

# A Treacherous Crossing

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

By Kathy Kelly

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



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

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

process.”

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

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

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

Raytheon and Boeing are the companies that will primarily benefit from a deal that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement coinciding with President Donald Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia in May.

### **Paul Ryan’s Remarks**

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

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

“Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, we are focused on the Iranian threat to

regional stability.”

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

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

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

Potential starvation of their children terrifies people who can’t acquire food for their families. Those who can’t obtain safe drinking water face nightmarish prospects of dehydration or disease. Persons fleeing bombers, snipers, and armed militias who might arbitrarily detain them shudder in fear as they try to devise escape routes.

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

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

The “good guys” shaping and selling U.S. foreign policy and weapon sales

exemplify the heartless indifference of the smugglers who gamble human life in exceedingly dangerous crossings.

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## Remaining Peaceful Was Their Choice

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

By Kathy Kelly

People living now in Yemen's third largest city, Taiz, have endured unimaginable circumstances for the past three years. Civilians fear to go outside lest they be shot by a sniper or step on a land mine. Both sides of a worsening civil war use Howitzers, Kaytushas, mortars and other missiles to shell the city.

Residents say no neighborhood is safer than another, and human rights groups report appalling violations, including torture of captives. On Dec. 26th, 2017, a Saudi-led coalition bomber killed between 20 and 50 people in a crowded marketplace.

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

### **Peaceful Protest**

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

school and university graduates.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Nightmare of War**

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

What could we wish for Taiz? Surely, we wouldn't wish the terror plague of

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

We could instead build massive campaigns demanding a U.S. call for a permanent ceasefire and an end of all weapon sales to any of the warring parties. But, if the U.S. continues to equip the Saudi-led coalition, selling bombs to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and refueling Saudi bombers in midair so they can continue their deadly sorties, people in Taiz and throughout Yemen will continue to suffer.

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

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## How Afghans View the Endless US War

To understand why the 16-year-old U.S. war in Afghanistan continues to fail requires a look from the ground where Afghans live and suffer, a plight breeding strong opposition to the U.S. presence, explains Kathy Kelly.

By Kathy Kelly

On a recent Friday at the Afghan Peace Volunteers' (APV) Borderfree Center, here in Kabul, 30 mothers sat cross-legged along the walls of a large meeting room. Masoumah, who co-coordinates the Center's "Street Kids School" project, had invited the mothers to a parents meeting. Burka-clad women who wore the veil over their faces looked identical to me, but Masoumah called each mother by name, inviting the mothers, one by one, to speak about difficulties they faced.

From inside the netted opening of a burka, we heard soft voices and, sometimes, sheer despair. Others who weren't wearing burkas also spoke gravely. Their eyes expressed pain and misery, and some quietly wept. Often a woman's voice would break, and she would have to pause before she could continue:

"I have debts that I cannot pay," whispered the first woman.

"My children and I are always moving from place to place. I don't know what will happen."

"I am afraid we will die in an explosion."

"My husband is paralyzed and cannot work. We have no money for food, for fuel."

"My husband is old and sick. We have no medicine."

"I cannot feed my children."

"How will we live through the winter?"

"I have pains throughout my whole body."

"I feel hopeless."

"I feel depressed, and I am always worried."

"I feel that I'm losing my mind."

The mothers' travails echo across Afghanistan, where, as one article noted, "one-third of the population lives below the poverty line (earning less than \$2 a day) and a further 50 percent are barely above this." Much of the suffering voiced was common: most of the women had to support their families as they moved from house to house, not being able to come up with the rent for a more permanent space, and many women experienced severe body pains, often a result of chronic stress.

### **Water Shortages**

Last week, our friend Turpekai visited the Borderfree Center and spoke with dismay about her family's well having gone dry. Later that morning, Inaam, one of the students in the "Street Kids School," said that his family faces the same problem.

Formerly, wells dug to depths of 20 to 30 meters were sufficient to reach the water table. But now, with the water table dropping an average of one meter a year, new wells must be dug to depths of 80 meters or more. Inflowing refugees create increased demands on the water table in times of drought and so do the extravagant water needs of an occupying military, and the world's largest fortified embassy, that can dig as deep for water as it wants.

Families living on less than \$2 a day have little wherewithal to dig deep wells or begin paying for water. The water has been lost to war.

Sarah Ball, a nurse from Chicago, arrived in Kabul one week ago. Together we visited the Emergency Surgical Center for Victims of War, feeling acutely grateful for an opportunity to donate blood and hear an update from one of their logistical coordinators about new circumstances they encounter in Kabul.

In past visits to Kabul, staff at the Emergency Hospital would point happily to their volleyball court, the place where they could find diversion and release from tensions inherent in their life saving work. Now, as an average of two “mass casualties” happen each week, often involving many dozens of patients severely injured by war, a triage unit has replaced the volleyball court. Kabul, formerly one of the safest places in Afghanistan, has now become one of the most dangerous.

The Taliban and other armed groups have vowed to continue fighting as long as the U.S. continues to occupy Afghan land, to wage attacks on Afghans and supply weapons to the various fighting factions. The United States maintains nine major bases in Afghanistan and many smaller forward operating bases.

### **Trump’s Continued War**

Following President Trump’s announcement of an increase in U.S. troops being sent to Afghanistan, the Washington Post reported that “Direct U.S. spending on the war in Afghanistan will rise to approximately \$840.7 billion if the president’s fiscal year 2018 budget is approved.”

What on earth have they accomplished?!

Masoumah asked each mother a second question: What are you thankful for? The atmosphere became a little less grim as many of the mothers said they were grateful for their children. Beholding the lively, bright and beautiful youngsters who fill the Borderfree Center each Friday, I could well understand their gratitude.

The following day, we joined two dozen young girls living in a squalid refugee camp. Crowded into a small makeshift classroom with a mud floor, our friend Nematullah taught a two-hour class focused on forming peace circles. The little girls were radiant, exuberant and eager for better futures. Nematullah later told us that all their families are internally displaced, many because of war.

I feel deeply moved by the commitment my young friends have made to reject wars and dominance, preferring instead to live simply, share resources, and help protect the environment. Zarghuna works full-time to coordinate projects at the Border Free Center. She and Masoumah feel passionately committed to social change which they believe will be organized “from the ground up.”



I showed Zarghuna a Voices accounting sheet tallying donations entrusted to us for the Street Kids School and The Duvet Project. I wanted to assure her of grassroots support from people giving what they can.

“Big amounts of money coming from the U.S. military destroys us,” Zarghuna said. “But small amounts that are given to the people can help change lives and make them a little better.”

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## Trump Ignores Israeli/Saudi Abuses

By offering a propagandistic tirade on Iran’s role in the Mideast – a classic neocon screed – President Trump has demonstrated his inability to bring any fresh or honest thinking to the regional crises, as Kathy Kelly explains.

By Kathy Kelly

Mordechai Vanunu was imprisoned in Israel for 18 years because he blew the whistle on Israel’s secret nuclear weapons program. He felt he had “an obligation to tell the people of Israel what was going on behind their backs” at a supposed nuclear research facility which was actually producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. His punishment for breaking the silence about Israel’s capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons included 11 years of solitary confinement.

On Friday, reading about President Donald Trump’s new strategy on Iran, Vanunu’s long isolation and sacrificial commitment to truth-telling came to mind. Donald Trump promised to “deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon.” But it is Israel, which possesses an estimated 80 nuclear warheads, with fissile material for up to 200, which poses the major nuclear threat in the region. And Israel is allied to the nation with the world’s largest nuclear arsenal: the United States.

Israel doesn’t acknowledge its nuclear arsenal publicly, nor does Israel allow weapons inspectors into its nuclear weapons facilities. Along with India and Pakistan, Israel refuses to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. And it has used conventional weapons in numerous destabilizing wars, which include aerial bombing of Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank.

Vanunu, designated by Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg as the “the pre-eminent hero of the nuclear era,” helped many people envision nations in the region making progress toward a nuclear weapons-free Middle East.

In fact, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jawad Zarif, spoke eloquently about just that possibility, in 2015, holding that “if the Vienna deal is to mean anything, the whole of the Middle East must rid itself of weapons of mass destruction.”

“Iran,” he added, “is prepared to work with the international community to achieve these goals, knowing full well that, along the way, it will probably run into many hurdles raised by the skeptics of peace and diplomacy.”

Significantly, since the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” pact with Iran was concluded in 2015, the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) has steadily verified Iran’s compliance with inspections. Iran has accepted around-the-clock supervision by IAEA officials.

What’s more, “Iran has gotten rid of all of its highly enriched uranium,” according to Jessica Matthews, writing for the New York Review of Books. Matthews continues:

“It has also eliminated 98 percent of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium, leaving only three hundred kilograms, less than the amount needed to fuel one weapon if taken to high enrichment. The number of centrifuges maintained for uranium enrichment is down from 19,000 to 6,000. The rest have been dismantled and put into storage under tight international monitoring.

“Continuing enrichment is limited to 3.67 percent, the accepted level for reactor fuel. All enrichment has been shut down at the once-secret, fortified, underground facility at Fordow, south of Tehran. Iran has disabled and poured concrete into the core of its plutonium reactor – thus shutting down the plutonium as well as the uranium route to nuclear weapons. It has provided adequate answers to the IAEA’s long-standing list of questions regarding past weapons-related activities.”

### **U.S. Government’s Sabotage**

What do the Iranians think of the U.S. government? Ordinary Iranians might well think that whatever discontent they have with their own government the U.S. is their most implacable and most immediate enemy. Invective like Trump’s recent words could be a precursor of disastrous invasion. Many Iranians remember the U.S.-backed coup that ended their democracy in 1953, and they remember the fierce U.S. support given to Saddam Hussein in the brutal eight years of the Iran-Iraq war.

Noam Chomsky rightly names the U.S. “shock and awe” attack against Iraq as the greatest destabilizing force at work in the Middle East. “Thanks to that invasion,” writes Chomsky, “hundreds of thousands were killed and millions of refugees generated, barbarous acts of torture were committed – Iraqis have compared the destruction to the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century – leaving Iraq the unhappiest country in the world according to WIN/Gallup polls. Meanwhile, sectarian conflict was ignited, tearing the region to shreds and laying the basis for the creation of the monstrosity that is ISIS. And all of that is called ‘stabilization.’”

Trump’s record of statements and of cabinet appointments suggests that regime change in Iran is a long-term goal. Despite his close Saudi ally’s massive involvement in funding and fomenting terrorism, Trump’s evolving strategy for the Middle East strangely emphasizes Iranian impacts on the region, particularly regarding the conflict in Yemen.

Yemen is entering conflict-driven famine, with a correspondingly lethal cholera outbreak, making it the worst of the region’s “Four Famines,” now widely recognized as collectively the worst starvation crisis in the 72-year history of the United Nations.

“In Yemen,” says Trump, “the IRGC, (the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp), has attempted to use the Houthis as puppets to hide Iran’s role in using sophisticated missiles and explosive boats to attack innocent civilians in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as to restrict freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.”

But it is Saudi Arabia and its UAE ally, with crucial U.S. backing, that have been intensely bombing Yemen since 2015 and maintaining a punishing Red Sea blockade against shipments often vital to famine relief.

“The Saudi-led coalition’s ships are preventing essential supplies from entering Yemen,” according to an Oct. 11, 2017 Reuters report. The report goes on to assess the dire consequences, for Yemen, caused by blocking and delaying ships carrying food and medicine. It documents many cases in which vessels were thoroughly searched, certified not to be carrying weapons, and still not allowed to enter Yemen.

In a time when 20 million people face starvation, it’s particularly obscene for any country to pour resources into nuclear weaponry. Mordechai Vanunu took extraordinary risks and endured incredible suffering to rescue the human species from the foolhardiness of building and maintaining nuclear arsenals.

I wonder if people worldwide can rise to a level of courage and seriousness

needed to simply recognize, and then, where possible, act in response to the world's real threats. Within the U.S., can several decades of U.S. government bipartisan lying about Iran be overcome with saner, more humane narratives?

Can the threat of U.S. invasion be lifted long enough to allow Iran's people a window for once again considering democratic reforms? Silence about these issues seems ominous. But silence can be broken. We have Vanunu's courageous example. Let's not waste the precious time we have in which to follow it.

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## Ignoring Today's 'Great Hungers'

The U.S. government presents itself as the beneficent superpower, but the reality of Washington's endless wars and lavish spending on bombs – while millions face starvation and disease – suggest a different reality, as Kathy Kelly notes.

By Kathy Kelly

Earlier this year, the Sisters of St. Brigid invited me to speak at their Feile Bride celebration in Kildare, Ireland. The theme of the gathering was: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak."

The Sisters have embraced numerous projects to protect the environment, welcome refugees, and nonviolently resist wars. I felt grateful to reconnect with people who so vigorously opposed any Irish support for U.S. military wars in Iraq. They had also campaigned to end the economic sanctions against Iraq, knowing that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children suffered and died for lack of food, medicine and clean water.

This year, the Sisters asked me to first meet with local teenagers who would commemorate another time of starvation imposed by an imperial power. Joe Murray, who heads Action from Ireland (Afri), arranged for a class from Dublin's Beneavin De La Salle College to join an Irish historian in a field adjacent to the Dunshaughlin work house on the outskirts of Dublin.

Such workhouses dot the landscape of Ireland and England. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, during the famine years, they were dreaded places. People who went there knew they were near the brink of death due to hunger, disease, and dire

poverty. Ominously, behind the workhouse lay the graveyard.

The young men couldn't help poking a bit of fun, at first; what in the world were they doing out in a field next to an imposing building, their feet already soaked in the wet grass as a light rain fell? They soon became quite attentive.

We learned that the Dunshaughlin workhouse had opened in May of 1841. It could accommodate 400 inmates. During the famine years, many hundreds of people were crowded in the stone building in dreadful conditions.

An estimated one million people died during a famine that began because of blighted potato crops but became an "artificial famine" because Ireland's British occupiers lacked the political will to justly distribute resources and food. Approximately one million Irish people who could no longer feed themselves and subsist on the land emigrated to places like the U.S. But seeking refuge wasn't an option for those who couldn't afford the passage.

Evicted by landowners, desperate people arrived at workhouses like the one we were visiting. Our guide read us the names of people from the surrounding area who had been buried in a mass grave behind the workhouse, their bodies unidentified. They were victims of what the Irish call "Greta Mor"—"The Great Hunger." It was recently, as I tried to better understand the migration of desperate and starving people now crossing from East Africa into Yemen, that I began to realize how great the hunger was.

## **A Global Holocaust**

During that same period as the Irish famine – in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century – there were 30 million people, possibly 50 million, dying of famine in northern China, India, Brazil and the Maghreb. The terrible suffering of these unknown people, whose plight never made it into the history books, was a sharp reminder to me of Western exceptionalism.

As researched and described in Mike Davis's book, *The Late Victorian Holocaust*, El Nino and La Nina climate changes caused massive crop failures. What food could be harvested was often sent abroad. Railroad infrastructure could have been used to send food to people dying of hunger, but wealthier people chose to ignore the plight of the starving. The Great Hunger, fueled by bigotry and greed, had been greater than any of its victims knew.

And now, few in the prosperous West are aware of the terror faced by people in South Sudan, Somalia, northeast Nigeria, northern Kenya and Yemen. Millions of people cannot feed themselves or find potable water.

Countries in Africa, which the U.S. has helped destabilize such as Somalia, are

convulsed in fighting which exacerbates effects of drought and drives helpless civilians toward points of hoped-for refuge. Many have chosen a path of escape through the famine-torn country of Yemen.

But the U.S. has been helping a Saudi-led coalition to blockade and bomb Yemen since March of 2015. Sudanese fighters aligned with Saudi Arabia have been taking over cities along the Yemeni coast, heading northward. People trying to escape famine find themselves trapped amid vicious air and ground attacks.

In March 2017, Stephen O'Brien, head of the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, traveled to Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Northern Kenya. Since that trip, he has repeatedly begged the U.N. Security Council to help end the fighting and prevent conflict-driven famine conditions.

Regarding Yemen, he wrote, in a July 12, 2017 statement to the U.N. Security Council that: "Seven million people, including 2.3 million malnourished (500,000 severely malnourished) children under the age of five, are on the cusp of famine, vulnerable to disease and ultimately at risk of a slow and painful death. Nearly 16 million people do not have access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene, and more than 320,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported in all of the country's governorates bar one." This number has since risen to 850,000.

### **Spreading Famine**

Ben Ehrenreich describes famine conditions along what the Israeli theorist Eyal Weizman calls the "conflict shoreline," an expanding band of climate change-induced desertification that stretches through the Sahel and across the African continent before leaping the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. He notes that this vast territory, once the site of fierce resistance to colonial incursions, is now paying the heaviest price, in disastrous climate conditions, for the wealth of the industrialized north. As the deserts spread south, ever more dire conflicts can be expected to erupt, causing more people to flee.

Of a drought-stricken area of Somaliland, Ehrenreich writes: "People were calling this drought *sima*, 'the leveller,' because it affected all of the clans stretching across Somaliland and into Ethiopia to the west and Kenya to the south."

"The women's stories were almost all the same," writes Ehrenreich, "differing only in the age and number of children sick, the number of animals they had lost and the number that survived. Hodan Ismail had lost everything. She left her husband's village to bring her children here, where her mother lived, 'to save them,' she said. 'When I got there, I saw that she had nothing either.' The

river and streams, their usual source of drinking water, had gone dry and they had no option but to drink from a shallow well at the edge of town. The water was making all the children sick.”

In 1993, at the Rio de Janeiro “Earth Summit,” delegates conveying the views of then-President George H.W. Bush, voiced a refrain of the statement, “the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation.” U.S. demands of the summit incalculably restricted the changes to which it might have led.

Representing President Bill Clinton six years later, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defended planned bombardment of Iraq, saying “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.”

### **A Downward Spiral**

There is danger that must be recognized. The danger is real and the danger is spreading. Violence spreads the famine, and the famine will spread violence.

I find myself repulsed by assertions voicing U.S. exceptionalism, yet my own study and focus often omits histories and present realities which simply must be understood if we are to recognize the traumas our world faces.

In relation to conflict-driven famines, it becomes even more imperative to resist the U.S. government’s allocation of \$700 billion to the Department of Defense. In the U.S., our violence, and our delusions of being indispensable stem from accepting a belief that our “way of life” is non-negotiable.

Growing inequality, protected by menacing arsenals, paves a path to the graveyard: It is not a “way of life.” We still could acquire a great hunger: a transforming hunger to share justice with our planetary neighbors. We could shed familiar privileges and search for communal tools to preserve us from indifferent wealth and voracious imperial power.

We could embrace the theme of the Irish sisters at their Feile Bride gathering: “Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak” and then choose action-based initiatives to share our abundance and lay aside, forever, the futility of war.

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# The Price of America's Endless Wars

Official Washington likes to think of its wars as “humanitarian,” supposedly bringing “democracy” to faraway lands, but the wars really bring death, destruction and despair, says peace activist Kathy Kelly.

By Kathy Kelly

At a symposium on peace in Nashville, Tennessee, in April, Martha Hennessy spoke about central tenets of Maryhouse, a home of hospitality in New York City, where Martha often lives and works. Every day, the community there tries to abide by the counsels of Dorothy Day, Martha's grandmother, who co-founded houses of hospitality and a vibrant movement in the 1930s. During her talk, she held up a postcard-sized copy of one of the movement's defining images, Rita Corbin's celebrated woodcut listing “The Works of Mercy” and “The Works of War.”

She read to us. “The Works of Mercy: Feed the hungry; Give drink to the thirsty; Clothe the naked; Visit the imprisoned; Care for the sick; Bury the dead.” And then she read: “The Works of War: Destroy crops and land; Seize food supplies; Destroy homes; Scatter families; Contaminate water; Imprison dissenters; Inflict wounds, burns; Kill the living.”

The following week, General James Mattis was asked to estimate the death toll from the U.S. first use in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, of the MOAB, or Massive Ordnance Air Burst bomb, the largest non-nuclear weapon in U.S. arsenals.

“We stay away from BDA, (bomb damage assessment), in terms of the number of enemy killed,” he told reporters traveling with him in Israel. “It is continuing our same philosophy that we don't get into that, plus, frankly, digging into tunnels to count dead bodies is probably not a good use of our troops' time.”

His comment seemed to echo another General, Colin Powell, who, when asked how many Iraqi soldiers might have been killed by U.S. troops invading Iraq in 1991, commented, “That's not really a number I'm terribly interested in.”

Other generals noted that some of those Iraqi troops, conscripts trying to surrender, were literally buried alive in their trenches by plow attachments affixed to U.S. tanks. More recently, Lieutenant General Aundre F. Piggee acknowledged that during the 2007 U.S. military surge in Iraq, when civilian casualties rose by 70 percent, the U.S. military wasn't “necessarily concerned” about limiting civilian deaths.



What are the generals' concerns and interests in Iraq and Afghanistan? How strong is their concern even for the well-being of their own troops?

### **U.S. Veterans Complain**

Several veterans of U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have written persuasive memoirs about the wastefulness of their deployments, accusing commanders of sending them on futile missions.

Major Daniel Sjursen, writing for *Tom Dispatch*, describes the ostensible reasons for the entire U.S. war in Afghanistan as fantasies. He argues that U.S. generals gained promotions and notoriety for strategic proposals designed to win what they knew was an unwinnable war. He describes the squandering of soldiers' lives to secure villages that had been largely abandoned, and the pointlessness of paying high-tech military contractors billions for weapons useless against homemade enemy bombs:

"That's right, the local 'Taliban' – a term so nebulous it's basically lost all meaning – had managed to drastically alter U.S. Army tactics with crude, homemade explosives stored in plastic jugs. And believe me, this was a huge problem. Cheap, ubiquitous, and easy to bury, those anti-personnel Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs, soon littered the 'roads,' footpaths, and farmland surrounding our isolated outpost. To a greater extent than a number of commanders willingly admitted, the enemy had managed to nullify our many technological advantages for a few pennies on the dollar (or maybe, since we're talking about the Pentagon, it was pennies on the millions of dollars)."

In a spate of recent articles, Sjursen and other veterans of U.S. war in Afghanistan have shredded each of the various rationales U.S. generals and pro-war think tanks have given to defend the wreckage and ruin the U.S. has caused during 16 years of "generational war" in Afghanistan, throughout which U.S. people have been told that the war protects Afghans from the Taliban.

War profiteers and self-marketing politicians have no interest in helping U.S. people understand that war itself is a tyrant, that the sound of nearby gunfire or a drone attack is as much of an order to flee one's home as any command from a Taliban warlord. Children displaced by war, living in the relative safety of Kabul's refugee camps find scant protection from hunger, disease, and the harshest winters, while mothers repeatedly tell us that if it weren't for the children bringing scraps of food scavenged at the market place and working as child laborers in the streets, the families would starve. When will the U.S. end, when will it depose, this war that it has made into a ruler of Afghanistan?

Mubasir, age ten, lives in Kabul. He helps his family by polishing boots every

day from 7:00 a.m. to noon. Then, as part of the APV "Street Kids School" program, he goes to school during the second part of the day, assured that the APV will compensate his mother for the income he otherwise might have earned. The APV gives her a monthly donation of rice, cooking oil and a small amount of beans.

In a recent videotaped conversation with Mubasir, Hakim, who mentors the APV, asks if he has any special problems at home. Mubasir responds: "We have many problems. My father is in prison. I cannot manage on my own. There's not much at home." Mubasir earns an average of 75 cents to \$1.50 per day.

Do you sometimes have fruit at home?" Hakim asks. "No," says Mubasir. "And meat?" "Never, we're definitely not able to have meat."

Asked if he feels tired at the end of the day, after working in the mornings and schooling in the afternoons, Mubasir notes that he does his homework from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. "Then I say my prayers and go to sleep."

### **Not Giving Help**

Mubasir has never been helped by the U.S. or the Afghan government. But Afghans have learned to help each other. I've watched the APV community care, profoundly and practically, about feeding the hungry, bringing drink to the thirsty, and visiting people nearly imprisoned in refugee camps. Every year, they provide warmth for families at risk of freezing to death during harsh Afghan winters.

It seems simplistic, at first, to contrast the works of peace and the works of war. U.S. politicians endlessly promise us humanitarian wars meant to create stable, democratic regimes wherever our bombs level buildings, reservoirs and electricity plants, dismembering whole economies and countless civilian bodies, creating endless reservoirs of panic and rage and grief from which democracy might grow. Perhaps we forget people like Mubasir because after having heard these implausible platitudes, we forget our humane pretensions and settle down to rooting for our side against faceless enemies of the wrong race and religion.

Humane aid is desperately needed in Afghanistan, but it can only evaporate in corruption if people bearing weapons control it. Resources meant for impoverished people are predictably diverted toward the benefit of various factions fighting a war. Warring factions within Afghanistan, including the U.S. Army, cannot do the works of mercy as they pursue the works of war.

War has its own agenda and remains the worst of many dark outcomes for Afghanistan until the U.S. resolves to contribute nothing more to the region but the plentiful reparations it will owe once its pointless war is surrendered, and its troops have gone home.

My young Afghan friends live in a country which is maddened, bloodied, and broken. They know what war generates. Yet they still believe it's in the interest of U.S. people, including the generals, to abolish war and live together without killing one another.

**Kathy Kelly ([kathy@vcnv.org](mailto:kathy@vcnv.org)) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence ([www.vcnv.org](http://www.vcnv.org)).**

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## Dropping the (Non-Nuclear) Big One

After pounding “war on terror” targets for 15-plus years, the U.S. military dropped its “mother of all bombs” on some caves in Afghanistan, a show-off of its terrifying weapon, peace activist Kathy Kelly told Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Just back from Afghanistan, Kathy Kelly, co-founder of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, says the consequences of U.S. military interventions across the Middle East and into Africa now include the spreading of starvation to some 16 million people.

But the U.S. government's reaction has been to drop even more tonnage of bombs on some of these countries, including the deployment of the “mother of all bombs,” the world's most devastating non-nuclear explosive dropped on Afghanistan on April 13, the day I interviewed Kelly.

Dennis Bernstein: This is a very troubling day, in U.S. history, and for the people of Afghanistan. The U.S. military has dropped a 21,600 pound bomb on a tunnel complex it says was “used by Islamic State militants in Afghanistan” – that's coming out of the government. The GBU-43B Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, or MOAB, known as the mother of all bombs – the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used by the U.S. in a conflict. The massive ordnance was dropped from a U.S. aircraft in Nangarhar Province. The “bunker buster” bomb is so huge it can't be delivered by a normal bomber aircraft, but instead needs to be put in a cargo plane. Its blast radius is up to a mile.

Joining us to talk about this, and a lot that is surrounding it, is Kathy Kelly. You know a lot about what's going on in Afghanistan. You returned from there about a week ago, and you have spent a lot of time there in the past few years. Your response?

Kathy Kelly: I came back from Afghanistan on April 6th. And I think about all the military people who have itchy fingers. They have a huge bomb and they want

to experiment with it in some place other than a remote desert. It seems incredibly obscene to imagine that they would pick Afghanistan. Supposedly they have to pick a place where there's a war going on already. And it seems like maybe the President has said I'm really not all that interested in your decisions, or the briefings in the mornings. And so, this was their chance, and they took it. The excuse given is that there are tunnels there.

But you know, many of us can remember when we were told that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and this justified the Shock and Awe bombings. And there weren't any weapons of mass destruction to be found. And, I wonder, maybe those tunnels would never be found because they've all been blasted away. But that kind of rationale, it seems to me is so cruel.

I mean, suppose the United States were to transport its fighters and its weapons through tunnels, weapons like the one you just described, or weapons like the AC-130 Transport planes, weapons like the Apache helicopters that fire Hellfire missiles, I mean all this weaponry has gone into Afghanistan now since 2001. Suppose it had come in through tunnels, those tunnels would have to be the size of the Grand Canyon. And I'm not saying that we should ever legitimize armed struggle on the part of fighters who might be coming across from Pakistan, or might be coming from other countries, into Afghanistan.

But I think we have to recognize that the warlord that has spent billions of dollars, massive amounts of TNT, displaced millions of people—that's the United States. And now we've hit people during a time when they're already burdened down, on their knees, flattened almost, by environmental problems, by poisoned water, by air that nearly can't be breathed, by 1.5 million refugees inside the country, 1.8 million that might be shoved back in, collapsing health care, collapsing education. And when I was there most recently, and inside refugee camps, it could break your heart to see how wretched the conditions are. And I was with beautiful, bright-eyed little girls. And I thought – what kind of future do they have?

DB: Just to say a little bit more about this bomb because this is fantastic, in the worst sense of it. Reading a little bit more, its principle effect is a massive blast wave said to stretch for a mile in every direction, created by an 18,000lb, I guess explosion, equal to 18,000lb of TNT. And they call it the bunker busting bomb. It's designed to damage underground facilities. The weapon costs \$16 million a shot. What could you do with \$16 million and that camp you were in recently, Kathy?

KK: Well, of course, the expenditure on weaponry at a time when there's so much massive need – I'm in New York because of a fast to call attention to Yemen, which is in a conflict where [there are] near-starvation conditions. And the

same is true for three countries near the Horn of Africa: Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria. And for the United States to be spending money on these kinds of bombs...

You know, I think the "mother of all bombs" is greed. Greed is the mother of all bombs...I think the very notion that they would drop this bomb after one of the U.S. soldiers was killed in a special operations raid is also very frightening, this disproportionate response. And when do U.S. people ever get a chance to think about what the night raids are like for the people whose homes are broken into, whose futures might be shattered by just one night raid?

DB: This notion of disproportionate response, I mean, it really does feel like a bit of Israeli influence. You know, the Palestinians shoot a rocket across the border, it misses everything, and then there's 2,000 Palestinians dead. And it's the lesson, it's sort of, I guess, this is the new world order. Trump wants people to know he's tough and at the same time they can test a lot of their new weapons. Is that too cynical? First I'm crying, you know Kathy, first I'm crying and then the fury sets in, and it's incomprehensible. But, you've been there and you've seen who the people are that we are destroying. And, I don't know. I'm sorry, go on, I interrupted.

KK: Well, you can certainly bet that people are very, very frightened of what's going to be rained down on them from the skies above. As I mentioned, their areas are already terrible. Just on my second to last day there, little Chin, she was so excited, [... she] half pulled me up a hill, the highest hill I've ever climbed in my life. And they wanted me on top of that hill so that I could be with them as they flew kites. And each one of their kites had pictures of drones on the kite. It was Xs over it, or the consequences of drone warfare. They were so excited as those kites became little dots up in the sky. And even the youngest of the girls could tell me what a drone was. Very seriously, shaking their heads, saying "These drones can kill people."

And can you imagine the innocence of these children, and U.S. people have no exposure whatsoever to the communities of families who just want to live and raise their children. And then we pour our resources into bombs like the ones that you've described. Well, if we earn ourselves a reputation as a menacing, fearful country of warlords, we've certainly gotten what we've asked for.

So does this build security? I mean imagine how many rage-filled, angry, traumatized young people might say "Sign me up"...in the next Jihadist group that comes into town.

DB: Yeah. And this...

KK: And, Dennis, can I ask...?

DB: Yes, please.

KK: So, blowing up all the tunnels with this massive penetration bombing, does this mean, then, that they might want to drive the ISIS fighters into the cities? Because they're going to go somewhere. So then you've got...I mean Nangarhar is a very resort area near the border. But Jalalabad is not so far away. What kind of a strategy, in terms of the future, is the military thinking about?

And it's very frightening to see who's in charge of the military now. And to know that the president seems to have just kind of walked away from being informed, or aware of, these different strategies. And I think past presidents have also done plenty of damage in Afghanistan, and in Iraq and in Syria. We should all at least acknowledge that. And they were able to maybe put a better mask on it. I think President Trump doesn't have much of a mask. But it's certainly going to arouse fury all around the world.

DB: And, just for a moment, to come back to the kids who were flying kites with pictures or paintings of drones on them, I assume that's obviously out of their own experience. I imagine some of those folks actually lost relatives and friends to drone operations...

KK: Well, the young man who organized the day, he got the bus and he helped to make the kites, and invited the children, and the older kids to come on the hilltop, Maldiva has a nephew who, every time he hears a drone fly overhead, goes into something like a panic attack, and runs and hides. And so, Maldiva said "I had to do something, to try to protect my nephew."

And another thing that I want to point out is that all of this aerial surveillance, it's not just drones, the United States has been experimenting with huge systems for surveillance over Afghanistan, but those systems will never, ever disclose the kinds of questions my young friends ask when they go out to the villages to try to find out who needs the heavy blankets, to try to find out who's most in need of getting a child laborer into school. And they ask "When was the last time your family had enough food" and "What's your source for water?"

And, in the refugee camp, a woman came up to me, she just sobbed on my shoulder, and she said "I have nothing to feed my children for lunch. Nothing to give them for dinner." People run from these wars, they've got nowhere to turn, nowhere to hide. They come to overcrowded cities, like Kabul, where the infrastructure is already crumbling. You begin to wonder, "Is there no mercy? Are there no ethical constraints on the United States, which allies Saudi Arabia, and these other warlords?"

DB: The kinds of comments I've been hearing since the first bombing...but now after this bombing is that—and these are from, I don't know what you'd call them, some people call them liberals—"He's [Trump] getting his act together. This is a positive reversal." I guess, "Getting to the job. Really seeing what it looks like from the inside, really does have the power to transform."

KK: Well, it certainly is the case that he was being labelled as a kind of bumptious fool, as a president, before he took the act of hitting Syria, and now this action, and if that's how you earn your way into the elite salon as a club member, I guess we shouldn't be terribly surprised because at the top of that group are the Directors of Boeing, Lockheed, Martin Marietta, British Aerospace, Raytheon.

The stocks for Raytheon went up after. Raytheon-manufactured Tomahawk cruise missiles hit Syria. This was certainly a sad, sad statement on, I suppose, the way to corral these kinds of dangerous actions becomes more and more confusing. Because we're not really sure who is in charge of governance under the Trump administration.

DB: Kathy, you're in New York, you've said having to do with a fast. Are you fasting now?

KK: Yeah, I'm on day five of a week-long fast. It's been a real gift to be with the community across from the United Nations, at the Isaiah Wall where there's a saying "When shall come a day when they shall beat their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks." But we feel so conscious of the alarm that U.N. workers have sounded, have been predicting that these conflict driven, near famine conditions could cost the lives, collectively, if you factor in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, upwards of 16 million people. And what a terrible, horrible way to die, stranded in the desert with no water and no food.

And, meanwhile, the United States has supported the Saudis in blocking the Port of Hodeidah, in Saudi air strikes. The United States has made air strikes. Very, very expensive weaponry being used, while people are starving.

DB: I believe the Pentagon announced today [4/13/17] actually another air strike in Syria killed 18 of so-called rebels that they're supporting.

KK: The chaos and the upheaval that all of these strikes cause will not be over after the announcements. It will go on and on, imagine people that are maimed and wounded, and in need of health care. Imagine the families that don't have a bread winner. Imagine the desires for revenge that come. The idea that military solutions, so-called solutions, could make a difference in that part of the world is, it seems to me, insane. It seems like the military has been doing

[this] decade after decade.

DB: Kathy, we just have a minute or two left, but just for a broader picture, and I always come to you with a question like this. Forgive me, but what does this say about who we are? What we've become? What our government has become? Your thoughts on that?

KK: Well, we're a nation of people who join grassroots groups to non-cooperate with murdering and killing all of the time. And these grassroots groups exist, they're sturdy, they're beckoning for more people to join, in fact they've been more evident since President Trump was inaugurated, and the lead up to that time. And so, I think we are a group of people who can say "No, we don't want to be identified as warlords, as menacing, fearsome people." But, we're going to have to do everything we can to make that very, very clear.

I think people who will be going to churches, and to synagogues, over this weekend coming up, have a responsibility to say to their communities, and their faith based leaders, "We must speak out in this time, here and now." And not focus on the past or some kind of apocalyptic future. I think that people in universities, there's a big responsibility right now. Educate our young people to understand the consequences of war, otherwise they're completely being robbed of their finances, as they go to the universities.

And I think people are right to think about strikes. Strikes all over the place, working with the BDS campaigns, with Black Lives Matter, with students. I think it's an important time to say "We don't want to cooperate." I haven't paid a dime of federal income tax since 1980, and that's one thing I can say with relief. So, as tax day approaches, what people think, what do you want to pay for? And do you get what you pay for in the USA? And sadly, you do, you get days like today, when we learn about this massive bomb dropped on some of the poorest people in the world.

DB: Kathy Kelly, Voices for Creative Non-Violence, if people want to learn more about that organization, or what you're up to, best way?

KK: Oh, yes please, go to [vcnv.org](http://vcnv.org). Also, for the Afghan peace volunteers, seeing video of those kids up on the hillside with their kites at [ourjourneytosmile.com](http://ourjourneytosmile.com). Speaking of Yemen, we're speaking of a fast for Yemen because Yemen is starving. So, Yemen and fast and you'll get to us.

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

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# In Case You Missed...

Some of our notable stories in January, focusing on the U.S. presidential transfer of power, the issue of alleged Russian interference in the election and the furor over “fake news.”

[“The War Against Alternative Information”](#) by Rick Sterling, Jan. 1, 2017

[“Crosses Marking Chicago Death Toll”](#) by Kathy Kelly, Jan. 2, 2017

[“Israel’s Above-the-Law Behavior”](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jan. 2, 2017

[“WPost’s New ‘Fake News’ on Russian ‘Hack’”](#) by Annie Machon, Jan. 2 2017

[“Requiem for a UN ‘Yes Man’”](#) by Joe Lauria, Jan. 3, 2017

[“Obama’s Deadly Afghan Acquiescence”](#) by Ray McGovern, Jan. 3, 2017

[“Anti-Trump Coalition Shows Cracks”](#) by Nat Parry, Jan. 4, 2017

[“Donald Trump’s Debt to Willie Horton”](#) by JP Sottile, Jan. 5, 2017

[“The Dubious Case on Russian ‘Hacking’”](#) by William Binney & Ray McGovern, Jan. 6 2017

[“US Report Still Lacks Proof on Russia ‘Hack’”](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 7, 2017

[“Europe’s Mixed Feelings About Trump”](#) by Andrew Spannaus, Jan. 9, 2017

[“The ‘Post-Truth’ Mainstream Media”](#) by Nicolas JS Davies, Jan. 9, 2017

[“The Democrats’ Russia-Did-It Dodge”](#) by Norman Solomon, Jan. 10, 2017

[“Wall Street’s Win-Win with Trump”](#) by Mike Lofgren, Jan. 10, 2017

[“Obama Belatedly Says No to Israel”](#) by Marjorie Cohn, Jan. 10, 2017

[“What DeVos Might Do to Public Schools”](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jan. 11, 2017

[“Obama’s Unkept Promise on Nuclear War”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 11, 2017

[“How Obama Spread the Mideast Fires”](#) by Daniel Lazare, Jan. 11, 2017

[“Did Trump Kill ‘Liberal Democracy’?”](#) by Mike Lofgren, Jan. 12, 2017

[“Pulling a J. Edgar Hoover on Trump”](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 12, 2017

["Who's the Real Manipulator of Elections?"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 13, 2017

["Mainstream Media's Russian Bogeymen"](#) by Gareth Porter, Jan. 13, 2017

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["Donald Trump v. the Spooks"](#) by Annie Machon, Jan. 16, 2017

["A Demand for Russian 'Hacking' Proof"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Jan. 17, 2017

["Obama's Bombing Legacy"](#) by Nicolas JS Davies, Jan. 18, 2017

["The Ugly Specter of Torture and Lies"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 18, 2017

["How the NYT Plays with History"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 19, 2017

["Selectivity in Trashing Trump"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 21, 2017

["America's Putin Derangement Syndrome"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Jan. 23, 2017

["The Zionist Record on Refugees"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jan. 23, 2017

["Russia's Leery Reaction to President Trump"](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Jan. 24, 2017

["Obama Bequeaths a More Dangerous World"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 24, 2017

["Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 25, 2017

["The Injustices of Manning's Ordeal"](#) by Marjorie Cohn, Jan. 25, 2017

["Getting Better Results Than Law-and-Order"](#) by Don Ediger, Jan. 25, 2017

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["Deep State vs. Donald Trump"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jan. 28, 2017

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["Rachel Maddow Plays Glenn Beck"](#) by Norman Solomon, Jan. 30, 2017

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## Crosses Marking Chicago Death Toll

Gang violence has fueled a staggering death toll in Chicago, much as military violence has spread death and chaos over large swaths of the world, reminding Kathy Kelly of the need for an “eternal hostility” toward killing.

By Kathy Kelly

This New Year’s Eve, 750 heavy wooden crosses were distributed to a gathering of Chicagoans commemorating the victims of gun violence killed in 2016.

Rev. Michael Pflieger and the Faith Community of St. Sabina Parish had issued a call to carry crosses constructed by Greg Zanis. The crosses, uniform in size, presented the name and age and, in many cases, a facial photo of the person killed. Some who carried the crosses were relatives of the people killed. As the group assembled, several sobbed upon finding the crosses that bore the names and photos of their loved ones.

Those carrying the heavy crosses along Chicago’s “Magnificent Mile” of high-end shops and restaurants knew that other arms than theirs were aching ... aching with longing for loved ones who would never return.

In 2016, more people were killed in Chicago by gun violence than in New York City and Los Angeles combined. The number killed represented a 58 percent increase over the number killed in 2015.

“How could this happen?” – was the question asked on the front page of the Chicago Tribune.

It was a year of social service program shutdowns driven by the Governor’s office in Springfield. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s description of a triplet of giant evils, each insoluble in isolation from the others, helps us identify an answer to the Tribune’s question. King spoke of the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism.

Training for, and the diversion of money to, wars overseas was a crisis inextricable from the race crisis at home, as were policies promoting radical wealth inequality. Representative Danny Davis, of Chicago, whose grandson was killed by gun violence in 2016, insists that “poverty was fueling the city’s bloodshed, and that Chicago needed to make investments ‘to revamp whole communities.’”

Poverty and racism clearly interact: Blacks and Latinos comprise 56 percent of the incarcerated population, yet only 30 percent of the U.S. population. A report documenting the rates of incarceration for whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics in the Illinois state prison system notes that over half of this prison population is black. For every 100,000 people in the state, 1,533 black people are imprisoned as compared to 174 white people and 282 Hispanic people.

The consequences of incarceration affect entire communities: former prisoners are restricted in terms of employment, their families are disrupted, housing becomes unstable, they become disenfranchised, and stigmas persist.

## **Global Slaughters**

We must also consider gun violence in relation to U.S. militarism. Gun violence in Chicago is condemned, as it should be, and yet a message to every one of the 9,000 Chicago Public School children participating in U.S. military junior ROTC programs is that killing is acceptable if you are following orders. Killing of civilians by the U.S. military is considered regrettable but acceptable “collateral damage.” These killings eliminate “high value targets.”

The mere suspicion of harboring a targeted person in a home, restaurant, or mosque becomes an excuse for an airborne drone attack to execute whole families or communities. Ironically, this policy enacts an airborne version of a drive-by shooting.

Soldiers who have seen combat are less likely to praise the virtues of military life. “The myth is that the military teaches discipline,” say the Chicago area Veterans for Peace, in their “education not militarization” campaign. “The reality is that the military teaches children to follow orders without question and to use the military solution to conflict resolution – that is, death and destruction.”

President Obama had tears in his eyes in January 2016, calling for relief from record-breaking shootings and killings in the U.S. Yet 2016 became a record-breaking year for U.S. export of weapons to other countries. The U.S. is responsible for nearly 33 percent of worldwide weapon exports – by far the top arms exporter on the planet.

"Arms deals are a way of life in Washington," writes William Hartung. "From the president on down, significant parts of the government are intent on ensuring that American arms will flood the global market and companies like Lockheed and Boeing will live the good life. ... American officials regularly act as salespeople for the arms firms. And the Pentagon is their enabler. ... In its first six years, team Obama entered into agreements to sell more weaponry than any administration since World War II."

Carrying a cross along Michigan Avenue, I thought of the terrible slaughter in World War I that killed 38 million people. Elites, weapon-makers, and war profiteers drove millions of men into the trenches to fight and die in the war that was to end all wars.

### **Christmas Truce**

In 1914, mired in mud, war-weary and miserable, troops on both sides took matters into their own hands. For a brief, yet magnificent time, they enabled the "Christmas truce." One account relates how some German troops began singing one of their carols, and British and other troops then sang a carol from their side. As voices wafted across the no-man's land, troops began calling out to one another.

"Time and again during the course of that day, the Eve of Christmas, there were wafted towards us from the trenches opposite the sounds of singing and merry-making, and occasionally the guttural tones of a German were to be heard shouting out lustily, 'A happy Christmas to you Englishmen!' Only too glad to show that the sentiments were reciprocated, back would go the response from a thick-set Clydesider, 'Same to you, Fritz, but dinna o'er eat yourself wi' they sausages!'"

"The high command on both sides took a dim view of the activities and orders were issued to stop the fraternizing with varying results. In some areas, the truce ended Christmas Day in others the following day and in others it extended into January."

Dr. King said, "Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit, and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring *eternal* hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism."

The soldiers in those trenches went out into their no-man's land and showed the world one way to end wars. They should never have had to. It was left to them to venture into the no-man's land, risking exposure to the others' fire and their generals' punishment for disobeying orders.

No matter what gang is issuing the orders to kill, whether a massive military

power or a smaller group that has acquired weapons, we can all claim our right not to develop, store, sell or use weapons. We can claim our right not to kill and not to live with the memory of having killed. “Declaring eternal hostility” to the fear, greed and hate which are our real enemies seems to be our true hope. We can lay aside forever the futility of killing. We can be hopeful and determined that our resources and ingenuity are directed toward meeting human needs.

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in September focused on the overlooked foreign policy issues of Campaign 2016, the unacknowledged reasons for U.S. overseas interventions, and the troubling twists and turns of the New Cold War.

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[“Belated Pushback on Saudis’ War on Yemen”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Sep. 2, 2016

[“Georgetown’s Gesture on Slavery’s Evils”](#) by Ray McGovern, Sep. 3, 2016

[“Hillary Clinton’s ‘Exceptionalist’ Warpath”](#) by Daniel Lazare, Sep. 3, 2016

[“Campaign 2016: Populism vs. Establishment”](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Sep. 4, 2016

[“Troubling Origins of ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’”](#) by Sam Hussein, Sep. 4, 2016

[“Behind the Russian-Israeli Detente”](#) by Zach Battat, Sep. 5, 2016

[“Dissecting the Propaganda on Syria”](#) by Rick Sterling, Sep. 6, 2016

[“America and the Plague of ‘Moral Idiocy’”](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Sep. 6, 2016

[“Old Cold Warriors Cool to New Cold War”](#) by Kathy Kelly, Sep. 7, 2016

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