special forces night raids over the past 14 years.

‘War Is Not Pretty’

As a former U.S. Navy Seal told the New York Times, “War is not this pretty thing the United States has come to believe it to be.” But it is not really “the United States” that has come to see war as a “pretty thing.” Rather it is our leaders who have targeted the American public with propaganda or “Stratcom” “strategic communications” – to disguise the horrific reality of war, while providing JSOC and other U.S. forces with secrecy and legal cover to systematically violate the Geneva Conventions.

As retired Admiral James Stavridis told the Times, “If you want these forces to do things that occasionally bend the rules of international law, you certainly don’t want that out in public.”

While U.S. forces feel free to disregard the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law, the People On War survey conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that ordinary people in war-torn countries like Afghanistan hold strongly to the international legal conventions that are supposed to protect them.

This ICRC report did find the United States exceptional, not in believing war to be “pretty,” but in its failure to educate its people and its soldiers about the Geneva Conventions and the protections they guarantee to civilians in wartime.

While three-quarters of people in other developed countries knew that soldiers in war “must attack only other combatants and leave civilians alone,” only 52 percent of Americans were aware of this basic principle of military law. Twice as many Americans as people in other countries subscribed to an erroneous and lower legal standard that military operations should only “avoid civilians as much as possible.”

The ICRC concluded that, “Across a wide range of questions, in fact, American attitudes towards attacks on civilians were much more lax.”

U.S. officials claim that their air strikes are carefully designed and vetted by military lawyers and planners to ensure minimum “collateral damage,” but William Arkin discovered a dirty little secret about this process when he was invited to observe an attack on an alleged ACF leader in Afghanistan from the safety of the U.S. Combined Air and Space Operations Center in Qatar.

Arkin watched on a large TV screen as A-10 Warthog planes dropped two 500-pound bombs on a convoy of vehicles. U.S. officials explained that 1,000-pound bombs would have caused more casualties, while 150-pound Hellfire missiles might have missed their target, so the 500-pound bombs were carefully chosen to kill the target without causing unnecessary casualties.

But then one of the planes did something unexpected. It turned to make a second

pass and blanketed the whole area with 30mm armor-piercing shells from its Gatling gun, which fires 65 shells per second. A “precision strike” had just turned into an indiscriminate massacre. A U.S. official quickly told Arkin that this was “not unauthorized.”

The dirty little secret Arkin had discovered was that, once such an operation is under way, special forces ground controllers in the area take full control, and the plans drawn up by lawyers and controllers far from the action no longer apply. Similar rules may have applied to the U.S. air strikes on the MSF hospital in Kunduz, making it difficult for anyone in Washington or Kabul to stop them once they were under way.

Erroneous Raids

Senior U.S. military officers have told Dana Priest of the *Washington Post* that more than 50 percent of U.S. special forces night raids target the wrong person or house. But that didn't stop President Obama making them a central tactic in his escalation of the war in Afghanistan, boosting the number of night raids from 20 raids in May 2009 to 1,000 per month a year later.

There is no reason to believe that U.S. air strikes are more accurate or based on better intelligence than night raids by special operations forces. British military adviser Kamal Alam explained to the BBC last Friday that Russian air strikes in Syria are likely to be more accurate than U.S. ones because they have the critical advantage of being guided by Syrian military intelligence on the ground.

Alam noted that even the Iraqi government depends on Syrian military intelligence in its campaign against the Islamic State, and added that this is a source of embarrassment to U.S. officials, who have no such human intelligence capabilities in Syria or Iraq.

Maybe the attack on the MSF hospital in Kunduz will force more Americans to confront the ugly reality of the devastating air war our country has waged across half a dozen countries for 14 years. [See Consortiumnews.com's "America's Endless Air Wars."]]

Whether any institution can succeed in holding U.S. officials legally accountable for the bombing of the MSF hospital or not, it may finally bring home the horrors and the indiscriminate nature of our country's endless air war to millions of Americans. U.S. propaganda will try to portray this as a tragic isolated incident. It is not. It is a war crime, and only the latest in a 14-year-long policy of systematic war crimes.

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion*

and Destruction of Iraq. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader.*

Pentagon Manual Calls Some Reporters Spies

Exclusive: The Pentagon’s new “Law of War” manual puts some journalists in the category of “unprivileged belligerents,” meaning they can be tried by military tribunals as spies, a further sign of U.S. government hostility toward reporting that undercuts Washington’s goals, writes veteran war correspondent Don North.

By Don North

Honest war correspondents and photographers who try to cover wars effectively are about to become suspect spies if a new Pentagon manual, “Law of War,” is accepted by U.S. military commanders. I can confirm from personal experience that reporting on wars is hard enough without being considered a suspicious character secretly working for the other side.

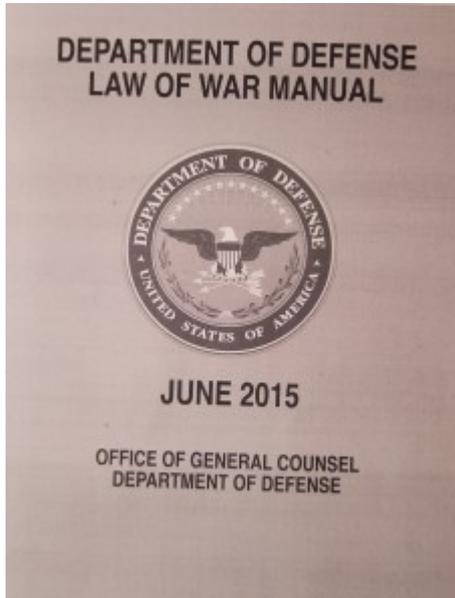
The 1,176-page manual, published on June 24, is the first comprehensive revision made to the Defense Department’s law of war policy since 1956. One change in terminology directly targets journalists, saying “in general, journalists are civilians,” but under some circumstances, journalists may be regarded as “unprivileged belligerents.” [p. 173] That places reporters in the same ranks as Al Qaeda, since the term “unprivileged belligerents” replaces the Bush-era phrase “unlawful combatants.”

“Reporting on military operations can be very similar to collecting intelligence or even spying,” the manual says, calling on journalists to “act openly and with the permission of relevant authorities.” The manual notes that governments “may need to censor journalists’ work or take other security measures so that journalists do not reveal sensitive information to the enemy.”

The manual’s new language reflects a long-term growing hostility within the U.S. military toward unencumbered reporting about battlefield operations as well as a deepening interest in “information warfare,” the idea that control over what the public gets to hear and see is an important way of ensuring continued popular support for a conflict at home and undermining the enemy abroad.

But allowing this manual to stand as guidance for commanders, government lawyers

and leaders of foreign nations would severely damage press freedoms, not only for Americans but internationally. It would drastically inhibit the news media ability to cover future wars honestly and keep the public informed, which is after all what both U.S. government officials and journalists say they want.



Bitter Vietnam Memories

The new manual also reflects an historical trend. During the Vietnam War, a majority of U.S. military officers believed the press should have been under more restraint. By the early years of the Reagan administration, it had become an article of faith among many conservatives that the press had helped lose that war by behaving more as disloyal fifth columnists than a respectable Fourth Estate.

So, the Pentagon began to strike back. During the short-lived Grenada invasion of 1983, press coverage was banned in the early phases of the conflict. Soon, the Pentagon began a more formal process of both constraining and co-opting journalists. In the first Gulf War, journalists were forced to work in restrictive "pools." In the Iraq War, reporters were "embedded" with military units while facing multiple limitations on what they could say and write.

Now, the Pentagon appears to be engaging in an attempt at intimidation or "prior restraint," essentially warning journalists that if they are deemed to have reported something that undermines the war effort, they could be deemed "unprivileged belligerents," presumably opening them to trial by military tribunals or to indefinite detention.

And, while that might seem to be an extreme interpretation, the manual's ominous wording comes at a time when the U.S. government has escalated its denunciations

of what it regards as “propaganda” from journalists at RT, a Russian network, and earlier of Al-Jazeera, an Arab-based network, both of which broadcast internationally, including inside the United States offering alternative perspectives and contrasting information from what is often reported in the mainstream U.S. media.

Growing Dangers

This rhetoric labeling unwelcome journalism as “propaganda” hostile to U.S. national security goals also comes at a time of global political turmoil that has seen a shocking number of journalists jailed, intimidated and murdered with impunity simply for doing their jobs.

Reporters Without Borders reported 61 journalists killed last year, with 59 percent dying while covering wars. The same study found media freedom in retreat across the globe, including in the United States, which ranked 49th among the 180 nations examined regarding the environment for press activities, the lowest standing since President Barack Obama took office.

The Reporters Without Borders report suggests that the Pentagon’s new manual may be part of a worldwide trend in which governments see shaping the presentation of information as an important national security goal and skeptical journalism as an impediment.

“Many governments used control and manipulation of media coverage as a weapon of war in 2014, ranging from over-coverage to complete news blackout,” the report stated. “It creates a hostile climate for journalists and has disastrous consequences for media pluralism.”

In the United States, the hostility toward unwanted or unapproved reporting whether from RT, Al-Jazeera or WikiLeaks has merged with more classification of information and greater delays in releasing material sought through Freedom of Information channels.

Despite President Obama’s pledge to make his administration one of the most transparent in history, press freedom watchdogs have continually slammed his administration as one of the least transparent and criticized its aggressive prosecution of leakers, including Army Pvt. Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning for releasing evidence of apparent war crimes in the Iraq and Afghan wars. Manning received a 35-year prison sentence and is currently facing possible solitary confinement for alleged prison infractions.

The Obama administration’s obsession with secrecy even extended to the status of the new manual’s views about war reporting. A spokesman for the National Security Council has declined to say whether the White House contributed to or

signed off on the manual.

The manual does contain a disclaimer about its possible limits: "The views in this manual do not necessarily reflect the views of ... the US government."

The manual was issued by the office of Stephen W. Preston, general counsel for the Pentagon and former chief attorney for the CIA. After six years overseeing the Obama administration's legal policy with respect to lethal drone attacks as well as the raid that killed Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and the current war against the Islamic State, Preston resigned from the Pentagon in June following publication of the manual and has not been available for comment.

Media Pushback

The manual has even drawn some criticism from the mainstream U.S. media. On Aug. 10, a New York Times editorial declared: "Allowing this document to stand as guidance for commanders, government lawyers and officials of other nations would do severe damage to press freedoms."

The Times also dismissed the value of the manual's disclaimer about not necessarily reflecting the views of the U.S. government: "That inane disclaimer won't stop commanders pointing to the manual when they find it convenient to silence the press. The White House should call on Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter to revise this section, which so clearly runs contrary to American law and principles."

Reporters Without Borders published an open letter to Secretary Carter calling on him to revise "dangerous language" of the Pentagon manual that suggests journalists can become "unprivileged belligerents," akin to spies or saboteurs.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists in a critique of the manual writes, "By giving approval for the military to detain journalists on vague national security grounds, the manual is sending a disturbing message to dictatorships and democracies alike. The same accusations and threats to national security are routinely used to put journalists behind bars in nations like China, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Russia to name just a few."

Public attention to the new Pentagon manual came at an awkward time for U.S. government officials. Secretary of State John Kerry was recently in Hanoi lecturing the Vietnamese to let up on oppressed journalists and release bloggers from jail.

In Iran, the U.S. government has protested the trial of Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian on spying charges and has marshaled international support behind demands for his release. United Nations human rights advocates called on Tehran

to release Rezaian, declaring: “Journalists must be protected, not harassed, detained or prosecuted.”

So, the new “law of war” manual suggests that we are seeing another case of American double standards, lecturing the world about principles that the U.S. government chooses to ignore when its own perceived interests are seen as endangered.

The reality is that the U.S. military has often taken questionable action against journalists, particularly Arab journalists working for U.S. or third country agencies. AP photographer, Bilal Hussein, whose photo of insurgents firing on Marines in Fallujah in 2004 earned him a Pulitzer Prize, was detained by the U.S. Marines and held two years without charges, evidence or explanation.

Al-Jazeera cameraman Sami al-Haj was detained in 2001 while covering a U.S. offensive against the Taliban in Afghanistan. U.S. military forces accused the Sudanese cameraman of being a financial courier for armed groups but never produced evidence to support the claims. Al-Haj was held for six years at the Guantanamo Bay prison.

Prior to releasing him, according to his lawyer, U.S. military officials tried to compel al-Haj to spy on Al-Jazeera as a condition of his release.

In its 6,000-plus footnotes, the manual ignores these two cases. Instead it suggests its own perspective on how journalists covering conflicts should operate: “To avoid being mistaken for spies, journalists should act openly and with the permission of relevant authorities” advice that is both impractical and problematic.

For instance, how would the U.S. military respond if “the permission of relevant authorities” came from a battlefield adversary? Would that be taken as prime facie evidence that the reporter was collaborating with the enemy?

Plus, in any war that I’ve covered from Vietnam to Iraq, I have never gone looking for “relevant authorities” in the fog of battle, as finding one would be as unlikely as it would be risky. Indeed, the more likely result if such a person was found would be for the reporter to be detained and prevented from doing his or her job rather than receiving some permission slip.

Such naive advice suggests the editors of this manual have had little experience in combat situations.

A False Comparison

When asked to give an example of when a reporter would be an “unprivileged

belligerent," a senior Pentagon official pointed to the assassination of the Afghan rebel military commander Ahmad Shah Massoud in September 2001, but the two assassins were not real journalists; they were simply using that as a cover.

I was at Massoud's headquarters at the time and can confirm that the two assassins were Al Qaeda agents from Algeria posing as television journalists with explosives hidden in their camera. They could just as easily have posed as United Nations envoys or as mail couriers. They were not journalists.

Significantly, the manual does not list any current or former American war correspondents as consultants. Military legal experts from Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia are listed as having an input, as well as unspecified "distinguished scholars."

Whatever their vast knowledge, the manual's author as well as those scholars and other military legal experts apparently had little familiarity with, or regard for, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which is supposed to guarantee freedom of the press.

Andrew Pearson, who was one of my colleagues at ABC News in Vietnam, observed: "When the Pentagon gets squeezed between stupid presidents and truth-telling journalists, the answer isn't jail for the journalist," though that seems to be the answer that the new manual favors.

"The Pentagon types don't learn that much out on the firing range about the Constitution, so somewhere along the way in our complicated 'democratic system,' there has to be protection for journalists against a Pentagon that thinks they're a dictatorship," Pearson added.

In an interview on NPR last Friday, a senior editor of the manual, Charles A. Allen, deputy general counsel for international affairs, could not respond to the question: "Can you give any examples of any cases of operations being jeopardized by journalists in say the last five wars?" Allen said he could not provide examples without referring to Pentagon files.

In fact, in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, I can remember only a very few infractions of the media rules by the thousands of journalists covering military operations.

A History of Distrust

Yet, it may be true that the tension between the military and the press will never cease, because both need each other but cannot grant the other what it really wants. The reporters want absolute freedom to print or film everything on the battlefield, while the military's mission is to fight and to win.

The generals would prefer the journalists to perform as organs of state propaganda to ensure popular support for the war or to undermine the enemy. But the journalist's purpose is to find and report the truth to the public, a mission not always compatible with successful warfare, which also relies on secrecy and deception.

As one World War II military censor in Washington described his view of appropriate media relations, "I wouldn't tell the press anything until the war is over, and then I'd tell them who won."

The U.S. military's mistrust of the press goes back even further. As General William Tecumseh Sherman one of the Civil War's most aggressive and outspoken commanders declared: "I hate newspaper men. I regard them as spies, which in truth they are. If I killed them all, there would be news from hell before breakfast."

So, war correspondents struggle with the constant conflict between the public's right to know and the military zeal to keep things secret. One side fights for information and the other fights to deny or control it. The U.S. military's legacy of suspicion and even hostility toward the media has been passed down through generations within military institutions like a family heirloom.

It is unlikely we will ever again find ourselves with the unfettered access to war that we had in Vietnam, my first experience as a war correspondent. At that time, the U.S. government recognized the importance of journalists being allowed to do our jobs at our own risk. We were considered a necessary evil that had to be tolerated.

However, the Vietnam lesson for the U.S. military was that images and the written word can inform the public with devastating effect and can lead to demands for accountability for war crimes as well as an erosion of popular support for the war. In other words, a well-informed public in a democracy might decide that the war was a bad idea and that it should be brought to an end short of victory.

War correspondents have short working lives and there is no tradition or means for passing on their knowledge and experience. However, the American news media must learn to represent themselves collectively with one voice on matters of access to information and censorship as represented in the Pentagon's "Law of War."

The news media should establish a working council of news representatives to meet with government and military officials to negotiate acceptable ground rules for the future. Number one on the agenda should be a rewrite of the Pentagon's

“Law of War.”

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

The Soft Power Hoax

U.S. officials love the idea of “soft power,” a concept that applies non-violent means from propaganda to culture to induce foreign countries to conform to Washington’s wishes. But the arrogance of the approach has alienated, rather than attracted, many people around the world, writes Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

A recurrent buzz phrase of the Washington mandarinat in the last two decades has been “soft power.” The term was coined by Joseph Nye, a Harvard academic, in his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. What he meant by the term is that “when one country gets other countries to want what it wants [it] might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants.”

Soft power he defined as the putatively attractive political, social and cultural traits of a country that induce admiration in a target people, and, presumably, a desire both to emulate those traits and to willingly comply with the wishes of the country projecting the soft power.

The term has gotten a workout by American politicians and national security bureaucrats, particularly since the manifest failure of military power to make Iraqis love us. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has used the term, saying he would like to augment U.S. soft power by “a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action and economic reconstruction and development.”

As might be expected, the idea is most loved by State Department officials, principally because they believe it could give them a leg up in the Washington budget battles with their colossal rival, DOD, the repository of “hard” power. A Google search of “Hillary Clinton smart power” gets about 3.7 million hits. Smart power is the former Secretary of State’s pet term for a fusion of hard and soft power. John Kerry is also fond of the concept.

It is easy to see why the national security establishment, casting about for some alternative to the usual bluster leading to military action, would be drawn to the magical notion that our presumed cultural attractiveness, combined with a really cool Twitter feed, could advance American interests (as the Beltway elite defines them) throughout the world.

Democrats, in particular, looking for some substitute to the brain-dead neoconservative policies that some of them were briefly enamored of when President George W. Bush was Stockholm Syndroming them, are magnetically pulled to a concept that sounds like the first cousin to the dorm room philosophizing that so many of their kind indulged in during their formative years in the Ivy League.

"If we just explain our policies to them in the right way in a Facebook post, and maybe open an Apple Store in downtown ChiÈ™inÄfu, ordinary Moldovans will be clamoring to join NATO!"

It is surely preferable to think in this manner than to act like a warmongering troglodyte, even if some soft power ploys, like John Kerry bringing James "You've Got a Friend" Taylor to Paris to console them after a terrorist attack, seem frivolous if not embarrassing one can hardly picture Charles Francis Adams or George Kennan doing likewise.

Yet soft power, while less pernicious, still springs from the same roots as neoconservative militarism. It arises from the near-universal belief among the Beltway illuminati in American Exceptionalism, the fairy tale that the United States dwells outside the normal processes of history and has a duty as a global redeemer. It is what H.L. Mencken would have classified as "the bilge of American idealism," and it ranks right up there with intelligent design and a conviction that real estate will always go up among the foolish things Americans have believed in.

Was the invasion of Iraq and the whole Bush-era nightmare really the polar opposite of what the soft power advocates wanted? With the fall of Baghdad, a military campaign that took only a month, the whole soft power apparatus swung into action: passing out soccer balls to children, rebuilding the municipal sewer system, and opening a Baghdad stock market on the assumption that the benighted Iraqi masses were pining for the fruits of American-style capitalism.

In 2015, vastly more Iraqis speak English than in 2003. The Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development spent \$50 billion in the country. Yet has all that money and all the cultural export of Americana accomplished anything? And could we not draw the identical conclusion about Afghanistan?

The whole soft power hallucination was born of the end of the Cold War in a particularly hubristic moment of American triumphalism. It was at that time that Francis Fukuyama wrote his extraordinarily silly discourse prophesying the end of history and the ushering in of a capitalist-consumerist utopia a kind of upside-down Marxist dialectic.

That is the fallacy at the heart of soft power: the belief that consumer goods, or some latent yearning for a Disney-fied lifestyle, or some technological gimmick like Snapchat, will liberate the foreign masses yearning to breathe free.

In the 1990s, one could see the apotheosis of this mentality in the pontifications of The New York Times' Thomas Friedman, who claimed that no two countries that had McDonald's franchises would go to war with each other a thesis that has proven false several times. But one can see why Corporate America might love the idea of soft power as a way of selling Philadelphia cheese steaks in Burundi. They might even get an Export-Import Bank loan to facilitate peddling their wares because of the alleged diplomatic value.

We have seen the fruits of this delusion in the Middle East. Saddam's Iraq, a secular if tyrannical government, at least allowed unveiled women to attend university and beer to be served in outdoor cafes. Tariq Aziz, Saddam's longtime foreign minister, was a Chaldean Catholic. Iraq is now a far more dogmatically Muslim country than it was 15 years ago.

The same could apply to most of the Middle East: blue jeans, smartphones, and contact with Westerners did not make most Middle Eastern peoples more Western psychologically, it did just the opposite. The botched Washington reaction to the so-called Arab spring was a case in point: mesmerized by the fact that the Tahrir Square demonstrators used social media, Foggy Bottom could not quite grasp that the popular democracy demanded by the Cairo throng may have had little in common with the vision of democracy of Kennedy School of Government professors.

The fact that Saudi princes drive Bugatti Veyrons, own flats in Mayfair, and get their cholesterol checked at the Cleveland Clinic, does not stay them from lopping off the heads of those they deem miscreants or sorcerers at a record rate.

It is precisely the money grubbing, pop-culture aspect of American soft power that has made it such a hard sell in the Middle East. Sayyid Qutb, a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood in early post-World War II Egypt, attended university in Colorado, where he was repelled by what he saw as the rampant materialism and superficiality of American life. He went back to Egypt

determined to reverse the growing Westernization of his country. So much for the Kumbaya effect of cultural exchange.

It is common for educated, progressive Americans to be appalled by the increasing intolerance of Muslim societies and their treatment of women, and to declare that these are broken, dysfunctional societies. There may be some validity in that judgment. But they ought to reflect that the antics of the Kardashians, Duck Dynasty, and the World Wrestling Federation, not even to mention the candidacy of Donald Trump, do not exactly broadcast to the world the image of America as the Last, Best Hope of Mankind.

We should have known that dressing up the outer man in Gap clothing does not change the inner man. One of the most profoundly exotic societies in the Nineteenth Century, from a Western point of view, was Japan.

Yet in an amazingly short time, the Japanese adopted the outward, physical trappings of a Western society. Their naval personnel donned U.S. Navy-style uniforms and their officers grew addicted to playing bridge as if they were barnacle-encrusted old English seadogs at the Admiralty. Their diplomats strutted around in wing collars, frock coats, and top hats like any respectable gentleman at the Court of Saint James. They adopted the superficial accoutrements of parliamentary rule. The Japanese industrialized rapidly. Babe Ruth turned them into baseball fans.

Yet Japan simultaneously became a violently aggressive country whose militarism astonished the world. Parallel with its outward "Westernization," Japan's elites concocted a jingoistic Shinto emperor worship that was at once reactionary and yet new: an arresting analogue to the increasingly violent brands of Islam that have arisen in recent decades along with rising contact with the West. And these same Islamic fanatics, namely in ISIS, are now experts in social media, a talent that is giving the FBI director fits.

Soft power, the hula hoop craze of a segment of the national security establishment, is one more peculiar aspect of American parochialism and ethnocentrism, such as hewing to the English system of weights and measures, or the archaic use of a.m. and p.m. on airline schedules rather than the more rational 24-hour clock.

It is no substitute for traditional diplomacy that emphasizes horse-trading, reciprocity, and the fact that other countries just might, after all, have legitimate interests. A bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken is no suitable door prize for peoples whose sense of cultural pride could very well be as strong as our own.

Mike Lofgren is a former congressional staff member who served on both the House and Senate budget committees. His book about Congress, *The Party is Over: How Republicans Went Crazy, Democrats Became Useless, and the Middle Class Got Shafted*, appeared in paperback on August 27, 2013. His new book, *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government*, will be published in January 2016.

A Clash Over Whose Lives Matter

A Twitter clash has broken out between people favoring #BlackLivesMatter or #AllLivesMatter, both protesting U.S. police violence against Americans but failing to take into account the hundreds of thousands of lives lost to the U.S. military as self-appointed global policeman, says Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein

The last several months have seen a debate, at times heated, between the #BlackLivesMatter movement and those who respond with #AllLivesMatter. I think a lot of people – perhaps not all – who are using both tags are missing a larger point and opening themselves up to ultimately devaluing a lot of lives.

People use #BlackLivesMatter to denote that given our criminal “justice” system, African-Americans are frequently targeted, endangered and at times killed largely *because* they are black. And that’s totally true and needed saying a long time ago.

People saying #AllLivesMatter presume to appeal to universal values, perhaps also noting that poor whites and others have particular vulnerabilities to police abuse as well. And the last part is certainly true. But it is odd to see an appeal to universal values that seems to broaden the point to include a relatively privileged group.

They crit each other: “The Defacement of Sandra Bland Mural Proves #AllLivesMatter Is Destructive” (“#AllLivesMatter is a mantra of white supremacy that ignores history...” and “#BlackLivesMatter Should Move Towards #AllLivesMatter” (“Twice as many Whites are killed than Blacks by cops, which means they are killed at about a third of the rate as Blacks.”)

But both sides limit who they mean by “lives.” They effectively exclude the victims of the U.S.’s highest officials. When most people use #BlackLivesMatter, they seem to be saying that all black U.S. lives matter when taken unlawfully by the government. And when most people who use #AllLivesMatter use it, they seem

to be saying all U.S. lives matter when taken at the hands of police authorities – not just black U.S. lives. But the formulation effectively excludes the lives of millions of people who U.S. officials have deemed expendable for reasons of state.

Charles Blow of the *New York Times*, for example, at one level makes a legitimate point: “#AllLivesMatter may be your personal position, but until that is this COUNTRY’S position it is right to specify the lives it values less...” But aren’t some of the lives that this country values less the lives our government and military has taken in Iraq and Afghanistan the last 15 years?

Blow also tweeted: “I will not be an accessory to my own oppression. #BlackLivesMatter” But nor should one be an accessory to the oppression of others.

What should be a glaring blind spot has at time reached absurd proportions. Hillary Clinton saying “all lives matter” at a predominantly black church was deemed a “misstep” by NPR, but why not examine if it makes any sense coming from her?

While a U.S. senator, Clinton voted for authorizing President George W. Bush to invade Iraq, resulting in hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. While Secretary of State, Clinton helped preside over the U.S. massive nuclear weapons arsenal, which threatens the entire planet, the drone assassination program which has killed thousands, and the NATO bombing of Libya, boasting afterward of Muammar Gaddafi’s brutal murder: “We came, we saw, he died.” That doesn’t exactly square with a position of “all lives matter.”

As it is, #BlackLivesMatter fails to genuinely uplift the lives of the most discarded by remaining within a national confine. And #AllLivesMatter isn’t being universal at all – in its current form, it’s being outright nationalistic and parochial.

Many now know the names of Sandra Bland and of Samuel DuBose and other African-Americans whose lives were devalued by law enforcement officials, we know their *names* and we know some of their *stories*. But the U.S. government has been bombing and attacking several countries in the Mideast and parts of Africa for years now, including. Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya. How many names do you know of the victims of U.S. foreign policy?

We know the names of the victims of the so-called Islamic State, people like Steven Sotloff. We know the names of victims of the Taliban, like Malala Yousafzai, who recovered from their attack on her. But the U.S. government has killed thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan, but we don’t know the names,

we don't listen to their stories.

Virtually the only time we meaningfully perceive the violence of U.S. foreign policy – in media or anywhere really – is when U.S. soldiers are hurt or killed. Otherwise, the violence is accepted as normal, as Cincinnati prosecutor Joe Deters said in relation to the police slaying of Samuel DuBose: “This doesn't happen in the United States – okay. This might happen in Afghanistan or somewhere. This just does not happen in the United States.”

Have you thought of a civilian victim of U.S. policy who you could name? You probably came up with Anwar al-Awlaki. But the reason you know his name is he was a U.S. citizen, proving the point that often that is what bestows value upon a human life. A study by Physicians for Social Responsibility earlier this year found: “The number of Iraqis killed during and since the 2003 U.S. invasion have been assessed at one million, which represents 5 percent of the total population of Iraq. This does not include deaths among the three million refugees subjected to privations.”

But that's a non-story. We've ended up in a sense embracing Stalin's aphorism: “The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic.” A year ago, the U.S. government backed the latest of Israel's regular brutal bombing of Gaza, in which Israel killed over 1,000 Palestinians, hundreds of them children. For several months now, U.S. ally Saudi Arabia has been bombing Yemen to minimal attention and virtually no protest. President Barack Obama just visited Ethiopia and Kenya – with barely any criticism of how those nations have carved up Somalia, perpetuating killing there.

It may be possible to honor the noblest possible intent in #BlackLivesMatter: That we should rush to aid those lives that are disregarded by many. Likewise for #AllLivesMatter: We should be universal and apply the principle of veneration of the value of life truly to *all*. Both impulses in their best form would argue to seriously scrutinize the U.S. government's role as global rogue cop – a “cop” more dangerous than the most violent, racist police operating in the U.S. today.

Sam Hussein is communications director for the Institute for Public Accuracy. Follow him on twitter: [@samhusseini](#).

America's Endless Air Wars

Like his predecessors, President Obama is relying heavily on aerial bombardment

to wage war across the Mideast, but the vague notions of who is the enemy and the horrific civilian casualties have continued to generate an endless supply of new enemies, writes Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

U.S. Central Command's latest figures on its aerial bombardment of Iraq and Syria reveal that this is the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since President George W. Bush's "Shock and Awe" campaign against Iraq in 2003. In the campaign's first ten months from August 2014 to May 2015, the U.S. and its allies conducted 15,245 air strikes, or an average of 51 air strikes per day.

This is only the latest campaign in a 15-year global air war, largely ignored by U.S. media, in which the United States and its allies have conducted at least 118,000 air strikes against other countries since 2000. The 47,000 air strikes conducted in the 6 ½ years since President Barack Obama took office are only a small reduction from the 70,000 in eight years of the Bush administration, and the current campaign will easily make up that deficit if it continues at this intensity until Obama leaves office.

Afghanistan has been the most heavily bombed country, with at least 61,000 air strikes since 2001. That includes 24,000 bombs and missiles in the first year of the war and a relentless bombing campaign that struck Afghanistan with another 29,000 bombs and missiles between 2007 and 2012, a slow motion version of "Shock and Awe." That was an average of 13 air strikes per day for six full years, two years under Bush and four under Obama. The heaviest bombardment was in October 2010, with 1,043 air strikes that month, but that total is now eclipsed every month by the new campaign in Iraq and Syria.

Iraq had already suffered about 34,000 air strikes since 2000 before the latest campaign began. There were at least 800 air strikes in the "No Fly Zone" bombing campaign to destroy Iraq's air defenses between 2000 and 2002; 29,200 air strikes in "Shock and Awe" in 2003, a campaign whose planners compared it to a nuclear attack; and another 3,900 during the U.S. occupation, peaking with 400 strikes in January 2008 as remaining centers of armed resistance were obliterated by air strikes, Spectre gunships and heavy artillery in the climax of the "Surge."

But until the new campaign in Iraq and Syria, the seven-month NATO-Gulf Cooperation Council bombing of Libya was the heaviest bombardment since "Shock and Awe", with 7,700 air strikes in seven months, or 36 air strikes per day. NATO and its Arab monarchist allies plunged Libya into intractable chaos and violence, exposing "regime change" as a euphemism for "regime destruction."

NATO's destruction of Libya spurred Russia to finally draw the line on its 20-year acquiescence to Western aggression and military expansion. Since then, the U.S. and its allies have persisted in their "regime destruction" policy in Syria and Ukraine, threatening strategically important Russian naval bases in Tartus and Sevastopol, what has evolved from an asymmetric war on a series of relatively defenseless countries into full-blown 1950s-era nuclear brinkmanship.

Drones have played a growing role in the U.S. air war, but they still account for only a fraction of total U.S. and allied air strikes, several thousand out of 118,000 air strikes in 15 years.

None of these figures include Israeli air strikes against Palestine, the current Saudi-led bombing of Yemen, or French operations in West Africa, as I haven't found comparable figures for those campaigns, but they must add many thousand more air strikes to the real total.

Keeping the People in the Dark

In a recent article, Gareth Porter reported that the Pentagon is seriously opposed to putting more "boots on the ground" in Iraq or Syria, but that the generals and admirals are prepared to keep bombing them more or less indefinitely as the political path of least resistance for themselves and the White House. This may indeed be the "safe" course for a politically-driven administration and a Pentagon that is always thinking of its public image and its future funding.

But it depends on keeping the public in the dark about several critical aspects of this policy. First, there is little public resistance to this policy mainly because few Americans know that it's happening, let alone understand the full scale of the bloodshed and devastation perpetrated in our names for the past 15 years.

The second thing the Pentagon doesn't want you to think about is the deceptive role of "precision" weapons in U.S. propaganda. Considering how accurate these weapons really are in relation to the huge numbers of them raining down on country after country, it is not surprising that they have killed or wounded millions of civilians and destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes and civilian infrastructure, as we see in photographs and video of the ruins of Fallujah, Sirte or Kobani.

A direct hit with a single 500- or 1,000-pound bomb will cause death, injury and destruction up to hundreds of feet from its point of impact, so even accurate air strikes inevitably kill and maim civilians and

destroy their homes. But whatever proportion of these 118,000 bombs and missiles have actually missed their targets have wreaked completely indiscriminate death, injury and destruction.

Rob Hewson, the editor of *Jane's Air Launched Weapons*, estimated that 20 to 25 percent of the "precision" weapons used in "Shock and Awe" in 2003 missed their targets. Another one third of the bombs and missiles used in "Shock and Awe" were not "precision" weapons to begin with.

Even the Pentagon has not claimed a quantum leap in its "precision" weapons technology since 2003, so it is likely that at least 15 percent are still missing their targets, adding daily to a massive and mounting toll on innocent civilians.

As Hewson told the Associated Press in 2003, "In a war that's being fought for the benefit of the Iraqi people, you can't afford to kill any of them. But you can't drop bombs and not kill people. There's a real dichotomy in all of this."

Body Count, a recent report published by Physicians for Social Responsibility, confirmed previous estimates of well over a million people killed in America's wars since 2000. This and previous studies document the horrific results of what Hewson and other experts understand only too well, that "you can't drop (100,000) bombs and not kill (hundreds of thousands of) people."

Another element in the Pentagon's shaky propaganda house of cards is its effort to obscure what bombs and missiles actually do to their victims. Americans watch the Islamic State beheading videos on TV or YouTube but we never see videos of people decapitated or children dismembered by the bombs our taxes are paying for. But our bombs behead people too.

Apologists claim that U.S. bombing is morally superior to the "terrorism" of America's enemies, because the U.S. killing and beheading of civilians is "unintentional" rather than "deliberate." The late Howard Zinn, a former U.S. Air Force bombardier and later a history professor, responded to this claim in a letter to the *New York Times* in 2007:

"These words are misleading because they assume that an action is either 'deliberate' or 'unintentional.' There is something in between, for which the word is 'inevitable.' If you engage in an action, like aerial bombing, in which you cannot possibly distinguish between combatants and civilians (as a former Air Force bombardier, I will attest to that), the deaths of civilians are inevitable, even if not 'intentional.'

"Does that difference exonerate you morally? The terrorism of the suicide bomber and the terrorism of aerial bombardment are indeed morally equivalent. To say

otherwise (as either side might) is to give one moral superiority over the other, and thus serve to perpetuate the horrors of our time.”

Millions of ‘Enemies’

In fact, U.S. armed forces are waging war on millions of people for whom becoming combatants in a war would be the last thing they would ever consider if we had not brought our war to their doorsteps. The Center for Civilians in Conflict recently interviewed hundreds of local people who have participated as combatants in conflicts in Bosnia, Libya, Gaza or Somalia. It found that their motivations were almost entirely defensive, to protect themselves, their families, their communities or their countries.

When military forces attack or invade a country, many ordinary people feel compelled to take up arms to defend themselves and their homes. When the forces that put them in this unbearable predicament in the first place treat their efforts to defend themselves as a legal “green light” to target them with force and call them “terrorists,” they are driven to join better organized armed resistance movements that offer them protection in numbers and an effective way to fight back.

The essential first step to breaking the escalating spiral of violence is to force the aggressors, in this case the United States and its allies, to cease their aggression, including their state sponsorship of armed groups or “terrorists” in the affected countries. Then legitimate diplomatic initiatives can begin the difficult work of resolving the complex political and humanitarian problems caused by U.S.-led aggression and beginning to restore peace and security.

In his 1994 masterpiece, *Century of War*, the late Gabriel Kolko documented that war was the catalyst for all the major political revolutions of the Twentieth Century. While the working people of the world have otherwise failed to “rise up” as Marx predicted, the one thing that has reliably driven them to do so is the horror of war.

The war that the United States is waging today is proving no different. Armed resistance is spreading throughout the affected countries, spawning new ideologies and movements that defy the conceptual frameworks and limited imagination of the U.S. officials whose actions gave birth to them.

U.S. leaders of all stripes, military or civilian, Democrat or Republican, still fail to grasp what Richard Barnet concluded in 1973 as he studied the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, “at the very moment the number one nation has perfected the science of killing, it has become an impractical instrument of political

domination.”

The last 15 years of war have served to confirm Barnett’s conclusion. After 118,000 air strikes, millions of casualties, trillions of dollars squandered, and country after country plunged into chaos, the U.S. has failed to gain political control over any of them.

But our complacent leaders and their self-satisfied advisers blunder on, debating who to threaten or attack next: Russia? China? Iran? Which “threat” provides the best pretext for further U.S. military expansion?

As Gabriel Kolko observed, because of “inherent, even unavoidable institutional myopia, ... options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles.”

But U.S. war-making is not just dangerous and irrational. It is also a crime. The judges at Nuremberg defined aggression, attacking or invading other countries, as the “supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” The UN Charter goes one step further and prohibits the threat as well as the use of force.

Benjamin Ferencz, the only surviving member of the prosecution team at Nuremberg, is a fierce critic of illegal U.S. war-making. In response to U.S. war crimes in Vietnam, he dedicated the rest of his life to establishing an International Criminal Court (ICC) that could prosecute senior officials of any government who commit aggression and other war crimes.

Ferencz is hailed as the founding father of the ICC, but his vision of “Law Not War” remains unfulfilled as long as his own country, the United States, refuses to recognize the jurisdiction of either the ICC or the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

By rejecting the jurisdiction of international courts, the U.S. has carved out what Amnesty International has called an “accountability-free zone,” from which it can threaten, attack and invade other countries, torture prisoners, kill civilians and commit other war crimes with impunity.

Nuremberg ‘Exemption’?

U.S. government lawyers enjoy the privilege, unique in their profession, of issuing legally indefensible but politically creative legal cover for war crimes, secure in the knowledge that they will never be forced to defend their opinions before an impartial court.

Ben Ferencz very graciously wrote a preface to my book, *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*, and he spoke at an event with me and David Swanson in 2011, just before his 91st birthday. Ben talked about Nuremberg and the ICC, and he compared U.S. justifications for its “preemptive” illegal war-making to the defense offered by SS Gruppenfuhrer Otto Ohlendorf at Nuremberg.

As Ben explained, “That Ohlendorf argument was considered by three American judges at Nuremberg, and they sentenced him and twelve others to death by hanging. So it’s very disappointing to find that my government today is prepared to do something for which we hanged Germans as war criminals.”

If we do not hold American war criminals accountable for their crimes, and accept the jurisdiction of international courts to do so if we do not, how else can we serve notice on those who come after them that they must never do this again?

Argentina, Guatemala and other countries in Latin America are prosecuting and jailing mass murderers like Videla and Rios Montt who once took for granted that they could kill with impunity. America’s masters of war should not assume that we will fail to bring them to justice.

As for the collective responsibility we all share for the crimes committed by our country and our armed forces, we must be prepared to pay substantial war reparations to our millions of victims and the countries we have destroyed. We could start by paying the reparations ordered by the International Court of Justice when it convicted the United States of aggression against Nicaragua in 1986, and the \$3.3 billion promised by President Nixon to repair at least some of the U.S. bomb damage in Vietnam.

These would be concrete steps to tell the rest of the world that the United States was finally ready to abandon its failed experiment in “the science of killing,” to be bound by the rule of law, and to start cooperating in good faith with the rest of humanity to solve our common problems.

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