

# The Illusion of War Without Casualties

America's wars in the post-9/11 era have been characterized by relatively low U.S. casualties, but that does not mean that they are any less violent than previous wars, Nicolas J.S. Davies observes.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

Last Sunday's Oscar Awards were interrupted by an incongruous propaganda exercise featuring a Native American actor and Vietnam vet, featuring a montage of clips from Hollywood war movies.

The actor, Wes Studi, said that he "fought for freedom" in Vietnam. But anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of that war, including for instance the millions of viewers who watched Ken Burns' Vietnam War documentary, knows that it was the Vietnamese who were fighting for freedom – while Studi and his comrades were fighting, killing and dying, often bravely and for misguided reasons, to deny the people of Vietnam that freedom.

Studi introduced the Hollywood movies he was showcasing, including "American Sniper," "The Hurt Locker" and "Zero Dark Thirty," with the words, "Let's take a moment to pay tribute to these powerful films that shine a great spotlight on those who have fought for freedom around the world."

To pretend to a worldwide TV audience in 2018 that the U.S. war machine is "fighting for freedom" in the countries it attacks or invades was an absurdity that could only add insult to injury for millions of survivors of U.S. coups, invasions, bombing campaigns and hostile military occupations all over the world.

Wes Studi's role in this Orwellian presentation made it even more incongruous, as his own Cherokee people are themselves survivors of American ethnic cleansing and forced displacement on the Trail of Tears from North Carolina, where they had lived for hundreds or maybe thousands of years, to Oklahoma where Studi was born.

Unlike the delegates at the 2016 Democratic National Convention who broke out in chants of "no more war" at displays of militarism, the great and the good of Hollywood seemed nonplussed by this strange interlude. Few of them applauded it, but none protested either.

## **From Dunkirk to Iraq and Syria**

Perhaps the aging white men who still run the "Academy" were driven to this

exhibition of militarism by the fact that two of the films nominated for Oscars were war movies. But they were both films about the U.K. in the early years of the Second World War – stories of British people resisting German aggression, not of Americans committing it.

Like most cinematic paeans to the U.K.'s "finest hour," both these films are rooted in Winston Churchill's own account of the Second World War and his role in it. Churchill was roundly sent packing by British voters in 1945, before the war was even over, as British troops and their families instead voted for the "land fit for heroes" promised by the Labour Party, a land where the rich would share the sacrifices of the poor, in peace as in war, with a National Health Service and social justice for all.

Churchill reportedly consoled his cabinet at its final meeting, telling them, "Never fear, gentlemen, history will be kind to us – for I shall write it." And so he did, cementing his own place in history and drowning out more critical accounts of the U.K.'s role in the war by serious historians like A.J.P. Taylor in the U.K. and D.F. Fleming in the U.S.

If the Military Industrial Complex and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences are trying to connect these Churchillian epics with America's current wars, they should be careful what they wish for. Many people around the world need little prompting to identify the German Stukas and Heinkels bombing Dunkirk and London with the U.S. and allied F-16s bombing Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and the British troops huddled on the beach at Dunkirk with the destitute refugees stumbling ashore on Lesbos and Lampedusa.

### **Externalizing the Violence of War**

In the past 16 years, the U.S. has invaded, occupied and dropped 200,000 bombs and missiles on seven countries, but it has lost only 6,939 American troops killed and 50,000 wounded in these wars. To put this in the context of U.S. military history, 58,000 U.S. troops were killed in Vietnam, 54,000 in Korea, 405,000 in the Second World War and 116,000 in the First World War.

But low U.S. casualties do not mean that our current wars are less violent than previous wars. Our post-2001 wars have probably killed between 2 and 5 million people. The use of massive aerial and artillery bombardment has reduced cities like Fallujah, Ramadi, Sirte, Kobane, Mosul and Raqqa to rubble, and our wars have plunged entire societies into endless violence and chaos.

But by bombing and firing from a distance with very powerful weapons, the U.S. has wreaked all this slaughter and destruction at an extraordinary low rate of U.S. casualties. The U.S.'s technological war-making has not reduced the

violence and horror of war, but it has “externalized” it, at least temporarily.

But do these low casualty rates represent a kind of “new normal” that the U.S. can replicate whenever it attacks or invades other countries? Can it keep waging war around the world and remain so uniquely immune from the horrors it unleashes on others?

Or are the low U.S. casualty rates in these wars against relatively weak military forces and lightly armed resistance fighters giving Americans a false picture of war, one that is enthusiastically embellished by Hollywood and the corporate media?

Even when the U.S. was losing 900-1,000 troops killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan each year from 2004 to 2007, there was much more public debate and vocal opposition to war than there is now, but those were still historically very low casualty rates.

U.S. military leaders are more realistic than their civilian counterparts. General Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has told Congress that the U.S. plan for war on North Korea is for a ground invasion of Korea, effectively a Second Korean War. The Pentagon must have an estimate of the number of U.S. troops who are likely to be killed and wounded under its plan, and Americans should insist that it makes that estimate public before U.S. leaders decide to launch such a war.

The other country that the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia keep threatening to attack or invade is Iran. President Obama admitted from the outset that Iran was the ultimate strategic target of the CIA’s proxy war in Syria.

Israeli and Saudi leaders openly threaten war on Iran, but expect the U.S. to fight Iran on their behalf. American politicians play along with this dangerous game, which could get thousands of their constituents killed. This would flip the traditional U.S. doctrine of proxy war on its head, effectively turning the U.S. military into a proxy force fighting for the ill-defined interests of Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Iran is nearly 4 times the size of Iraq, with more than double its population. It has a 500,000 strong military and its decades of independence and isolation from the West have forced it to develop its own weapons industry, supplemented by some advanced Russian and Chinese weapons.

In an article about the prospect of a U.S. war on Iran, U.S. Army Major Danny Sjursen dismissed American politicians’ fears of Iran as “alarmism” and called his boss, Defense Secretary Mattis, “obsessed” with Iran. Sjursen believes that the “fiercely nationalistic” Iranians would mount a determined and effective

resistance to foreign occupation, and concludes, "Make no mistake, U.S. military occupation of the Islamic Republic would make the occupation of Iraq, for once, actually look like the 'cakewalk' it was billed to be."

### **Is This America's "Phony War"?**

Invading North Korea or Iran could make the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan look in hindsight like the German invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland must have looked to German troops on the Eastern front a few years later. Only 18,000 German troops were killed in the invasion of Czechoslovakia and 16,000 in the invasion of Poland. But the larger war that they led to killed 7 million Germans and wounded 7 million more.

After the deprivations of the First World War reduced Germany to a state of near starvation and drove the German Navy to mutiny, Adolf Hitler was determined, like America's leaders today, to maintain an illusion of peace and prosperity on the home front. The newly conquered people of the thousand-year Reich could suffer, but not Germans in the homeland.

Hitler succeeded in maintaining the standard of living in Germany at about its pre-war level for the first two years of the war, and even began cutting military spending in 1940 to boost the civilian economy. Germany only embraced a total war economy when its previously all-conquering forces hit a brick wall of resistance in the Soviet Union. Could Americans be living through a similar "phony war", one miscalculation away from a similar shock at the brutal reality of the wars we have unleashed on the world?

How would the American public react if far greater numbers of Americans were killed in Korea or Iran – or Venezuela? Or even in Syria if the U.S. and its allies follow through on their plan to illegally occupy Syria east of the Euphrates?

And where are our political leaders and jingoistic media leading us with their ever-escalating anti-Russian and anti-Chinese propaganda? How far will they take their nuclear brinkmanship? Would American politicians even know before it was too late if they crossed a point of no return in their dismantling of Cold War nuclear treaties and escalating tensions with Russia and China?

Obama's doctrine of covert and proxy war was a response to the public reaction to what were in fact historically low U.S. casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq.

But Obama waged war on the quiet, not war on the cheap. Under cover of his dovish image, he successfully minimized the public reaction to his escalation of the war in Afghanistan, his proxy wars in Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, his global expansion of special operations and drone strikes and a

massive bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria.

How many Americans know that the bombing campaign Obama launched in Iraq and Syria in 2014 has been the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign anywhere in the world since Vietnam? Over 105,000 bombs and missiles, as well as indiscriminate U.S., French and Iraqi rockets and artillery, have blasted thousands of homes in Mosul, Raqqa, Fallujah, Ramadi and dozens of smaller towns and villages. As well as killing thousands of Islamic State fighters, they have probably killed at least 100,000 civilians, a systematic war crime that has passed almost without comment in the Western media.

### **“...And It Is Late”**

How will the American public react if Trump launches new wars against North Korea or Iran, and the U.S. casualty rate returns to a more historically “normal” level – maybe 10,000 Americans killed each year, as during the peak years of the American War in Vietnam, or even 100,000 per year, as in U.S. combat in the Second World War? Or what if one of our many wars finally escalates into a nuclear war, with a higher U.S. casualty rate than any previous war in our history?

In his classic 1994 book, Century of War, the late Gabriel Kolko presciently explained,

“Those who argue that war and preparation for it is not necessary to capitalism’s existence or prosperity miss the point entirely: it simply has not functioned in any other way in the past and there is nothing in the present to warrant the assumption that the coming decades will be any different...”

Kolko concluded,

“But there are no easy solutions to the problems of irresponsible, deluded leaders and the classes they represent, or the hesitation of people to reverse the world’s folly before they are themselves subjected to its grievous consequences. So much remains to be done – and it is late.”

America’s deluded leaders know nothing of diplomacy beyond bullying and brinkmanship. As they brainwash themselves and the public with the illusion of war without casualties, they will keep killing, destroying and risking our future until we stop them – or until they stop us and everything else.

The critical question today is whether the American public can muster the political will to pull our country back from the brink of an even greater military disaster than the ones we have already unleashed on millions of our neighbors.

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

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## Hillary Clinton’s Hypocrisy on Dissent

**Exclusive:** Hillary Clinton says she’s a great defender of American veterans, but when Army vet (and ex-CIA analyst) Ray McGovern was assaulted for silently protesting one of her speeches, she did nothing and newly released emails show she rebuffed an adviser’s proposal to apologize, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Five years ago, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s personal adviser Sidney Blumenthal urged her to apologize to former Army officer (and ex-CIA analyst) Ray McGovern after he was roughly arrested when he stood silently with his back turned in protest against a Clinton speech, ironically condemning foreign leaders who show intolerance of dissent.

According to an internal email recently released from former Secretary Clinton’s private email server, Blumenthal cited “an unfortunate incident” that occurred at her speech at George Washington University in Washington on Feb. 15, 2011. Blumenthal wrote that “something bad happened” and urged Clinton to have someone reach out and apologize to McGovern.

Instead, Clinton, who has declared that “supporting veterans is a sacred responsibility,” denied any responsibility for McGovern’s brutal arrest, which left the 71-year-old who was wearing a “Veterans for Peace” T-shirt, bloodied and bruised. She also offered no explanation for why she failed to stop the police when the arrest was occurring right in front of her; instead she just continued on with her speech about the need for leaders to respect the rights of dissidents.

In the email, Clinton did tell Blumenthal, “I’ll see what else can be done,” but it’s not clear what that may have been. Afterwards, McGovern became a government target because of what the State Department called his “political activism, primarily anti-war.”

Though the criminal charges against McGovern were dropped, he was placed on the State Department’s “Be On the Look-out” or BOLO alert list, instructing police to “USE CAUTION, stop” and question him and also contact the State Department’s

Diplomatic Security Command Center.

After learning of the BOLO alert, the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF), which is representing McGovern in connection with the 2011 incident, interceded to have the warning lifted. But McGovern wondered if the warning played a role in 2014 when he was aggressively arrested by New York City police at the entrance to the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y where he had hoped to pose a question to a speaker there, one of Clinton's friendly colleagues, former CIA Director and retired General David Petraeus.

After that arrest on Oct. 30, 2014, McGovern wrote, "God only knows (and then only if God has the proper clearances) what other organs of state security had entered the 'derogatory' information about the danger of my 'political activism' into their data bases. Had my 'derog' been shared, perhaps, with the ever-proliferating number of 'fusion centers' that were so effective in sharing information to track and thwart the activists of Occupy including subversives like Quakers and Catholic Workers?"

### **Clinton's Speech**

On Feb. 15, 2011, McGovern attended Clinton GWU speech, deciding on the spur of the moment after feeling revulsion at the "enthusiastic applause" that welcomed the Secretary of State "to dissociate myself from the obsequious adulation of a person responsible for so much death, suffering and destruction.

"The fulsome praise for Clinton from GW's president and the loud, sustained applause also brought to mind a phrase that as a former Soviet analyst at CIA I often read in *Pravda*. When reprinting the text of speeches by high Soviet officials, the Communist Party newspaper would regularly insert, in italicized parentheses: '*Burniye applaudismenti; vce stoyat*' , *Stormy applause; all rise*.

"With the others at Clinton's talk, I stood. I even clapped politely. But as the applause dragged on, I began to feel like a real phony. So, when the others finally sat down, I remained standing silently, motionless, wearing my 'Veterans for Peace' T-shirt, with my eyes fixed narrowly on the rear of the auditorium and my back to the Secretary.

"I did not expect what followed: a violent assault in full view of Madam Secretary by what we Soviet analysts used to call the 'organs of state security.' The rest is history, as they say. A short account of the incident can be [found here](#).

"As the video of the event shows, Secretary Clinton did not miss a beat in her speech as she called for authoritarian governments to show respect for dissent and to refrain from violence. She spoke with what seemed to be an especially

chilly *sang froid*, as she ignored my silent protest and the violent assault which took place right in front of her.

“The experience gave me personal confirmation of the impression that I reluctantly had drawn from watching her behavior and its consequences over the past decade. The incident was a kind of metaphor of the much worse violence that Secretary Clinton has coolly countenanced against others.

“Again and again, Hillary Clinton both as a U.S. senator and as Secretary of State has demonstrated a nonchalant readiness to unleash the vast destructiveness of American military power. The charitable explanation, I suppose, is that she knows nothing of war from direct personal experience.” [For more of McGovern’s account of his arrest, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Standing Up to War and Hillary Clinton.”](#)]

In a civil court filing, the PCJF lawyers described the scene: “As Secretary Clinton was reading from her prepared remarks regarding Egypt’s dictatorship [and] saying, ‘Then the government pulled the plug,’ the then-71-year-old McGovern was forcibly and falsely arrested by GWU police officers, grabbed by the head, assaulted, and as Secretary Clinton continued undisturbed stating, ‘the government ... did not want the world to watch,’ Mr. McGovern was removed from public view with excessive and brutal force, taken to jail, and left bleeding with bruises and contusions.”

In a press release about Clinton’s emails on Thursday, McGovern’s attorneys said they had sought State Department emails related to McGovern’s arrest but had not received Clinton’s email exchange with Blumenthal. Those emails surfaced in connection with congressional inquiries about Clinton conducting State Department business using a private server outside U.S. government control.

Based on the new disclosures, it was clear Clinton knew a great deal about the incident from Blumenthal, including receiving photos of McGovern’s injuries.

Blumenthal suggested that Clinton “have someone apologize to Ray McGovern,” but referred to the incident and McGovern in condescending terms, noting that McGovern’s mistreatment has “become a minor cause cÃ©lÃ©bre on the Internet among lefties.” As for McGovern, Blumenthal said the former CIA analyst who was a presidential briefer to George H.W. Bush has “become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness. Whatever his views, he’s harmless.”

Clinton responded, “I appreciate your sending thgis [sic] to me. Neither State nor my staff had anything to do w this. The man stood up just as I was starting and GW—which claims their quick actions were part of their standard operating procedures to remove anyone who stands up and starts speaking while an invited



guest is talking—moved to remove him. GW claims he was not in any way injured.”

However, McGovern was not speaking, simply standing quietly until he was attacked by the police. As for Clinton, no apology was forthcoming, nor any further explanation of why she failed to stop police from roughing up a peaceful protester in her presence.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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