

Telling Only Part of the Story of Jihad

A CNN star reporter should not be shocked to learn that U.S. allies are consorting with Yemeni terrorists, writes Daniel Lazare.

By **Daniel Lazare**

Special to Consortium News



A recent *CNN* report about U.S. military materiel finding its way into Al Qaeda hands in Yemen might have been a valuable addition to Americans' knowledge of terrorism.

Entitled "**Sold to an ally, lost to an enemy,**" the 10-minute segment, broadcast on Feb. 4, featured rising *CNN* star **Nima Elbagir** cruising past sand-colored "Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected" armored vehicles, or MRAPs, lining a Yemeni highway.

"It's absolutely incredible," she says. "And this is not under the control of [Saudi-led] coalition forces. This is in the command of militias, which is expressly forbidden by the arms sales agreements with the U.S."

“That’s just the tip of the iceberg,” she adds.

“CNN was told by coalition sources that a deadlier U.S. weapons system, the

TOW missile, was airdropped in 2015 by Saudi Arabia to Yemeni fighters, an air drop that was proudly proclaimed across Saudi backed media channels.” The TOWs were dropped into Al Qaeda-controlled territory, according to CNN. But when Elbagir tries to find out more, the local coalition-backed government chases her and her crew out of town.

U.S.-made TOWs in the hands of Al Qaeda? Elbagir is an effective on-screen presence. But this is an old story, which the cable network has long soft-pedaled.

In the early days of the Syrian War, Western media was reluctant to acknowledge that the forces arrayed against the Assad regime included Al Qaeda. In those days, the opposition was widely portrayed as a belated ripple effect of the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings elsewhere in the region.

However, in April-May 2015, right around the time that the Saudis were air-dropping TOWs into Yemen, they were also supplying the same optically-guided, high-tech missiles to pro-Al Qaeda forces in Syria’s northern Idlib province. Rebel leaders were exultant as they drove back Syrian



government troops. TOWs “flipped the balance,” one said, while another declared: “I would put the advances down to one word – TOW.”

CNN reported that story very differently. From rebel-held territory, *CNN*'s Nick Paton Walsh described the missiles as a “possible game-changer ... that may finally be wearing down the less popular side of the Shia-Sunni divide.” He conceded it wasn't all good news: “A major downside for Washington at least, is that the often-victorious rebels, the Nusra Front, are Al Qaeda. But while the winners for now are America's enemies, the fast-changing ground in Syria may cause to happen what the Obama administration has long sought and preached, and that's changing the calculus of the Assad regime.”

Foreign Policy, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* all reacted the same way, frowning their brows at the news that Al Qaeda was gaining, but expressing measured relief that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was at last on the ropes.

But now that Elbagir is sounding the alarm about TOWs in Yemen, *CNN* would do well to acknowledge that it has been distinctly more blasé in the past about TOWs in the hands of al Qaeda.

The network appears unwilling to go where Washington's pro-war foreign-policy establishment doesn't want it to go. Elbagir shouldn't be shocked to learn that U.S. allies are consorting with Yemeni terrorists.

U.S. History with Holy Warriors

What *CNN* producers and correspondents either don't know or fail to mention is that Washington has a long history of supporting jihad. As Ian Johnson notes in "[A Mosque in Munich](#)" (2010), the policy was mentioned by President Dwight Eisenhower, who was eager, according to White House memos, "to stress the 'holy war' aspect" in his talks with Muslim leaders about the Cold War Communist menace." [See "[How U.S. Allies Aid Al Qaeda in Syria](#)," Consortium News, Aug. 4, 2015.]

Britain had been involved with Islamists at least as far back as 1925 when it helped establish the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and both the U.S. and Britain worked with Islamists in the 1953 coup in Iran, according to Robert Dreyfus in "[Devil's Game](#)" (2006).

By the 1980s a growing Islamist revolt against a left-leaning, pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan brought U.S. support. In mid-1979, President Jimmy Carter and his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, armed the Afghan mujahideen – not at first to [drive](#) the Soviets out, but to lure them in. Brzezinski intended to deal Moscow a Vietnam-sized blow, as he [put it](#) in a 1998 interview.

Meanwhile, a few months after the U.S. armed the mujahideen, the Saudis were deeply shaken when Islamist extremists seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and called for the overthrow of the royal family. While Saudi Arabia has been keen to repress jihadism at home, it has been a major supporter of Sunni extremists in the region, particularly to battle the Shi'ite regime that came to power in Tehran, also in 1979.

Since then, the U.S. has made use of jihad, either directly or indirectly, with the Gulf oil monarchies or Pakistan's notoriously pro-Islamist Inter-Services Intelligence agency. U.S. backing for the Afghan mujahideen helped turn Osama bin Laden into a hero for some young Saudis and other Sunnis, while the training camp he established in the Afghan countryside drew jihadists from across the region.

U.S. backing for Alija Izetbegovic's Islamist government in Bosnia-Herzegovina brought al-Qaeda to the Balkans, while U.S.-Saudi support for Islamist militants in the Second Chechen War of 1999-2000 enabled it to establish a base of operations there.

Downplaying Al Qaeda

Just six years after 9/11, according to investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, the U.S. downplayed the fight against Al Qaeda to rein in Iran – a policy, Hersh wrote, that had the effect of “bolstering ... Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”

Under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, policy toward Al-Qaeda turned even more curious. In March 2011, she devoted nearly two weeks to persuading Qatar, the UAE and Jordan to join the air war against Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, only to stand by and watch as Qatar then poured hundreds of millions of dollars of aid into the hands of Islamist militias that were spreading anarchy from one end of the country to the other. The Obama administration thought of remonstrating with Qatar, but didn't in the end.

Much the same happened in Syria where, by early 2012,

Clinton was organizing a “Friends of Syria” group that soon began channeling military aid to Islamist forces waging war against Christians, Alawites, secularists and others backing Assad. By August 2012, the Defense Intelligence Agency reported that “the Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the [anti-Assad] insurgency”; that the West, Turkey, and the Gulf states supported it regardless; that the rebels’ goal was to establish “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria,” and that “this is exactly what the supporting powers want in order to isolate the Syrian regime...”

Biden Speaks Out

Two years after that, Vice President Joe Biden declared at Harvard’s Kennedy School:

“Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. ... The Saudis, the Emiratis, etc. what were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of military weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad, except the people who were being supplied were al Nusra and al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.” (Quote starts at 53:25.)

The fact that Obama ordered the vice president to apologize to the Saudis, the UAE and Turkey for his comments provided back-handed confirmation that they were true. When TOWs

turned up in the hands of pro-Qaeda rebels in Syria the following spring, all a senior administration official would say was: “It’s not something we would refrain from raising with our partners.”

It was obvious that Al Qaeda would be a prime beneficiary of Saudi intervention in Yemen from the start. Tying down the Houthis – “Al Qaeda’s most determined foe,” according to the [Times](#) – gave it space to blossom and grow. Where the State Department [said](#) it had up to 4,000 members as of 2015, a [UN report](#) put its membership at between 6,000 and 7,000 three years later, an increase of 50 to 75 percent or more.

In early 2017, the International Crisis Group [found](#) that Al Qaeda was “thriving in an environment of state collapse, growing sectarianism, shifting alliances, security vacuums and a burgeoning war economy.”

In Yemen, Al Qaeda “has regularly fought alongside Saudi-led coalition forces in ... Aden and other parts of the south, including Taiz, indirectly obtaining weapons from them,” the ICG added. “...In northern Yemen ... the [Saudi-led] coalition has engaged in tacit alliances with AQAP fighters, or at least turned a blind eye to them, as long as they have assisted in attacking the common enemy.”

In May 2016, a [PBS documentary](#) showed Al Qaeda members fighting side by side with UAE forces near Taiz. (See [“The Secret Behind the Yemen War,” Consortium News](#), May 7, 2016.)

Last August, an *Associated Press* investigative team [found](#) that the Saudi-led coalition had cut secret deals with Al Qaeda fighters, “paying some to leave key cities and towns

and letting others retreat with weapons, equipment, and wads of looted cash.” Saudi-backed militias “actively recruit Al Qaeda militants,” the *AP* team added, “...because they’re considered exceptional fighters” and also supply them with armored trucks.

If it’s not news that U.S. allies are providing pro-Al Qaeda forces with U.S.-made equipment, why is *CNN* pretending that it is? One reason is that it feels free to criticize the war and all that goes with it now that the growing human catastrophe in Yemen is turning into a major embarrassment for the U.S. Another is that criticizing the U.S. for failing to rein in its allies earns it points with viewers by making it seem tough and independent, even though the opposite is the case.

Then there’s Trump, with whom *CNN* has been at war since the moment he was elected. Trump’s Dec. 19 decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria thus presented the network with a double win because it allowed it to rail against the pullout as “bizarre” and a “win for Moscow” while complaining at the same time about administration policy in Yemen. Trump is at fault, it seems, when he pulls out *and* when he stays in.

In either instance, *CNN* gets to ride the high horse as it blasts away at the chief executive that corporate outlets most love to hate. Maybe Elbagir should have given her exposé a different title: “Why arming homicidal maniacs is bad news in one country but OK in another.”

Daniel Lazare is the author of “The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy” (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for

a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

American Terror is Not New

There were hate crimes before Donald Trump ran for president, most of them sanctioned by the state, including anti-black violence, as old as white settlement on this continent, says Margaret Kimberley of Black Agenda Report.

American Terror is Not New

By Margaret Kimberley

Black Agenda Report



The casual, endemic and racist violence that characterizes American behavior at home and abroad cannot be laid at the doorstep of the current buffoon in the White House.

Within the past week very disturbing and violent events took place in quick succession across the country. Two black people were shot to death in a Louisville, Kentucky supermarket. The white shooter made it clear that his goal was to kill black people when he said, “Whites don’t shoot whites,” as he was apprehended. No sooner had this crime occurred than a Florida man was arrested and charged with sending explosive devices to Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, George Soros, Maxine Waters, and Eric Holder among others. One day later a shooting at a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania synagogue left 11 people dead.

The unnamed suspect in all of these cases is Donald Trump. The bombing

suspect made clear his love for the 45th president. He was described by his attorney as a previously apolitical man who nonetheless "found a father in Donald Trump." The Louisville killing is the latest in a long line carried out by white racists. Anti-black violence is as old as white settlement on this continent.

Analysis of these recent incidents must be made very carefully. Trump differs from his predecessors mostly by tearing away the veneer of humanity and civility from a system which is relentlessly brutal. But the façade keeps many would-be terrorists from carrying out their sick fantasies. There are people who keep their hatred to themselves until they know that they may be given some cover and acceptance. Hatred expressed by a president emboldens people who might not ordinarily act upon their racist impulses.

It is very dangerous for these hidden haters to think they can come out of their closets. At the same time we cannot forget that a racist shooter succeeded in entering a black church in Charleston, South Carolina and killing nine people in 2015 when Barack Obama was president. The most prevalent racially motivated murders are carried out by police across the country when they kill an average of 300 black people every year.

It is a mistake to see Trump as a singular evil in American history. He is also not an anomaly among world leaders. An avowed fascist just won a presidential race in Brazil. White supremacists march openly in European countries like Ukraine where the Obama administration helped to overthrow an elected president and install Nazis among the new leadership. Fascism is carried out daily not only by the police but by the neoliberal state and by the military as it carries out a war of terror all over the world.

The current moment is perilous and requires serious analysis. Trump is the low hanging fruit in any discussion of racism and other forms of bigotry. But the country cannot be given a pass and allowed to behave as if all was well until he was elected. White people cannot play innocent and black people can't relax when the day comes that he is out office.

Trump Given Pass for Raising Nuclear Danger

If Trump can be connected to all of these incidents it should be with the knowledge that the entire country is suffering from a terrible sickness that few want to confront. Americans prefer to think well of themselves and their nation and treat any information contradicting that belief as an inconvenience to be avoided at all costs. There were hate crimes before Donald Trump ran for president and most of them weren't carried out by individuals. Most of them are still sanctioned by the state.

The crazed Trump lover may have tried to send bombs to Obama and Clinton but they sent bombs to Libya and destroyed a nation that still suffers from their terrorist acts. They are quite literally guilty of committing hate crimes, along with other NATO leaders and their predecessors in high places. The fact that they know how to express diplomatic niceties is no reason to see them as being on our side as we fight to defeat fascism at home and around the world.

Their enablers cannot be given a pass either. When we fight to make war and peace a political issue we are derided as purists and spoilers who ought to be quiet and allow imperialism to take place without hindrance. The people who join in the chorus of denunciation should not be allowed to wring their hands when dead bodies appear within our borders too.

If they want to denounce Trump they had an excellent opportunity recently. Trump announced that the United States was withdrawing unilaterally from the INF missile treaty with Russia. This decision quite literally puts the world closer to nuclear war. But the liberal Trump haters have had very little to say about a policy change which quite literally endangers all life on the planet. The numbers of people who realize the danger and speak against this action is minuscule, unlike the near unanimous condemnation of racist gun men and the would-be mail bomber.

We have always lived in a very dangerous nation. Trump makes it more difficult to be in denial. But we must fight against the crowd which averts its eyes until a racist buffoon enters the White House. There

is nothing new about American terrorism. It can be found in high and low places regardless of presidential civility or lack thereof.

This article originally appeared on BlackAgendaReport.com

Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in BAR, and is widely reprinted elsewhere. She maintains a frequently updated blog as well at <http://freedomrider.blogspot.com> . Ms. Kimberley lives in New York City, and can be reached via e-Mail at [Margaret.Kimberley\(at\)BlackAgendaReport.com](mailto:Margaret.Kimberley(at)BlackAgendaReport.com).

The Other Side of John McCain

If the paeans to McCain by diverse political climbers seems detached from reality, it's because they reflect the elite view of U.S. military interventions as a chess game, with the millions killed by unprovoked aggression mere statistics, says Max Blumenthal.

**By Max Blumenthal
in Washington**

Special to Consortium News



As the Cold War entered its final act in 1985, journalist Helena Cobban participated in an academic conference at an upscale resort near Tucson, Arizona, on U.S.-Soviet interactions in the Middle East. When she attended what was listed as the "Gala Dinner with keynote speech", she quickly learned that the virtual theme of the evening was, "Adopt a Muj."

"I remember mingling with all of these wealthy Republican women from the Phoenix suburbs and being asked, 'Have you adopted a muj?'" Cobban told me. "Each one had pledged money to sponsor a member of the Afghan mujahedin in the name of beating the communists. Some were even seated at the event next to their personal 'muj.'"

The keynote speaker of the evening, according to Cobban, was a hard-charging freshman member of Congress named John McCain.

During the Vietnam war, McCain had been captured by the North Vietnamese Army after being shot down on his way to bomb a civilian lightbulb factory. He spent two years in solitary confinement and underwent torture that left him with

crippling injuries. McCain returned from the war with a deep, abiding loathing of his former captors, remarking as late as 2000, "I hate the gooks. I will hate them as long as I live." After he was criticized for the racist remark, McCain refused to apologize. "I was referring to my prison guards," he said, "and I will continue to refer to them in language that might offend some people because of the beating and torture of my friends."

McCain's visceral resentment informed his vocal support for the mujahedin as well as the right-wing contra death squads in Central America – any proxy group sworn to the destruction of communist governments.

So committed was McCain to the anti-communist cause that in the mid-1980s he had joined the advisory board of the United States Council for World Freedom, the American affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL). Geoffrey Stewart-Smith, a former leader of WACL's British chapter who had turned against the group in 1974, described the organization as "a collection of Nazis, fascists, anti-Semites, sellers of forgeries, vicious racialists, and corrupt self-seekers. It has evolved into an anti-Semitic international."

Joining McCain in the organization were notables such as Jaroslav Stetsko, the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator who helped oversee the extermination of 7,000 Jews in 1941; the brutal Argentinian former dictator Jorge Rafael Videla; and Guatemalan death squad leader Mario Sandoval Alarcon. Then-President Ronald Reagan honored the group for playing "a leadership role in drawing attention to the gallant struggle now being waged by the true freedom fighters of our day."

Being Lauded as a Hero

On the occasion of his death, McCain is being honored in much the same way – as a patriotic hero and freedom fighter for democracy. A stream of hagiographies is pouring forth from the Beltway press corps that he described as his true political base. Among McCain's most enthusiastic groupies is CNN's Jake Tapper, whom he chose as his personal stenographer for a 2000 trip to Vietnam. When the former CNN host Howard Kurtz asked Tapper in February, 2000, "When you're on the [campaign] bus, do you make a conscious effort not to fall under the magical McCain spell?"

"Oh, you can't. You become like Patty Hearst when the SLA took her," Tapper joked in reply.

But the late senator has also been treated to gratuitous tributes from an array of prominent liberals, from George Soros to his soft power-pushing client, Ken Roth, along with three fellow directors of Human Rights Watch and "democratic socialist" celebrity Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, who hailed McCain as "an

unparalleled example of human decency.” Rep. John Lewis, the favorite civil rights symbol of the Beltway political class, weighed in as well to memorialize McCain as a “warrior for peace.”

If the paeans to McCain by this diverse cast of political climbers and Davos denizens seemed detached from reality, that’s because they perfectly reflected the elite view of American military interventions as akin to a game of chess, and the millions of dead left in the wake of the West’s unprovoked aggression as mere statistics.

There were few figures in recent American life who dedicated themselves so personally to the perpetuation of war and empire as McCain. But in Washington, the most defining aspect of his career was studiously overlooked, or waved away as the trivial idiosyncrasy of a noble servant who nonetheless deserved everyone’s reverence.

McCain did not simply thunder for every major intervention of the post-Cold War era from the Senate floor, while pushing for sanctions and assorted campaigns of subterfuge on the side. He was uniquely ruthless when it came to advancing imperial goals, barnstorming from one conflict zone to another to personally recruit far-right fanatics as American proxies.

In Libya and Syria, he cultivated affiliates of Al Qaeda as allies, and in Ukraine, McCain courted actual, sig-heiling neo-Nazis.

While McCain’s Senate office functioned as a clubhouse for arms industry lobbyists and neocon operatives, his fascistic allies waged a campaign of human devastation that will continue until long after the flowers dry up on his grave.

American media may have sought to bury this legacy with the senator’s body, but it is what much of the outside world will remember him for.

‘They are Not al-Qaeda’

When a violent insurgency swept through Libya in 2011, McCain parachuted into the country to meet with leaders of the main insurgent outfit, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), battling the government of Moamar Gaddafi. His goal was to make kosher this band of hardline Islamists in the eyes of the Obama administration, which was considering a military intervention at the time.

What happened next is well documented, though it is scarcely discussed by a Washington political class that depended on the Benghazi charade to deflect from the real scandal of Libya’s societal destruction. Gaddafi’s motorcade was attacked by NATO jets, enabling a band of LIFG fighters to capture him, sodomize him with a bayonet, then murder him and leave his body to rot in a butcher shop

in Misrata while rebel fanboys snapped cellphone selfies of his fetid corpse.

A slaughter of Black citizens of Libya by the racist sectarian militias recruited by McCain immediately followed the killing of the pan-African leader. ISIS took over Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte while Belhaj's militia took control of Tripoli, and a war of the warlords began. Just as Gaddafi had warned, the ruined country became a staging ground for migrant smugglers on the Mediterranean, fueling the rise of the far-right across Europe and enabling the return of slavery to Africa.

Many might describe Libya as a failed state, but it also represents a successful realization of the vision McCain and his allies have advanced on the global stage.

Following the NATO-orchestrated murder of Libya's leader, McCain tweeted, "Qaddafi on his way out, Bashar al Assad is next."

McCain's Syrian Boondoggle

Like Libya, Syria had resisted aligning with the West and was suddenly confronted with a Salafi-jihadi insurgency armed by the CIA. Once again, McCain made it his personal duty to market Islamist insurgents to America as a cross between the Minutemen and the Freedom Riders of the civil rights era. To do so, he took under his wing a youthful DC-based Syria-American operative named Mouaz Moustafa who had been a consultant to the Libyan Transitional Council during the run-up to the NATO invasion.

In May 2013, Moustafa convinced McCain to take an illegal trip across the Syrian border and meet some freedom fighters. An Israeli millionaire named Moti Kahana who coordinated efforts between the Syrian opposition and the Israeli military through his NGO, Amaliah, claimed to have "financed the opposition group which took senator John McCain to visit war-torn Syria."

"This could be like his Benghazi moment," Moustafa remarked excitedly in a scene from a documentary, "Red Lines," that depicted his efforts for regime change. "[McCain] went to Benghazi, he came back, we bombed."

During his brief excursion into Syria, McCain met with a group of CIA-backed insurgents and blessed their struggle. "The senator wanted to assure the Free Syrian Army that the American people support their cry for freedom, support their revolution," Moustafa said in an interview with CNN. McCain's office promptly released a photo showing the senator posing beside a beaming Moustafa and two grim-looking gunmen.

Days later, the men were named by the Lebanese *Daily Star* as Mohammad Nour and

Abu Ibrahim. Both had been implicated in the kidnapping a year prior of 11 Shia pilgrims, and were identified by one of the survivors. McCain and Moustafa returned to the U.S. the targets of mockery from Daily Show host John Stewart and the subject of harshly critical reports from across the media spectrum. At a town hall in Arizona, McCain was berated by constituents, including Jumana Hadid, a Syrian Christian woman who warned that the sectarian militants he had cozied up to threatened her community with genocide.

But McCain pressed ahead anyway. On Capitol Hill, he introduced another shady young operative into his interventionist theater. Named Elizabeth O'Bagy, she was a fellow at the Institute for the Study of War, an arms industry-funded think tank directed by Kimberly Kagan of the neoconservative Kagan clan. Behind the scenes, O'Bagy was consulting for Moustafa at his Syrian Emergency Task Force, a clear conflict of interest that her top Senate patron was well aware of. Before the Senate, McCain cited a *Wall Street Journal* editorial by O'Bagy to support his assessment of the Syrian rebels as predominately "moderate," and potentially Western-friendly.

Days later, O'Bagy was exposed for faking her PhD in Arabic studies. As soon as the humiliated Kagan fired O'Bagy, the academic fraudster took another pass through the Beltway's revolving door, striding into the halls of Congress as McCain's newest foreign policy aide.

McCain ultimately failed to see the Islamist "revolutionaries" he glad handled take control of Damascus. Syria's government held on thanks to help from his mortal enemies in Tehran and Moscow, but not before a billion dollar CIA arm-and-equip operation helped spawn one of the worst refugee crises in post-war history. Luckily for McCain, there were other intrigues seeking his attention, and new bands of fanatical rogues in need of his blessing. Months after his Syrian boondoggle, the ornery militarist turned his attention to Ukraine, then in the throes of an upheaval stimulated by U.S. and EU-funded soft power NGO's.

Coddling the Neo-Nazis of Ukraine

On December 14, 2013, McCain materialized in Kiev for a meeting with Oleh Tyanhbok, an unreconstructed fascist who had emerged as a top opposition leader. Tyanhbok had co-founded the fascist Social-National Party, a far-right political outfit that touted itself as the "last hope of the white race, of humankind as such." No fan of Jews, he had complained that a "Muscovite-Jewish mafia" had taken control of his country, and had been photographed throwing up a sieg heil Nazi salute during a speech.

None of this apparently mattered to McCain. Nor did the scene of Right Sector neo-Nazis filling up Kiev's Maidan Square while he appeared on stage to egg them

on.

“Ukraine will make Europe better and Europe will make Ukraine better!” McCain proclaimed to cheering throngs while Tyanhbok stood by his side. The only issue that mattered to him at the time was the refusal of Ukraine’s elected president to sign a European Union austerity plan, opting instead for an economic deal with Moscow.

McCain was so committed to replacing an independent-minded government with a NATO vassal that he even mulled a military assault on Kiev. “I do not see a military option and that is tragic,” McCain lamented in an interview about the crisis. Fortunately for him, regime change arrived soon after his appearance on the Maidan, and Tyanhbok’s allies rushed in to fill the void.

By the end of the year, the Ukrainian military had become bogged down in a bloody trench war with pro-Russian, anti-coup separatists in the country’s east. A militia affiliated with the new government in Kiev called Dnipro-1 was accused by Amnesty International observers of blocking humanitarian aid into a separatist-held area, including food and clothing for the war torn population.

Six months later, McCain appeared at Dnipro-1’s training base alongside Sen.’s Tom Cotton and John Barasso. “The people of my country are proud of your fight and your courage,” McCain told an assembly of soldiers from the militia. When he completed his remarks, the fighters belted out a World War II-era salute made famous by Ukrainian Nazi collaborators: “Glory to Ukraine!”

Today, far-right nationalists occupy key posts in Ukraine’s pro-Western government. The speaker of its parliament is Andriy Parubiy, a co-founder with Tyanhbok of the Social-National Party and leader of the movement to honor World World Two-era Nazi collaborators like Stepan Bandera. On the cover of his 1998 manifesto, “View From The Right,” Parubiy appeared in a Nazi-style brown shirt with a pistol strapped to his waist. In June 2017, McCain and Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan welcomed Parubiy on Capitol Hill for what McCain called a “good meeting.” It was a shot in the arm for the fascist forces sweeping across Ukraine.

The past months in Ukraine have seen a state sponsored neo-Nazi militia called C14 carrying out a pogromist rampage against Ukraine’s Roma population, the country’s parliament erecting an exhibition honoring Nazi collaborators, and the Ukrainian military formally approving the pro-Nazi “Glory to Ukraine” greeting as its own official salute.

Ukraine is now the sick man of Europe, a perpetual aid case bogged down in an endless war in its east. In a testament to the country’s demise since its so-

called “Revolution of Dignity,” the deeply unpopular President Petro Poroshenko has promised White House National Security Advisor John Bolton that his country – once a plentiful source of coal on par with Pennsylvania – will now [purchase coal](#) from the U.S. Once again, a regime change operation that generated a failing, fascistic state stands as one of McCain’s greatest triumphs.

McCain’s history conjures up memory of one of the most inflammatory statements by Sarah Palin, another cretinous fanatic he foisted onto the world stage. During a characteristically rambling stump speech in October 2008, Palin [accused](#) Barack Obama of “palling around with terrorists.” The line was dismissed as ridiculous and borderline slander, as it should have been. But looking back at McCain’s career, the accusation seems richly ironic.

By any objective standard, it was McCain who had palled around with terrorists, and who wrested as much resources as he could from the American taxpayer to maximize their mayhem. Here’s hoping that the societies shattered by McCain’s proxies will someday rest in peace.

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement That Shattered the Party](#), [Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel](#), [The Fifty One Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza](#), and the forthcoming [The Management of Savagery](#), which will be published by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries including [Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie](#) and the newly released [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded the [GrayzoneProject.com](#) in 2015 and serves as its editor.

If you valued this original article please consider [making a donation to Consortium News](#) so we can bring you more stories like this one.

The ‘White Helmets’ Controversy

FROM THE ARCHIVES: As Israel in the past few days helped evacuate 800 “White Helmets” from Syria, en route to Britain and other Western countries, we look back at an article published by Consortium News in Oct. 2016.

By Rick Sterling



Across the mainstream Western media, the “White Helmets” are hailed as heroic first responders rescuing injured civilians in rebel-controlled parts of Syria. The U.K. Guardian and The Independent urged the Nobel Committee to award this year’s Nobel Peace Prize to the “White Helmets.” As it turned out, they didn’t get that one, but they did receive the prestigious 2016 “Right Livelihood Award.”

On the U.S. side of the Atlantic, the “White Helmets” are treated with similar uncritical acclaim. They were the subject of the Oct. 17 TIME magazine cover story. Netflix has released a special “documentary” movie about them. (It later won the 2017 Academy Award for Best Documentary.) New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof has gushed over them for years, helping the group’s one-sided depiction of events inside Syria shape the pro-rebel narrative that is pretty much all the American and European publics hear about Syria.

And, this love-fest is not just confined to establishment media. DemocracyNow! ran a puff piece interview with the White Helmet infomercial directors. The Intercept published an uncritical promotion of the “White Helmets” and the group’s controversial leader. Codepink recommended the Netflix movie (though after receiving criticism about the endorsement, the anti-war group removed it).

Yet, despite the favorable “group think” regarding the “White Helmets” – and more broadly about the rebel cause in Syria – there is another side to the story, including the fact that the “White Helmets” are not just some well-meaning Syrians who emerged to help all civilians suffering from the five years of war.

Not only do they only operate in rebel-controlled areas but they are a source of propaganda about the war, indeed their very existence is an element in the larger propaganda campaign to rally international support for a “regime change” war in Syria. The “White Helmets” brand was conceived and directed by a New York-based marketing company named “The Syria Campaign,” which itself was “incubated” by a larger politically oriented marketing company called Purpose.

Along with managing the online and social media promotion of the White Helmets, the Syria Campaign has parallel efforts in support of “regime change” in Syria. One of these efforts has been to criticize United Nations and humanitarian relief organizations that supply aid to displaced persons living in areas protected by the Syrian government.

“The allegations made by the Syria Campaign and others were written by people who know nothing about the UN and how it must work,” according to an NGO worker operating in Damascus.

Exaggerated Claims

Claims that the “White Helmets” have saved 65,000 people also appear to be wildly exaggerated. The areas, served by the White Helmets and controlled by Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and its rebel allies, have few civilians living in them. A medical doctor visiting east Aleppo two years ago described it as a “ghost town,” yet Western media reports cite a highly inflated estimated population of 250,000.

Perhaps unintentionally, the “White Helmets” and one of their video teams confirmed this reality in producing a “cat video” when cat videos were all the rage on social media. In an apparent bid to bring cat lovers onto the side of “regime change” in Syria, the White Helmets’ video showed White Helmet members playing with stray cats in empty neighborhoods, saying: “The homeowners abandoned this district and its kittens.”

Besides promoting themselves as a humanitarian group, the White Helmets have become essential to the propaganda war by gaining – along with similar pro-rebel “activists” – a virtual monopoly on information from rebel-controlled areas, supplying a steady stream of heart-rending stories and images about suffering children to a credulous Western media wanting to believe everything bad about the Syrian government.

One of the reasons why the “White Helmets” have been so successful in inserting their propaganda into Western media is that most of the rebel zones of Syria, especially east Aleppo, have been off limits to Western journalists and other outside observers for years. Two of the last Western reporters to venture into rebel territory, James Foley and Stephen Sotloff, were subsequently beheaded by the Islamic State.

So, as the Syrian government and its allies finally try to expel Al Qaeda terrorists and their cohorts from east Aleppo, the White Helmets have become a major source for the Western news media which treats these “relief workers” as credible providers of on-the-ground information.

Thus, the positive image of the White Helmets and the group’s skillful use of social media deflect attention from the sectarian, violent and unpopular nature of Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front (recently renamed the Syria Conquest Front) and other armed opposition groups while hyping accusations that Syrian and Russian attacks are primarily hitting civilians.

In other words, the White Helmets have gone from being talked about to being the ones doing the talking. News stories increasingly use White Helmet witnesses as their sources, often in ways that promote the self-serving myth of White Helmet

heroism. One day, CNN announced that a White Helmet aid center had been hit. Another day, TIME magazine claimed that White Helmet workers were being "hunted".

'Eyewitness' Accounts

Reports from the White Helmets also have served as "eyewitness" accounts about the Syrian military using "barrel bombs," including in an attack to destroy a Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian convoy and warehouse on Sept. 19 in Orem al Kubra. But there were reasons to be suspicious of this claim since this town is controlled by the infamous Nour al Din al Zinki terrorist group, which recently filmed itself beheading a Palestinian Syrian boy.

It was also illogical that Syrian or Russian planes would attack a SARC convoy, which they could have stopped when it was in government held territory. Plus, the Syrian government works with SARC. And, the ones to "benefit" from the attack were the rebels and their Western backers who cited this atrocity as another reason for "regime change" and to condemn the Russians for assisting the Syrian government. The attack also took attention away from the U.S. airstrike that killed some 70 Syrian soldiers on Sept. 17.

After the convoy was struck, the Russian and Syrian governments called for an independent investigation of the attack site but this has not been done, presumably because the terrorists controlling the area have not allowed it. Nevertheless, the narrative supplied by the White Helmets and other pro-rebel factions – blaming the Syrian government and their Russian allies – has dominated the Western media's handling of the story.

The "White Helmets" also played a dubious role in allegations that the Syrian government was using chlorine gas in 2013 and 2014 by warning residents before the attacks to expect the Syrian military to drop chlorine bombs, although it was unclear how the activist first-responders would know that fact in advance. In one of the cases, seven witnesses told U.N. investigators that the rebels had staged the chlorine-gas attack, which could suggest that the "White Helmets" were in on the scam.

So, are the White Helmets heroes or a politically motivated hoax? The time to investigate is now, since it does little good to uncover the lies and manipulations years later, as has happened with the Iraqi and Libyan "regime change" invasions.

A Dangerous Replay

Evidence now suggests that we are seeing a replay of Curveball and the Iraqi WMD in 2003 and the bogus hysteria about stopping a Libyan "genocide" in 2011, both

debunked by later investigations but too late to spare those countries from massive death and destruction.

The belated recognition by some Americans that they are being “had” again in Syria has led to some pushback against the mainstream media’s promotion of the “White Helmets” and other pro-rebel activists. In April 2015, Dissidentvoice published an expose of the group’s creation and purpose. Since then there have been other articles and videos revealing the reality behind the “feel good” veneer.

Vanessa Beeley has produced a number of articles about the fraudulent pretense that the “White Helmets” are Syrian Civil Defense, including documentation about the real Syrian Civil Defense, which was founded six decades ago. She initiated an online Change.org petition to NOT give the Nobel Peace Prize to the “White Helmets,” an initiative that must have upset some influential people because Change.org removed the petition without explanation. (You can read the text of the petition here.)

The real Syrian Civil Defense works on a shoestring budget with real volunteers without video teams accompanying and promoting them. Most in the West are unaware the real Syrian Civil Defense even exist. The situation is similar for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which is a genuinely neutral and independent relief organization and has a good website.

Another online petition, also at Change.org, which is still up and running, calls on the Right Livelihood Foundation to rescind its award to the “White Helmets.” The petition includes a number of reasons why the group does not deserve the prize and are not what they are presented to be: they stole the name Syria Civil Defense from the real Syrian organization; they appropriated the name “White Helmets” from the Argentinian rescue organization Cascos Blancos/White Helmets; they are not independent; they are funded by governments; they are not apolitical; they actively campaign for a “no-fly zone” (which even Hillary Clinton has acknowledged would “kill a lot of Syrians” although she continues to promote the idea); they do not work across Syria; they only work in areas controlled by the armed opposition, mostly under the command of Al Qaeda’s affiliate Nusra Front; they are not unarmed; they sometimes do carry weapons and they also celebrate terrorist victories; they assist in terrorist executions.

Max Blumenthal wrote a two-part exposé at *Alternet*: “How the White Helmets became International Heroes while Pushing US Intervention and Regime Change in Syria” and “Inside the Shadowy PR Firm that’s Lobbying for Regime Change in Syria.”

(Blumenthal shows how the White Helmets are funded with millions of dollars from

the British Foreign Office and \$23 million from USAID.) Former weapons inspector Scott Ritter, who was one of the few voices daring to contest President George W. Bush's false claims about Iraq's WMD, wrote an article which challenged the White Helmets' "lionization."

Internationally, the Israeli TV station I24 ran a special report with the title "White Helmets: Heroes or Hoax?" – giving equal coverage to supporters and critics. Even "The National" out of United Arab Emirates has documented the controversy around the White Helmets.

Not surprisingly, this dissent to the mainstream media's love affair with the White Helmets drew return fire. The British military contractor who initially set up the group accused critics of being "proxies" for the Syrian and Russian governments (much as Ritter and other skeptics about the Iraqi WMD "group think" were called "Saddam apologists" in 2003).

The controversy also has done little to chasten the Western press corps from relying on the "White Helmets" as the go-to sources for information in Syria's conflict zones.

Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist and member of Syria Solidarity Movement.

If you enjoyed this original article please consider making a donation to Consortium News so we can bring you more stories like this one.

How Many Millions Have Been Killed in America's Post-9/11 Wars? Part 3: Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen

In the third and final part of his series, Nicolas JS Davies investigates the death toll of U.S. covert and proxy wars in Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen and underscores the importance of comprehensive war mortality studies.

By Nicolas J S Davies *Special to Consortium News*



In the first two parts of this report, I have estimated that about 2.4 million people have been killed as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, while about 1.2 million have been killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a result of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. In the third and final part of this report, I will

estimate how many people have been killed as a result of U.S. military and CIA interventions in Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen.

Of the countries that the U.S. has attacked and destabilized since 2001, only Iraq has been the subject of comprehensive "active" mortality studies that can reveal otherwise unreported deaths. An "active" mortality study is one that "actively" surveys households to find deaths that have not previously been reported by news reports or other published sources.

These studies are often carried out by people who work in the field of public health, like Les Roberts at Columbia University, Gilbert Burnham at Johns Hopkins and Riyadh Lafta at Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, who co-authored the 2006 Lancet study of Iraq war mortality. In defending their studies in Iraq and their results, they emphasized that their Iraqi survey teams were independent of the occupation government and that that was an important factor in the objectivity of their studies and the willingness of people in Iraq to talk honestly with them.

Comprehensive mortality studies in other war-torn countries (like Angola, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Iraq, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda) have revealed total numbers of deaths that are 5 to 20 times those previously revealed by "passive" reporting based on news reports, hospital records and/or human rights investigations.

In the absence of such comprehensive studies in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen, I have evaluated passive reports of war deaths and tried to assess what proportion of actual deaths these passive reports are likely to have counted by the methods they have used, based on ratios of actual deaths to passively reported deaths found in other war-zones.

I have only estimated violent deaths. None of my estimates include deaths from the indirect effects of these wars, such as the destruction of hospitals and health systems, the spread of otherwise preventable diseases and the effects of malnutrition and environmental pollution, which have also been substantial in all these countries.

For Iraq, my final estimate of about 2.4 million people killed was based on accepting the estimates of the 2006 Lancet study and the 2007 Opinion Research Business (ORB) survey, which were consistent with each other, and then applying the same ratio of actual deaths to passively reported deaths (11.5:1) as between the Lancet study and Iraq Body Count (IBC) in 2006 to IBC's count for the years since 2007.

For Afghanistan, I estimated that about 875,000 Afghans have been killed. I

explained that the annual reports on civilian casualties by the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) are based only on investigations completed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), and that they knowingly exclude large numbers of reports of civilian deaths that the AIHRC has not yet investigated or for which it has not completed its investigations. UNAMA's reports also lack any reporting at all from many areas of the country where the Taliban and other Afghan resistance forces are active, and where many or most U.S. air strikes and night raids therefore take place.

I concluded that UNAMA's reporting of civilian deaths in Afghanistan appears to be as inadequate as the extreme under-reporting found at the end of the Guatemalan Civil War, when the UN-sponsored Historical Verification Commission revealed 20 times more deaths than previously reported.

For Pakistan, I estimated that about 325,000 people had been killed. That was based on published estimates of combatant deaths, and on applying an average of the ratios found in previous wars (12.5:1) to the number of civilian deaths reported by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) in India.

Estimating Deaths in Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen

In the third and final part of this report, I will estimate the death toll caused by U.S. covert and proxy wars in Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen.

Senior U.S. military officers have hailed the U.S. doctrine of covert and proxy war that found its full flowering under the Obama administration as a "disguised, quiet, media-free" approach to war, and have traced the development of this doctrine back to U.S. wars in Central America in the 1980s. While the U.S. recruitment, training, command and control of death squads in Iraq was dubbed "the Salvador Option," U.S. strategy in Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen has in fact followed this model even more closely.

These wars have been catastrophic for the people of all these countries, but the U.S.'s "disguised, quiet, media-free" approach to them has been so successful in propaganda terms that most Americans know very little about the U.S. role in the intractable violence and chaos that has engulfed them.

The very public nature of the illegal but largely symbolic missile strikes on Syria on April 14, 2018 stands in sharp contrast to the "disguised, quiet, media-free" U.S.-led bombing campaign that has destroyed Raqqa, Mosul and several other Syrian and Iraqi cities with more than 100,000 bombs and missiles since 2014.

The people of Mosul, Raqqa, Kobane, Sirte, Fallujah, Ramadi, Tawergha and Deir Ez-Zor have died like trees falling in a forest where there were no Western

reporters or TV crews to record their massacres. As Harold Pinter asked of earlier U.S. war crimes in his 2005 Nobel acceptance speech,

“Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to U.S. foreign policy? The answer is yes, they did take place, and they are in all cases attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn’t know it. It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening, it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest.”

For more detailed background on the critical role the U.S. has played in each of these wars, please read my article, “Giving War Too Many Chances,” published in January 2018.

Libya

The only legal justification for NATO and its Arab monarchist allies to have dropped at least 7,700 bombs and missiles on Libya and invaded it with special operations forces beginning in February 2011 was UN Security Council resolution 1973, which authorized “all necessary measures” for the narrowly defined purpose of protecting civilians in Libya.

But the war instead killed far more civilians than any estimate of the number killed in the initial rebellion in February and March 2011, which ranged from 1,000 (a UN estimate) to 6,000 (according to the Libyan Human Rights League).

So the war clearly failed in its stated, authorized purpose, to protect civilians, even as it succeeded in a different and unauthorized one: the illegal overthrow of the Libyan government.

SC resolution 1973 expressly prohibited “a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory.” But NATO and its allies launched a covert invasion of Libya by thousands of Qatari and Western special operations forces, who planned the rebels’ advance across the country, called in air strikes against government forces and led the final assault on the Bab al-Aziziya military headquarters in Tripoli.

Qatari Chief of Staff Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Atiya, proudly told AFP,

“We were among them and the numbers of Qataris on the ground were in the hundreds in every region. Training and communications had been in Qatari hands. Qatar... supervised the rebels’ plans because they are civilians and did not have enough military experience. We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces.”

There are credible reports that a French security officer may even have delivered the coup de grace that killed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, after he

was captured, tortured and sodomized with a knife by the “NATO rebels.”

A parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry in the U.K. in 2016 concluded that a “limited intervention to protect civilians drifted into an opportunistic policy of regime change by military means,” resulting in, “political and economic collapse, inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare, humanitarian and migrant crises, widespread human rights violations, the spread of Gaddafi regime weapons across the region and the growth of Isil [Islamic State] in north Africa.”

Passive Reports of Civilian Deaths in Libya

Once the Libyan government was overthrown, journalists tried to inquire about the sensitive subject of civilian deaths, which was so critical to the legal and political justifications for the war. But the National Transitional Council (NTC), the unstable new government formed by Western-backed exiles and rebels, stopped issuing public casualty estimates and ordered hospital staff not to release information to reporters.

In any case, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, morgues were overflowing during the war and many people buried their loved ones in their backyards or wherever they could, without taking them to hospitals.

A rebel leader estimated in August 2011 that 50,000 Libyans had been killed.

Then, on September 8th 2011, Naji Barakat, the NTC’s new health minister, issued a statement that 30,000 people had been killed and another 4,000 were missing, based on a survey of hospitals, local officials and rebel commanders in the majority of the country that the NTC by then controlled. He said it would take several more weeks to complete the survey, so he expected the final figure to be higher.

Barakat’s statement did not include separate counts of combatant and civilian deaths. But he said that about half of the 30,000 reported dead were troops loyal to the government, including 9,000 members of the Khamis Brigade, led by Gaddafi’s son Khamis. Barakat asked the public to report deaths in their families and details of missing persons when they came to mosques for prayers that Friday. The NTC’s estimate of 30,000 people killed appeared to consist mainly of combatants on both sides.

The most comprehensive survey of war deaths since the end of the 2011 war in Libya was an “epidemiological community-based study” titled “Libyan Armed Conflict 2011: Mortality, Injury and Population Displacement.” It was authored by three medical professors from Tripoli, and published in the *African Journal of Emergency Medicine* in 2015.

The authors took records of war deaths, injuries and displacement collected by the Ministry of Housing and Planning, and sent teams to conduct face-to-face interviews with a member of each family to verify how many members of their household were killed, wounded or displaced. They did not try to separate the killing of civilians from the deaths of combatants.

Nor did they try to statistically estimate previously unreported deaths through the “cluster sample survey” method of the Lancet study in Iraq. But the Libyan Armed Conflict study is the most complete record of confirmed deaths in the war in Libya up to February 2012, and it confirmed the deaths of at least 21,490 people.

In 2014, the ongoing chaos and factional fighting in Libya flared up into what Wikipedia now calls a second Libyan Civil War. A group called Libya Body Count (LBC) began tabulating violent deaths in Libya, based on media reports, on the model of Iraq Body Count (IBC). But LBC only did so for three years, from January 2014 until December 2016. It counted 2,825 deaths in 2014, 1,523 in 2015 and 1,523 in 2016. (The LBC website says it was just a coincidence that the number was identical in 2015 and 2016.)

The U.K.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project has also kept a count of violent deaths in Libya. ACLED counted 4,062 deaths in 2014-6, compared with 5,871 counted by Libya Body Count. For the remaining periods between March 2012 and March 2018 that LBC did not cover, ACLED has counted 1,874 deaths.

If LBC had covered the whole period since March 2012, and found the same proportionally higher number than ACLED as it did for 2014-6, it would have counted 8,580 people killed.

Estimating How Many People Have Really Been Killed in Libya

Combining the figures from the Libyan Armed Conflict 2011 study and our combined, projected figure from Libya Body Count and ACLED gives a total of 30,070 passively reported deaths since February 2011.

The Libyan Armed Conflict (LAC) study was based on official records in a country that had not had a stable, unified government for about 4 years, while Libya Body Count was a fledgling effort to emulate Iraq Body Count that tried to cast a wider net by not relying only on English-language news sources.

In Iraq, the ratio between the 2006 *Lancet* study and Iraq Body Count was higher because IBC was only counting civilians, while the *Lancet* study counted Iraqi combatants as well as civilians. Unlike Iraq Body Count, both our main passive sources in Libya counted both civilians and combatants. Based on the one-line

descriptions of each incident in the Libya Body Count database, LBC's total appears to include roughly half combatants and half civilians.

Military casualties are generally counted more accurately than civilian ones, and military forces have an interest in accurately assessing enemy casualties as well as identifying their own. The opposite is true of civilian casualties, which are nearly always evidence of war crimes that the forces who killed them have a strong interest in suppressing.

So, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, I treated combatants and civilians separately, applying typical ratios between passive reporting and mortality studies only to civilians, while accepting reported combatant deaths as they were passively reported.

But the forces fighting in Libya are not a national army with the strict chain of command and organizational structure that results in accurate reporting of military casualties in other countries and conflicts, so both civilian and combatant deaths appear to be significantly under-reported by my two main sources, the Libya Armed Conflict study and Libya Body Count. In fact, the National Transitional Council's (NTC) estimates from August and September 2011 of 30,000 deaths were already much higher than the numbers of war deaths in the LAC study.

When the 2006 *Lancet* study of mortality in Iraq was published, it revealed 14 times the number of deaths counted in Iraq Body Count's list of civilian deaths.

But IBC later discovered more deaths from that period, reducing the ratio between the *Lancet* study's estimate and IBC's revised count to 11.5:1.

The combined totals from the Libya Armed Conflict 2011 study and Libya Body Count appear to be a larger proportion of total violent deaths than Iraq Body Count has counted in Iraq, mainly because LAC and LBC both counted combatants as well as civilians, and because Libya Body Count included deaths reported in Arabic news sources, while IBC relies almost entirely on English language news sources and generally requires "a minimum of two independent data sources" before recording each death.

In other conflicts, passive reporting has never succeeded in counting more than a fifth of the deaths found by comprehensive, "active" epidemiological studies.

Taking all these factors into account, the true number of people killed in Libya appears to be somewhere between five and twelve times the numbers counted by the Libya Armed Conflict 2011 study, Libya Body Count and ACLED.

So I estimate that about 250,000 Libyans have been killed in the war, violence and chaos that the U.S. and its allies unleashed in Libya in February 2011, and

which continues to the present day. Taking 5:1 and 12:1 ratios to passively counted deaths as outer limits, the minimum number of people that have been killed would be 150,000 and the maximum would be 360,000.

Syria

The "disguised, quiet, media-free" U.S. role in Syria began in late 2011 with a CIA operation to funnel foreign fighters and weapons through Turkey and Jordan into Syria, working with Qatar and Saudi Arabia to militarize unrest that began with peaceful Arab Spring protests against Syria's Baathist government.

The mostly leftist and democratic Syrian political groups coordinating non-violent protests in Syria in 2011 strongly opposed these foreign efforts to unleash a civil war, and issued strong statements opposing violence, sectarianism and foreign intervention.

But even as a December 2011 Qatari-sponsored opinion poll found that 55% of Syrians supported their government, the U.S. and its allies were committed to adapting their Libyan regime change model to Syria, knowing full well from the outset that this war would be much bloodier and more destructive.

The CIA and its Arab monarchist partners eventually funneled thousands of tons of weapons and thousands of foreign Al-Qaeda-linked jihadis into Syria. The weapons came first from Libya, then from Croatia and the Balkans. They included howitzers, missile launchers and other heavy weapons, sniper rifles, rocket propelled grenades, mortars and small arms, and the U.S. eventually directly supplied powerful anti-tank missiles.

Meanwhile, instead of cooperating with Kofi Annan's UN-backed efforts to bring peace to Syria in 2012, the U.S. and its allies held three "Friends of Syria" conferences, where they pursued their own "Plan B," pledging ever-growing support to the increasingly Al-Qaeda-dominated rebels. Kofi Annan quit his thankless role in disgust after Secretary of State Clinton and her British, French and Saudi allies cynically undermined his peace plan.

The rest, as they say, is history, a history of ever-spreading violence and chaos that has drawn the U.S., U.K., France, Russia, Iran and all of Syria's neighbors into its bloody vortex. As Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies has observed, these external powers have all been ready to fight over Syria "to the last Syrian."

The bombing campaign that President Obama launched against Islamic State in 2014 is the heaviest bombing campaign since the U.S. War in Vietnam, dropping more than 100,000 bombs and missiles on Syria and Iraq. Patrick Cockburn, the veteran Middle East correspondent of the U.K.'s *Independent* newspaper, recently

visited Raqqa, formerly Syria's 6th largest city, and wrote that, "The destruction is total."

"In other Syrian cities bombed or shelled to the point of oblivion there is at least one district that has survived intact," Cockburn wrote. "This is the case even in Mosul in Iraq, though much of it was pounded into rubble. But in Raqqa the damage and the demoralization are all pervasive. When something does work, such as a single traffic light, the only one to do so in the city, people express surprise."

Estimating Violent Deaths in Syria

Every public estimate of the numbers of people killed in Syria that I have found comes directly or indirectly from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), run by Rami Abdulrahman in Coventry in the U.K. He is a former political prisoner from Syria, and he works with four assistants in Syria who in turn draw on a network of about 230 anti-government activists across the country. His work receives some funding from the European Union, and also reportedly some from the U.K. government.

Wikipedia cites the Syrian Centre for Policy Research as a separate source with a higher fatality estimate, but this is in fact a projection from SOHR's figures. Lower estimates by the UN appear to also be based mainly on SOHR's reports.

SOHR has been criticized for its unabashedly opposition viewpoint, leading some to question the objectivity of its data. It appears to have seriously undercounted civilians killed by U.S. air strikes, but this could also be due to the difficulty and danger of reporting from IS-held territory, as has also been the case in Iraq.

SOHR acknowledges that its count cannot be a total estimate of all the people killed in Syria. In its most recent report in March 2018, it added 100,000 to its tally to compensate for under-reporting, another 45,000 to account for prisoners killed or disappeared in government custody and 12,000 for people killed, disappeared or missing in Islamic State or other rebel custody.

Leaving aside these adjustments, SOHR's March 2018 report documents the deaths of 353,935 combatants and civilians in Syria. That total is comprised of 106,390 civilians; 63,820 Syrian troops; 58,130 members of pro-government militias (including 1,630 from Hezbollah and 7,686 other foreigners); 63,360 Islamic State, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) and other Islamist jihadis; 62,039 other anti-government combatants; and 196 unidentified bodies.

Breaking this down simply into civilians and combatants, that is 106,488 civilians and 247,447 combatants killed (with the 196 unidentified bodies divided equally), including 63,820 Syrian Army troops.

The SOHR's count is not a comprehensive statistical survey like the 2006 Lancet study in Iraq. But regardless of its pro-rebel viewpoint, the SOHR appears to be one of the most comprehensive efforts to "passively" count the dead in any recent war.

Like military institutions in other countries, the Syrian Army probably keeps fairly accurate casualty figures for its own troops. Excluding actual military casualties, it would be unprecedented for SOHR to have counted more than 20% of other people killed in Syria's Civil War. But SOHR's reporting may well be as thorough as any previous efforts to count the dead by "passive" methods.

Taking the SOHR's passively reported figures for non-military war deaths as 20% of the real total killed would mean that 1.45 million civilians and non-military combatants have been killed. After adding the 64,000 Syrian troops killed to that number, I estimate that about 1.5 million people have been killed in Syria.

If SOHR has been more successful than any previous "passive" effort to count the dead in a war, and has counted 25% or 30% of the people killed, the real number killed could be as low as 1 million. If it has not been as successful as it seems, and its count is closer to what has been typical in other conflicts, then as many as 2 million people may well have been killed.

Somalia

Most Americans remember the U.S. intervention in Somalia that led to the "Black Hawk Down" incident and the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1993. But most Americans do not remember, or may never have known, that the U.S. made another "disguised, quiet, media-free" intervention in Somalia in 2006, in support of an Ethiopian military invasion.

Somalia was finally "pulling itself up by its bootstraps" under the governance of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a union of local traditional courts who agreed to work together to govern the country. The ICU allied with a warlord in Mogadishu and defeated the other warlords who had ruled private fiefdoms since the collapse of the central government in 1991. People who knew the country well hailed the ICU as a hopeful development for peace and stability in Somalia.

But in the context of its "war on terror," the U.S. government identified the Islamic Courts Union as an enemy and a target for military action. The U.S. allied with Ethiopia, Somalia's traditional regional rival (and a majority Christian country), and conducted air strikes and special forces operations to

support an Ethiopian invasion of Somalia to remove the ICU from power. As in every other country the U.S. and its proxies have invaded since 2001, the effect was to plunge Somalia back into violence and chaos that continues to this day.

Estimating the Death Toll in Somalia

Passive sources put the violent death toll in Somalia since the U.S.-backed Ethiopian invasion in 2006 at 20,171 (Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) – through 2016) and 24,631 (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)). But an award-winning local NGO, the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre in Mogadishu, which tracked deaths only for 2007 and 2008, counted 16,210 violent deaths in those two years alone, 4.7 times the number counted by UCDP and 5.8 times ACLED's tally for those two years.

In Libya, Libya Body Count only counted 1.45 times as many deaths as ACLED. In Somalia, Elman Peace counted 5.8 times more than ACLED – the difference between the two was 4 times as great. This suggests that Elman Peace's counting was about twice as thorough as Libya Body Count's, while ACLED seems to be about half as effective at counting war deaths in Somalia as in Libya.

UCDP logged higher numbers of deaths than ACLED from 2006 until 2012, while ACLED has published higher numbers than UCDP since 2013. The average of their two counts gives a total of 23,916 violent deaths from July 2006 to 2017. If Elman Peace had kept counting war deaths and had continued to find 5.25 (the average of 4.7 and 5.8) times the numbers found by these international monitoring groups, it would by now have counted about 125,000 violent deaths since the U.S.-backed Ethiopian invasion in July 2006.

But while Elman Peace counted many more deaths than UCDP or ACLED, this was still just a "passive" count of war deaths in Somalia. To estimate the total number of war deaths that have resulted from the U.S. decision to destroy Somalia's fledgling ICU government, we must multiply these figures by a ratio that falls somewhere between those found in other conflicts, between 5:1 and 20:1.

Applying a 5:1 ratio to my projection of what the Elman Project might have counted by now yields a total of 625,000 deaths. Applying a 20:1 ratio to the much lower counts by UCDP and ACLED would give a lower figure of 480,000.

It is very unlikely that the Elman Project was counting more than 20% of actual deaths all over Somalia. On the other hand, UCDP and ACLED were only counting reports of deaths in Somalia from their bases in Sweden and the U.K., based on published reports, so they may well have counted less than 5% of actual deaths.

If the Elman Project was only capturing 15% of total deaths instead of 20%, that

would suggest that 830,000 people have been killed since 2006. If UCDP's and ACLED's counts have captured more than 5% of total deaths, the real total could be lower than 480,000. But that would imply that the Elman Project was identifying an even higher proportion of actual deaths, which would be unprecedented for such a project.

So I estimate that the true number of people killed in Somalia since 2006 must be somewhere between 500,000 and 850,000, with most likely about 650,000 violent deaths.

Yemen

The U.S. is part of a coalition that has been bombing Yemen since 2015 in an effort to restore former President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to power. Hadi was elected in 2012 after Arab Spring protests and armed uprisings forced Yemen's previous U.S.-backed dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to resign in November 2011.

Hadi's mandate was to draw up a new constitution and organize a new election within two years. He did neither of these things, so the powerful Zaidi Houthi movement invaded the capital in September 2014, placed Hadi under house arrest and demanded that he and his government fulfill their mandate and organize a new election.

The Zaidis are a unique Shiite sect who make up 45% of Yemen's population.

Zaidi Imams ruled most of Yemen for over a thousand years. Sunnis and Zaidis have lived together peacefully in Yemen for centuries, intermarriage is common and they pray in the same mosques.

The last Zaidi Imam was overthrown in a civil war in the 1960s. In that war, the Saudis supported the Zaidi royalists, while Egypt invaded Yemen to support the republican forces who eventually formed the Yemen Arab Republic in 1970.

In 2014, Hadi refused to cooperate with the Houthis, and resigned in January 2015. He fled to Aden, his hometown, and then to Saudi Arabia, which launched a savage U.S.-backed bombing campaign and naval blockade to try to restore him to power.

While Saudi Arabia is conducting most of the air strikes, the U.S. has sold most of the planes, bombs, missiles and other weapons it is using. The U.K. is the Saudis' second largest arms supplier. Without U.S. satellite intelligence and in-air refueling, Saudi Arabia could not conduct airstrikes all over Yemen as it is doing. So a cut-off of U.S. weapons, in-air refueling and diplomatic support could be decisive in ending the war.

Estimating War Deaths in Yemen

Published estimates of war deaths in Yemen are based on regular surveys of hospitals there by the World Health Organization, often relayed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The most recent estimate, from December 2017, is that 9,245 people have been killed, including 5,558 civilians.

But UNOCHA's December 2017 report included a note that, "Due to the high number of health facilities that are not functioning or partially functioning as a result of the conflict, these numbers are underreported and likely higher."

Even when hospitals are fully functioning, many people killed in war do not ever make it to a hospital. Several hospitals in Yemen have been struck by Saudi air strikes, there is a naval blockade that restricts imports of medicine, and supplies of electricity, water, food and fuel have all been affected by the bombing and the blockade. So the WHO's summaries of mortality reports from hospitals are likely to be a small fraction of the real numbers of people killed.

ACLED reports a slightly lower figure than the WHO: 7,846 through the end of 2017. But unlike the WHO, ACLED has up to date data for 2018, and reports another 2,193 deaths since January. If the WHO continues to report 18% more deaths than ACLED, the WHO's total up to the present would be 11,833.

Even UNOCHA and the WHO acknowledge substantial underreporting of war deaths in Yemen, and the ratio between the WHO's passive reports and actual deaths appears to be toward the higher end of the range found in other wars, which has varied between 5:1 and 20:1. I estimate that about 175,000 people have been killed – 15 times the numbers reported by the WHO and ACLED – with a minimum of 120,000 and a maximum of 240,000.

The True Human Cost of U.S. Wars

Altogether, in the three parts of this report, I have estimated that America's post-9/11 wars have killed about 6 million people. Maybe the true number is only 5 million. Or maybe it is 7 million. But I am quite certain that it is several millions.

It is not only hundreds of thousands, as many otherwise well-informed people believe, because compilations of "passive reporting" can never amount to more than a fraction of the actual numbers of people killed in countries living through the kind of violence and chaos that our country's aggression has unleashed on them since 2001.

The systematic reporting of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has surely captured a larger fraction of actual deaths than the small number of completed

investigations deceptively reported as mortality estimates by the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan. But both of them still only represent a fraction of total deaths.

And the true number of people killed is most definitely not in the tens of thousands, as most of the general public in the U.S. and in the U.K. have been led to believe, according to opinion polls.

We urgently need public health experts to conduct comprehensive mortality studies in all the countries the U.S. has plunged into war since 2001, so that the world can respond appropriately to the true scale of death and destruction these wars have caused.

As Barbara Lee presciently warned her colleagues before she cast her lone dissenting vote in 2001, we have “become the evil we deplore.” But these wars have not been accompanied by fearsome military parades (not yet) or speeches about conquering the world. Instead they have been politically justified by “information warfare” to demonize enemies and fabricate crises, and then waged in a “disguised, quiet, media free” way, to hide their cost in human blood from the American public and the world.

After 16 years of war, about 6 million violent deaths, 6 countries utterly destroyed and many more destabilized, it is urgent that the American public come to terms with the true human cost of our country’s wars and how we have been manipulated and misled into turning a blind eye to them – before they go on even longer, destroy more countries, further undermine the rule of international law and kill millions more of our fellow human beings.

As Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “We can no longer afford to take that which is good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live.”

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*.

Nicolas Sarkozy: Crime and Punishment?

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy is under investigation for allegedly receiving millions of euros in illegal election campaign funding from Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. This must be placed in the broader context of war crimes by Western heads of state, Gilbert Doctorow explains.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The relationship between Sarkozy and Gaddafi fits the pattern of the old mafia joke: "You're my friend. I kill you for nothing."

Two news items jostled for attention on the front pages of mainstream newspapers and news bulletins of the main television channels on the Old Continent last week. One was the Sergei Skripal "nerve agent attack" and Theresa May's attempts to find support among EU leaders for a common stand against Russia as perpetrator. The other was the arrest and questioning of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy over allegations that he took 50 million euros in cash from Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2007 for the election campaign that won him the presidency.

The Skripal story of "the Russians did it" had its day in court in Brussels on Thursday and Friday during the summit of EU leaders at the European Council, the EU's chief executive body. The deliberations ended in verbal support for May: the EU said it was recalling its ambassador to Moscow for four weeks of consultations. As EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker explained at a press conference, however, the EU faces important challenges which require active coordination with Russia, so channels of communication must remain open.

But then on Monday, Germany, Poland and France expelled four Russian diplomats; the Czech Republic and Lithuania expelled three; Denmark, Italy, and The Netherlands two apiece; and one each from Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Finland, Sweden and Ireland. (The U.S. topped them all with 60 Russian diplomats expelled and the closing of Russia's Seattle consulate, further undermining the Democratic Party narrative that President Donald Trump is a Russia "puppet.") On Tuesday, NATO kicked out 13 Russians, further weakening the safety net protecting against East-West conflict.

These demarches were presented as an act of solidarity with the UK over the Skripal case. But these flea bites could be better described as the EU response to Vladimir Putin's overwhelming victory in the presidential elections of March 18, which concerns all EU states far more directly than a so-far totally unproven and highly questionable allegation against Russia by the Brexiting

United Kingdom. Following the predictable Russian symmetrical measures in the coming days, the Skripal case is likely to disappear from the headlines, until the results of the forensic investigation into the poisoning of the ex-double agent are completed and made public.

By contrast, the story about Sarkozy's arrest and 23-hour interrogation by judicial police over the course of two days was just gaining traction, with French media in particular split down the middle over whether an indictment and trial is warranted.

The Sarkozy case has unusually split the governing elites of France and Europe. As a result, a great deal of information has been released into the public domain, including in *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*. Even the American *Time* magazine devoted several pages of factual, as opposed to editorializing, coverage in a March 21 piece.

The facts of the case have dribbled out over a long time, especially from 2012 when Sarkozy decided to run again for the presidency. That brought attention to the story of Libyan financing of his 2007 election. Incriminating documents were disseminated by investigative French media and ultimately Sarkozy lost at the polls to Francois Hollande by several percentage points. Sarkozy later directly blamed the stories of Libyan financing for his defeat.

The Sarkozy affair must be placed in the broader context of investigating alleged war crimes by Western heads of state. So long as we choose only to look forward as Barack Obama insisted on immediately after taking office, when he closed the book on investigations into the George W. Bush administration, and not look into the recent past, we are condemned to an endless succession of "road accidents" yielding only chaos and death in the Middle East, and possibly in the wider world.

The Sarkozy Story

The wheels of justice turn slowly and may or may not grind finely. The current charges against Sarkozy go back to the days when he still occupied the office of Minister of the Interior in the government of Jacques Chirac and campaigned to succeed Chirac in the presidency as candidate of the center-right Union for a Popular Movement party (UMP). Sarkozy is said to have concluded a written agreement with Gaddafi's intelligence chief Abdullah Senussi to provide 50 million euros to his campaign in exchange for unspecified French assistance to rehabilitate Libya's international standing. The choice of Sarkozy to perform this mission was not arbitrary: he had over a long time spoken favorably of Islam and attempted when in power to integrate France's Islamic minority, including its religious hierarchy, into the national landscape.

A number of intermediaries on both sides were appointed to facilitate the secret transfer of funds including in cash, according to the French outlet Mediapart. Following his election, Sarkozy very warmly welcomed Muammar Gaddafi in Paris on December 10, 2007 for a state visit during which the Libyan leader was permitted to set up his tents in gardens close to the Elysée Palace. At the time, this hosting of someone seen as a dictator in France created controversy in the French media, all the more so as the visit coincided with the anniversary of the convention on human rights.

In the midst of the Arab Spring of 2011, Libya was one of the last dictatorships in North Africa to come under attack from self-proclaimed democratic rebels. France was among the loudest calling for Gaddafi to step down and be replaced by a transition government.

When the Colonel's armed forces appeared to have taken the upper hand, and victory over rebel forces in Benghazi and the east of the country was imminent, NATO, led by France, entered the conflict, initially under UN authorization to impose a no-fly zone for the stated purpose of protecting civilians from an anticipated massacre, one that was later questioned by a British parliamentary committee. This intervention in fact went well beyond its authorization and facilitated the overthrow of the Libyan regime, resulting in the brutal murder of its leader, who died amidst gang violence with a shot to the head. Chaos and disintegration of the state have continued to this day, with two power centers still vying for control of land and international recognition.

The fall of the Libyan dictator has special piquancy today because in his final months Gaddafi had reminded France and Europe of the important service he was performing for them: holding back the hordes of would-be asylum seekers from North and sub-Saharan Africa as well as containing a jihadist threat. As it turned out, that warning was not exaggerated. With the chaos that followed Gaddafi's murder, Libya became one of the main jumping off points for millions of immigrants on their way to Europe, compounding the problem that otherwise has been created by the civil war in Syria and strife throughout the Middle East extending as far as Afghanistan. It has also become a center for jihadist operations.

In March 2011, prior to the final assault on the regime, Gaddafi's son gave an interview to Euronews in which he issued veiled warnings to the French to desist from their encouragement of the rebels, whose spokesmen Sarkozy had received in Paris. "We can reveal a lot of things. Secrets. ... So the French should behave, or there is going to be a big fiasco in France," he said. Others in Gaddafi's entourage were less discrete and spoke of a large financial contribution to Sarkozy's election in 2007.

In 2012, when Sarkozy prepared his next presidential bid, the investigative French news website Mediapart published the 2007 master agreement and several other documents relating to Libyan funds being passed to Sarkozy's chief of staff, Claude Guéant. One of the pieces of evidence was a film of Ziad Takieddine, a Lebanese businessman who introduced Sarkozy to Gaddafi. Takieddine explains in the film how he handed cases of cash to Sarkozy and Guéant.

Also in 2012 rumors emerged that Muammar Gaddafi was killed not by the rebels who surrounded and mutilated him but by a French secret service agent who infiltrated the mob and shot him in the head, acting on express orders of Sarkozy.

In 2013, when Sarkozy no longer enjoyed immunity from prosecution, a judicial inquiry was opened in France with a view to possible charges for "active and passive corruption, misuse of power, forgery, abuse of public money, money laundering, and complicity in and concealment of these offences." The inquiry did not at the time lead to any proceedings against Sarkozy, though it was not closed either.

In the meantime, Guéant had claimed that the documents obtained by Mediapart were false. However, a French court concluded that some were authentic and could be used in the investigation.

In the past week, Sarkozy was arrested and held for questioning in a unit of the judicial police in the Paris suburb of Nanterre. He was subjected to 23 hours of interrogation over the course of two days, allowed to go home to sleep under bail conditions. He was barred from contacting Guéant and others from his former associates who were being interrogated separately. These include a former minister and close ally of Sarkozy, Brice Hortefeux.

In a separate but related line of investigation against Sarkozy, in January British police arrested a French businessman who is suspected of having funneled money from Gaddafi to Sarkozy's 2007 campaign. Alexandre Djouhri appeared in a London court and was released on bail. He was subsequently returned to pre-trial detention in February under a second warrant for his arrest issued by France. Djouhri is to appear in a hearing scheduled for later this month.

On the same day Sarkozy was released from custody, the former president took to the air waves on state channel TF1 to give his side of the story. One-sixth of the French electorate, approximately 7.3 million people, viewed his broadcast. On the next day, his remarks were debated at length in the country's leading newspapers, *Le Figaro* on the right, long-time supporter of the UMP (later renamed the Republican Party), and *Le Monde*, on the left, long-time supporter of the Socialists.

A Background of Impunity

The Sarkozy affair falls into a succession of attempts to bring to justice the leading perpetrators of war crimes since the start of the new millennium: George W. Bush and Tony Blair. So far, the record is not promising on justice being done.

In the United States, during Bush's presidency, Congressmen Dennis Kucinich and Robert Wexler introduced 35 articles of impeachment against Bush in the House of Representatives on June 10, 2008. Fifteen of the articles related directly to the invasion of Iraq, starting with the false evidence used to obtain authority for military action. The House voted 251 to 166 to refer the impeachment resolution to the Judiciary Committee where it died. For his efforts, Kucinich was gerrymandered out of his Ohio electoral district and is only now trying to make a political comeback in local politics in his state of Ohio.

In the UK, an investigation into the decision by Blair's government to join the U.S. in the 2003 invasion of Iraq went much further, though it took a very long time to reach a decision. It took still longer, nearly four years, to publish it while the authors of the report wrestled with the government over what documents could be made public given the possibility they would severely damage relations with the United States.

The so-called Chilcot Inquiry was launched in 2009 by then Prime Minister Gordon Brown. The remit took in not only the start of the war but how it was prosecuted all the way to 2009.

The Inquiry held open sessions from November 2009 to February 2011. It had the authority to request any British document and summon any British subject to give evidence. Its prime witness was Blair himself, who was called upon twice to undergo questioning. Other witnesses included former cabinet ministers and other politicians, senior civil servants, diplomats and high ranking military officers.

The Chilcot Inquiry's final report was published on July 6, 2016, nearly seven years after the probe began. It consisted of 12 volumes plus an executive summary. The report was highly critical of the case for war made by the British government and military. It found that the legal basis for war was not satisfactory. It concluded that the Blair government had overestimated the UK's ability to influence US decisions on Iraq. It faulted the war preparation and planning, and concluded that the UK's objectives in the war were not achieved.

British media described the Chilcot Report as "damning," and a "crushing verdict" on the Blair government.

On the day of the report's release, the leader of the opposition Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, who had spoken out against the war in Parliament from the beginning but was ignored by Blair, said in a speech to Westminster: "I now apologize sincerely on behalf of my party for the disastrous decision to go to war in Iraq in March 2003." Corbyn denounced the war as "an act of military aggression launched on a false pretext."

Blair, the major villain in the report, acknowledged some of the criticisms with respect to preparation, planning and the relationship with Washington, but insisted he had acted out of good faith in the best interests of the nation.

For Blair, the report was a bloody nose, and nothing more. He was not contrite about the heavy price for the wanton destruction and loss of life that the invasion caused.

However, the Chilcot Report did honorably achieve what it set out to do: it established responsibility for disastrous decisions, it found that the invasion was not justified by any urgent threat to British interests, and that the UK had undermined the authority of the UN Security Council. It was a rebuke, better than anything achieved in the U.S., where there has never been a reckoning over the disaster of Iraq. Indeed, Bush has been rehabilitated by of all quarters, the Democratic Party, enlisting him in its fight against Donald Trump. Neoconservatives in think tanks and the media who pushed for the war have suffered no consequences. They've kept their jobs or been promoted.

This Time, with Sarkozy, it May be Different

On Sunday, *The Mail* reported that: "Sarkozy, 63, is facing a criminal trial and could be jailed over the donations." But why would the French establishment impose such shame on a former president, bringing disrepute to the country?

It must be said that Sarkozy, unlike Blair or Bush, lacked warmth and charisma. On the contrary, this little Napoleon, as many viewed him, had an undisguised taste for ostentatious luxury, which exceeded by far his personal pocketbook until he fell in with his third wife, former super model and popular singer Carla Bruni. He had also left a trail of controversial public statements that were indelibly burned into the popular memory.

Perhaps Sarkozy's ugliest known altercation with the common man took place on February 23, 2008 at an International Agriculture Show, when he responded sharply to someone who refused to shake his hand with the vulgar dismissal "Casse-toi, pauv' con" (get lost, you poor schmuck). At a minimum, his comment was regarded as un-presidential.

To be sure, Sarkozy had a long and successful political career during which he

held many contradictory positions which suited various segments of the electorate and which changed over time. He extolled Islam on a visit to Riyadh and was long an advocate of Muslim integration in France. He backed the notion of state appropriations for the construction of mosques, to ensure they were not financed and run from abroad. And yet, he was always tough on immigration and used inflammatory language when addressing the issue of violence by Arab and black minorities in the French suburbs.

However, questions of his domestic policies and presence or absence of charisma do not bear on Sarkozy's present predicament. The unique challenge he has faced from the beginning is that his accusers have not all been murdered like Gaddafi. In particular, the Libyan dictator's highly educated second son and political heir, Saif al-Islam, is very much alive to avenge the family's loss. Bush and Blair never had to contend with a challenge to their narrative of the Iraqi adventure from the circle of Saddam Hussein.

That the charges against Sarkozy have reached their present critical point cannot be separated from the recent release of Saif from captivity by one of the armed bands which held him for six years, nor can it be separated from his declared intention to run for president in elections to be held in Libya later this year. This development in Libya has mobilized the surviving regime members and those who were go-betweens with Sarkozy. The witnesses include Abdallah Sanoussi, former director of Libyan intelligence services, and Bashir Salah Bashir, the former CEO of Libya Investment, the country's sovereign wealth fund.

The second factor working against Sarkozy is the wave of popular repugnance in France with the old, corrupt political class that swept Emmanuel Macron to power last year and overwhelmed the candidate from Sarkozy's Republican Party, Francois Fillon. Fillon was caught out on the petty venality that has long typified French politics. In this sense, the Sarkozy case comes amidst a popular mood of house cleaning.

Why This is Worse Than Chirac

In considering Sarkozy's prospects, it bears mentioning that in 2011 ex-President Jacques Chirac, under whom Sarkozy served as minister at several points in his career, was found guilty of embezzlement and breach of trust when he was mayor of Paris in a prosecution delayed for years by the President's constitutional immunity. Chirac was accused of lavish entertainment at public expense, appointment to government jobs of party hacks, inflation in the number of such positions and similar measures to buy public support for his party and for himself.

The criminal prosecution of Chirac ended in the first conviction of a former

head of the French state for corruption. Chirac was given a two-year suspended prison sentence. Moreover, leniency towards Chirac seemed justified given his frail health and memory loss related to a neural disorder.

Of course, the charges against Chirac were child's play compared to those being leveled at Sarkozy today: illegal acceptance of foreign donations to his electoral campaign, accepting contributions which were double the allowable amount to campaign in the second round of voting.

Moreover, there were no foreign policy implications to the felonies committed by President Chirac as there are now with Sarkozy, who promoted an illegal aggression on a sovereign state, destroying it in the process, and opened the gates to mass illegal immigration and the spread of jihadism by deposing and possibly having Gaddafi murdered.

Even the U.S. has gotten into the anti-Sarkozy act. Hollywood actor George Clooney's wife Amal Clooney was quoted as saying recently: "Gaddafi is not guilty, it's Sarkozy who is guilty." The human rights lawyer of Lebanese-Libyan descent has also been a practitioner of criminal law in her high visibility professional career. She is known to be close to Ziad Takieddine, the French Lebanese who, as noted above, claims to have been an intermediary carrying funds from Gaddafi to Sarkozy.

When he left the interrogation and got into his car on his way home, Sarkozy is reported to have looked disheveled and haggard. During his televised defense on TF1, he looked nervous. And well he might, because to defend himself against the accusations Sarkozy had to muster a day-by-day recollection of his meetings with the various go-betweens who alleged bringing him cases of cash in 2007. He had, in particular, to discredit Takieddine, his main accuser.

The newspaper of the right, *Le Figaro*, issued a verbatim account of Sarkozy's defense the day after he was released. In its weekend print edition it published a full page on the Sarkozy affair. At the head of the page, was an article devoted to Sarkozy's dinner with friends and close family at his favorite Italian restaurant in the fashionable 16th arrondissement immediately after his television appearance.

The newspaper claimed that the former President had "electrified his supporters" and he was inundated by text messages not only from the Republican Party but from ministers, including several now serving in the Macron government. At the start of the gathering, we are told all present were busy reading incoming messages on their mobile devices. One message from Alain Juppé, long-time leader of the right, mayor of Bordeaux and Sarkozy's rival for presidency, bears mention: "I watched TF1, I found Nicolas Sarkozy extremely combative. I also

felt that he was deeply wounded, and I understand that. His argumentation seemed to me to be consistent.”

An article to the right of the page quotes one of Sarkozy’s close supporters and official spokesman for the Republican Party, Gilles Platret, who put the investigation into Sarkozy in a different light. He called it an attack on France and its presidency: “He [Sarkozy] was right to return the discussion to fundamentals. It is not so much the person who is being accused. It is the image of the presidential role. Can it be that a deceased dictator can still have an impact on the national sphere with accusations..?”

Platret regretted that the accusations “give a sad color to the French political life.” He was confident that Sarkozy will “reestablish the truth in this affair...He began to do just that this evening.” Platret reminded readers that Sarkozy achieved a great deal for France during his presidency: “History will recall this with a big letter H.” But the *Figaro* journalist added a word of caution: “Unless the courts decide otherwise.”

The greater part of the Sarkozy page in the weekend edition of *Le Figaro* was a point for point discussion of the charges against the ex-President. It called attention to the 2007 interview with Saif al-Islam on Euronews, which said he was carried off by the revolution and is now living in Egypt. It highlighted the key role of Takieddine as witness against Sarkozy. It also recalled the written agreement signed by the head of Libyan intelligence on financing Sarkozy, published by Mediapart in April 2012. *Figaro* said this document was found to be a forgery by investigators in another case, as Sarkozy argued in his televised defense.

The paper mentioned still another Libyan accuser, the former Oil Minister Choukri Ghanem, whose personal notebook was taken by French judges and is said to mention the financing of Sarkozy. Ghanem was never interrogated. He was found drowned in the Danube at Vienna in April 2012. The death was determined to be “accidental” by the Austrian police. *Figaro* points to the testimony given by Gaddafi himself when bombs were already falling on Tripoli, in which he mentioned financing the French but without any details.

The *Figaro* article tried to place the whole affair in a geopolitical context. It noted that around the year 2000, Gaddafi had sought respectability. He received President Chirac in Libya in 2004, and a year later Sarkozy, accompanied only by two translators. Gaddafi believed that Sarkozy would be the next president of France and was quoted by one of the interpreters as saying: “It is a good thing to have a brother, a friend at the head of France.” Tight relations were knit as well with the close advisers to Sarkozy, Claude Guéant and Brice Hortefeux. As soon as he took office, Sarkozy launched his Union for the Mediterranean, an

organization intended to promote North-South dialogue that was France's answer to the EU's Eastern Neighborhood Policy initiated by Germany.

Figaro then weighed the evidence against Sarkozy. It noted that no written proof of transfers of funds by Libya exists. It said that the sums transferred are described variously by different witnesses ranging from the 35,000 euros in cash dispensed in 2007 to some employees of the UMP party, all of which is a drop in the ocean, while accusers speak of between 20 million dollars and 50 million euros. As for the travel restrictions placed on Sarkozy by the judges, and the ban on association with his colleagues now undergoing separate interrogation, the paper remarked that the opportunity to coordinate their testimony existed ever since 2013 when the first accusations appeared. *Figaro* told the Sarkozy story with a distinct bias toward the ex-president, but without fully endorsing his innocence.

Le Monde's Alternative Take

Le Monde had a different and more dangerous take on Sarkozy. In a piece published on March 22 headlined, "Libyan financing: the blind spots of Nicolas Sarkozy's defense," the first paragraph says that the former president's argument "is sometimes specious, with dead ends on material elements to the case." It said Sarkozy focused his efforts on discrediting Takieddine, "But he skirts around numerous substantive elements gathered by the investigators since 2013."

In his televised defense, Sarkozy had rejected the notion that he had ever worked to advance the interests of the Libyan state. He reminded viewers that he had been responsible for getting UN approval to use military force against Gaddafi. *Le Monde* agreed but pointed out that Sarkozy's had a honeymoon with the Libyan leader at the start of his presidency.

Sarkozy's core defense is that there is no material proof to support any of the claims made that Takieddine transferred the funds. Sarkozy accused Takieddine of stealing from the Libyan state and said there is no evidence he ever met the man at any time between 2005 and 2011.

Takieddine is suspected of having been involved in other French electoral financing going back to the campaign of Edouard Balladur in 1995. But he is the one who helped form the relationship between France and Libya beginning in 2005 and was involved in other cases relating to France, in particular the liberation of Bulgarian nurses held in Libya on charges of AIDS contamination. Takieddine says he was then dropped by Sarkozy as an intermediary in favor of the French businessman Alexandre Djouhri, and so he first turned state witness in the Balladur case, then in 2012, came forward as a witness in the developing scandal

around Sarkozy.

Le Monde said that no mention of a meeting with Takieddine in the ex-president's personal agenda does not mean such a meeting never took place. The agenda was offered to judges by Sarkozy in another court case over alleged corruption during the 2007 electoral campaign. One can imagine that Sarkozy had no interest in noting in his agenda a meeting with Takieddine two months after the first revelations by Mediapart of alleged Libyan financing.

Le Monde is giving Sarkozy no slack. His every word and action is weighed against the possibility, if not likelihood that he is lying.

We will see shortly whether the French courts have the stomach to take the investigation of Sarkozy through to prosecution and conviction and possible jail time, unlike the American response to its own engineers of Middle East disaster.

Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His latest book, *Does the United States Have a Future?* was published in October 2017. Both paperback and e-book versions are available for purchase on www.amazon.com and all affiliated Amazon websites worldwide.

Giving War Too Many Chances

As the new year begins, it is important for the U.S. to acknowledge its troubling history of global war-making, especially over the past two-decades, as Nicolas J.S. Davies delineates.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

I met John Lennon and Yoko Ono on Christmas Eve in 1969. I joined them and a small group of local peace activists in a Christmas fast for world peace in front of Rochester Cathedral in England, a short walk from where I lived with my family in Chatham Dockyard. I was 15 years old, and my father was the dockyard medical officer, responsible for the health and safety of the dockyard workers who maintained the U.K.'s new fleet of nuclear submarines.

John and Yoko arrived before midnight mass. We were all introduced and went in for the service. By the time we came out, thousands of people had heard John was there. He was still a Beatle and he was mobbed by a huge crowd, so he and Yoko decided they couldn't stay with us as planned. While most of our little group helped John back to their iconic white Rolls Royce, I and another boy not much older than me were left to shepherd a panicking Yoko back through the crowd

to the car. They both made it, and we never saw them again. The next morning a florist came by with a huge box of white carnations, and we spent the rest of our Christmas and Boxing Day handing flowers to passers-by and getting to know each other – the birth of what became the Medway and Maidstone Peace Action Group.

While the U.K. was not openly involved in the Vietnam War, it was deeply involved in the Cold War and the nuclear arms race, and watching the U.K.'s closest ally destroy Vietnam led many of my generation to question the Cold War assumptions about "good guys" and "bad guys" that we'd been raised on. John and Yoko became the de facto leaders of the peace movement, and their song "Give Peace a Chance" was a simple unifying anthem.

After two world wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War, we all wanted peace, but it seemed to be the one thing our leaders were not willing to try, claiming that the Cold War justified an endless arms race, and wars and coups wherever U.S. and British leaders thought they'd spotted a Red under somebody's bed. That included many countries whose experiments with socialism were less advanced than in the U.K., where I grew up with a cradle to grave healthcare system, free education through university, a comprehensive welfare state and state-owned utilities, railways and major industries.

The peace dividend vs the power dividend

Once the Cold War ended, the justification for 50 years of massive military spending, global warfare and coups was finally over. Like U.S. allies, enemies and neighbors around the world, Americans breathed a sigh of relief and welcomed the "peace dividend." Robert McNamara and Lawrence Korb, former cold warriors of both parties, testified to the Senate Budget Committee that the U.S. military budget could be cut in half from its FY1990 level over the next 10 years.

Committee chairman Senator Jim Sasser hailed "this unique moment in history" as "the dawn of the primacy of domestic economics."

But the peace dividend was short-lived, trumped by what Carl Conetta of the Project for Defense Alternatives has dubbed the "power dividend," the drive to exploit the end of the Cold War to consolidate and expand U.S. military power.

Influential voices linked to military industrial interests had a new refrain, essentially "Give War a Chance." But of course, they didn't put it so plainly:

– After the First Gulf War in 1991, President Bush I celebrated "kick(ing) the Vietnam syndrome," and deployed U.S. pilots directly from Kuwait to the Paris Air Show to cash in on the marketing value of a war that had just killed tens of thousands of people in Iraq. The next 3 years set a new record for U.S. arms sales. The Pentagon later admitted that only 7% of the bombs and missiles

dropped on Iraq were the “precision-guided” ones they showcased to TV viewers, and only 41% to 60% of those “precision” weapons hit their targets anyway. Iraq was ruthlessly carpet bombed, but we were sold a high-tech dog and pony show.

- Despite surely being well aware of the reality behind the propaganda, Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz crowed to General Wesley Clark, “With the end of the Cold War, we can now use our military with impunity.”
- As the Clinton administration took over the reins of the U.S. war machine in 1992, Madeleine Albright challenged General Colin Powell on his “Powell Doctrine” of limited war, asking him, “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”
- Albright was appointed Secretary of State in 1997, mainstreaming new political pretexts for otherwise illegal wars such as “humanitarian intervention” and the “responsibility to protect.” But despite the steady diet of war propaganda, Albright was drowned out by protests from the audience when she threatened war on Iraq at a town hall meeting in Columbus in 1998.
- Clinton’s 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review declared, “When the interests at stake are vital... we should do whatever it takes to defend them, including, when necessary, the unilateral use of military power. U.S. vital national interests include, but are not limited to... preventing the emergence of a hostile regional coalition... (and) ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources.” But as the U.K. Foreign Office’s senior legal adviser told his government during the Suez crisis in 1956, “The plea of vital interest, which has been one of the main justifications for wars in the past, is indeed the very one which the UN Charter was intended to exclude as a basis for armed intervention in another country.”
- After a failed CIA coup in 1996 betrayed every CIA agent in Iraq to the Iraqi government, precluding a second coup attempt, the newly formed neoconservative Project for the New American Century began pushing for war on Iraq. The 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, threatening “regime change” through the use of military force, passed Congress with only 38 Nays in the House and unanimous consent in the Senate.
- When U.K. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told Albright his government was having trouble “with our lawyers” over NATO’s illegal plan to attack Yugoslavia and annex Kosovo, she told him it should just “get new lawyers.”
- Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations a few weeks before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 2000, Hillary Clinton derided recent U.S. wars in Panama, Kuwait and Yugoslavia as “splendid little wars” and called for what a

banking executive in the audience described as a “new imperialism.”

– Samantha Power popularized the idea that the use of U.S. military force could have prevented the genocide in Rwanda, an assumption challenged by experts on genocide (see “A Solution From Hell”) but which has served ever since as a powerful political argument for the U.S. uses of military force.

Afghanistan

After pleading with the American people to “Give War a Chance” for a decade, U.S. political leaders seized on the crimes of September 11th, 2001 to justify an open-ended “global war on terror.”

Many Americans approved of attacking Afghanistan as an act of self defense, but of course it was not Afghanistan or the Taliban that committed the crimes of September 11th. As former Nuremberg prosecutor Ben Ferencz told NPR at the time, “It is never a legitimate response to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done. If you simply retaliate en masse by bombing Afghanistan, let us say, or the Taliban, you will kill many people who don’t approve of what has happened.”

Sixteen years later, 16,500 U.S. troops soldier on through the graveyard of empires, while U.S. warplanes have dropped 3,852 bombs and missiles on Afghanistan since Mr. Trump took office. No serious study has been conducted to estimate how many hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been killed since 2001.

As Matthew Hoh wrote in his resignation letter as he quit his post as the U.S. Political Officer in Zabul Province in Afghanistan in 2009,

“The Pashtun insurgency, which is composed of multiple, seemingly infinite local groups, is fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies. ...I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul.”

Or as an Afghan taxi driver in Vancouver told me, “We defeated the Persians in the 18th century, the British in the 19th century and the Russians in the 20th. Now, with NATO, we’re fighting 29 countries at once, but we’ll defeat them too.” Who would doubt it?

Today, after 16 years of occupation by up to 100,000 U.S. troops, thousands of deadly “kill or capture” night raids by U.S. special operations forces and over 60,000 bombs and missiles dropped on Afghanistan on the orders of 3 U.S.

presidents, the corrupt U.S.-backed government in Kabul governs less territory today than at any time since before the U.S. invasion.

The U.S. war on Afghanistan is the longest war in U.S. history. There must be U.S. troops in Afghanistan today whose fathers were fighting there 16 years ago. This isn't giving war a chance. It's giving it a blank check, in blood and money.

Iraq

When President Bush II unveiled a "national security strategy" based on a flagrantly illegal doctrine of preemptive war in 2002, Senator Edward Kennedy called it a "call for 21st century imperialism that no other country can or should accept." The rest of the world rejected the U.S. case for war on Iraq in the UN Security Council and 30 million people took to the streets in the largest global demonstrations in history. But the U.S. and U.K. invaded Iraq anyway.

The U.K.'s role in the invasion was thrown into limbo when Admiral Michael Boyce, the Chief of the Defense Staff, told his government he could not give orders to invade Iraq without written confirmation that it would be legal. It took Tony Blair and his cronies five full days of grappling with their legal advisers before one of them, Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, who was not even an international lawyer, was willing to contradict what he and all the U.K.'s legal advisers had consistently and repeatedly told their government, that the invasion of Iraq would be a criminal act of aggression.

Four days later, the U.S. and U.K. committed the war crime of the new century, unleashing a war that has killed a million innocent people and left Iraq mired in bloody violence and chaos for 14 years and counting.

When the people of Iraq rose in resistance to the illegal invasion and occupation of their country, the U.S. launched a bloody "counterinsurgency" campaign. As U.S. forces destroyed Fallujah and Ramadi, U.S. officials in Baghdad recruited, trained and ran Interior Ministry death squads who tortured and assassinated tens of thousands of men and boys to ethnically cleanse Baghdad and other areas on a sectarian basis.

The most recent U.S. atrocity in Iraq was the massacre of an estimated 40,000 civilians in Mosul by U.S., Iraqi, French and other "coalition" forces. The U.S.-led bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria has dropped 104,000 bombs and missiles since 2014, making it the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since the American War in Vietnam. Iraqi government death squads once again prowl through the ruins of Mosul, torturing and summarily executing anyone they identify as a suspected Islamic State fighter or sympathizer.

In Iraq, "Give war a chance" does not mean, "It didn't work here. Let's try it somewhere else." It means, "Keep bombarding Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul and massacring their people over and over again until there is nothing left but rubble and graveyards." That is why 9,123 U.S. troops remain deployed in a land of rubble and graveyards in the 15th year of an illegal war.

Somalia

Independent Somalia was formed from the former colonies of British and Italian Somaliland in 1970. After initially investing in literacy and infrastructure, Said Barre and his government built the largest army in Africa, supported first by the U.S.S.R. and then by the U.S., as it waged a long war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden, an ethnically Somali region of Ethiopia. In 1991, Barre was ousted in a civil war and the central government collapsed. UN and U.S. military interventions failed to restore any kind of order and foreign troops were withdrawn in 1995.

For the next 11 years, a dozen warlords ruled small fiefdoms while the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the internationally recognized government, hunkered down in Baidoa, the sixth largest city. But the country was not as violent as some other parts of Africa. Somalia is an ancient society and some order was preserved by traditional systems of law and government, including a unique system of customary law called Xeer, which has existed and evolved in Somalia since the 7th century.

In 2006, these various local authorities came together and formed the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). With the support of one of the strongest warlords, they defeated other warlords, including ones backed by the CIA, in fierce fighting in the capital, Mogadishu, and soon controlled the southern half of the country. People who knew Somalia well hailed the ICU as a hopeful development and tried to reassure the Bush administration that it was not a danger.

But the threat of peace breaking out in Somalia was too much for the "give war a chance" crowd to stomach. The U.S. backed an Ethiopian invasion, supported by U.S. air strikes and special operations forces, plunging Somalia back into violence and chaos that continues to this day. The Ethiopian invaders drove the ICU out of Mogadishu, and it split into factions, with some of its leaders going into exile and others forming new armed groups, not least Al-Shabaab [an offshoot of Al Qaeda], to resist the Ethiopian invasion.

After Ethiopia agreed to withdraw its forces in 2008, a coalition government was formed by TFG and ICU leaders but did not include Al-Shabaab, which by then controlled large areas of the country. The government has been fighting Al-Shabaab ever since, supported by an African Union force and currently at least

289 U.S. special operations forces and other U.S. troops. The government has made gains, but Al-Shabaab still controls some areas. As it has been pushed back militarily, Al-Shabaab has launched devastating terrorist attacks in Somalia and Kenya, where the U.S. now also has 212 troops deployed. Neighboring Djibouti hosts 4,715 U.S. troops at the largest U.S. base in Africa.

The U.S. is doggedly expanding its militarized counterterrorism strategy in Africa, with at least 7,271 U.S. troops in 47 countries as of September 30th.

But a new body of research has confirmed what independent analysts have long believed, that it is precisely these kind of operations that drive civilians into armed resistance in the first place. A recent survey of 500 African militants by the UN Development Program found that the “tipping-point” that decided 71% of them to join a group like Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram or Al Qaeda was the killing or detention of a family member or friend in U.S.-led or U.S.-model “counterterrorism” operations.

So the circular logic of U.S. counterterrorism policy uses the emergence and growth of groups like Al-Shabaab as a pretext to expand the operations that are fueling their growth in the first place, turning more and more civilians into combatants and their homes and communities into new U.S. battlefields, to “give war a chance” in country after country.

Honduras

On June 28th 2009, President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras was woken in the early hours of the morning by soldiers in combat gear bursting into his official residence. They hauled him away at gunpoint in his pajamas, bundled him into a car and onto a plane to Costa Rica. President Obama immediately called the coup a coup and reaffirmed that Zelaya was still the democratically-elected president of Honduras, appearing to adopt the same position as every government in Latin America, the European Union and the UN General Assembly.

But, in the coming days, as Hillary Clinton has since admitted, she went to work to push for a new election in Honduras that would, as she put it, “render the question of Zelaya moot,” by making the coup against him a *fait accompli* and allowing the coup regime of Roberto Micheletti to organize the new election.

Despite Obama’s statement and Wikileaks’ release of cables in which the U.S. Ambassador also called this an illegal coup, the U.S. never officially recognized that a coup had taken place, avoiding the cut-off of military aid to the post-coup government that was required under U.S. federal law and any further action to restore the democratically-elected president. In the coming years, Honduras, which was already the murder capital of the world, became even more dangerous as labor organizers and activists of all stripes were killed with

impunity by the post-coup government's death squads. Environmental activist Berta Cáceres' murder caused worldwide outrage, but she is one of hundreds of activists and organizers killed.

The role of Secretary Clinton and the U.S. government in consolidating the results of the coup in Honduras should be seen in the context of the U.S.'s dominant historic role in Honduras, the original "banana republic," 70% of whose exports are still sold to the United States. Honduras currently hosts 529 U.S. military personnel, far more than any other country in the Western hemisphere, and they are deeply embedded with the Honduran military which committed the coup.

In the 1980s, under Ambassador John Negroponte, who eventually became Director of National Intelligence, the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa reportedly hosted the largest CIA station in the world, from where the CIA ran its covert war against Nicaragua, death squads that killed even American nuns with impunity in El Salvador and an outright genocide in Guatemala. With this history of U.S. military and CIA involvement in Honduras, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the CIA was secretly involved in planning the coup against Zelaya.

The 2009 coup in Honduras has now come home to roost, as even the historically U.S.-controlled Organization of American States has demanded a rerun of the latest rigged election and Honduras's feared Cobra paramilitary police have refused to repress pro-democracy protesters. The opposition party, the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship, which appears to have won the most votes in the election, is a coalition of left and right against the post-coup government. How far will Trump and the U.S. go to rescue Clinton's 2009 campaign in Honduras? Will it ask us to "give war another chance?"

Yemen

From 897 (not a typo) until 1962, most of Yemen was ruled by the Zaidi Imams. The Zaidis follow a branch of Shiite Islam, but in Yemen they coexist and worship in the same mosques as Sunnis. The Houthis, who rule most of Yemen today, are also Zaidis. The last Zaidi Imam was overthrown by a republican coup in 1962, but, with Saudi support, he fought a civil war until 1970. Yes, you read that right. In the 1960s, the Saudis backed the Zaidi royalists in the Yemeni civil war. Now they call the Zaidis apostates and Iranian stooges and are waging a genocidal war to bomb and starve them to death.

At the peak of the previous civil war, 70,000 Egyptian troops fought on the republican side in Yemen, but the 1967 Arab-Israeli War changed the priorities of Arab countries on both sides. In February 1968, royalist forces lifted their siege of Sana'a and the two sides began peace talks, which led to a peace

agreement and international recognition of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1970.

Meanwhile, also in 1967, a popular armed rebellion forced the U.K. to withdraw from its colony in Aden, which formed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a Marxist state and Soviet ally. When the Cold War ended, the two Yemens merged to form a united Republic of Yemen in 1990. Ali Abdallah Saleh, the president of North Yemen since 1978, became president of the united Yemen and ruled until 2011.

Saleh's repressive government alienated many sectors of Yemeni society, and the Zaidi Houthis launched an armed rebellion in their northern homeland in 2004.

The Zaidis and other Shia Muslims make up about 45% of the population and Zaidis ruled the country for centuries, so they have always been a force to be reckoned with.

At the same time, the new Obama administration launched a campaign of cruise missile and drone strikes and special forces operations against the fledgling Al Qaeda faction in the country and increased military aid to Saleh's government.

A U.S. drone strike assassinated Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, and another strike two weeks later murdered his American son, 16-year-old Abdulrahman. Like militarized U.S. counterterrorism campaigns in other countries, U.S. attacks have predictably killed hundreds of civilians, fueling the growth of Al Qaeda in Yemen.

Arab Spring protests and political turmoil forced Saleh to resign in November 2011. His deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, was elected in February 2012 to head a unity government that would draw up a new constitution and organize a new election in two years. After Hadi failed to hold an election or step down as president, the Houthis invaded the capital in September 2014, placed him under house arrest and demanded that he complete the political transition.

Hadi and his government rejected the Houthis' demands and simply resigned in January 2015, so the Houthis formed a Revolutionary Council as an "interim authority." Hadi fled to Aden, his hometown, and then to Saudi Arabia, which launched a savage bombing campaign and naval blockade against Yemen on Hadi's behalf. The U.S. provides most of the weapons, munitions, satellite intelligence and in-air refueling and is a vital member of the Saudi-led coalition, but of course U.S. media and politicians downplay the U.S. role.

The Saudi-U.S. coalition's bombing campaign has killed at least ten thousand civilians, probably many more, while a naval blockade and the bombing of ports have reduced the population to a state of near-starvation. Hadi's forces have recaptured Aden and an area around it, but they have failed to defeat the Houthis in the rest of the country.

U.S.-made bombs keep hitting markets, hospitals and other civilian targets in Yemen. Western military trainers regard the Saudi armed forces as more or less untrainable, due mainly to Saudi Arabia's rigid class and tribal hierarchy. The officer corps, some of whom are members of the royal family, are beyond criticism, so there is no way to correct mistakes or enforce discipline. So Saudi pilots bomb indiscriminately from high altitude, and will keep doing so unless and until the U.S. stops selling them munitions and withdraws its military and diplomatic complicity in this genocidal war.

Aid agencies keep warning that millions of Yemenis are close to starvation, but neither Saudi nor U.S. officials seem to care. The normalization of war and the culture of apathy nurtured by 16 years of American wars that have killed millions of people in a dozen countries have left U.S. officials supremely cynical, but their cynicism will be tested in 2018 as the predictable results of this "made in the U.S.A." humanitarian catastrophe unfold. The U.S. propaganda machine will also be tested as it keeps trying to pin all the blame on the Saudis.

Libya

Muammar Gaddafi was a favorite villain of the West and an ally of the U.S.S.R., Cuba, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, the PLO, the IRA and the Polisario Front in Western Sahara. Gaddafi created a unique form of direct democracy, and he used Libya's oil wealth to provide free healthcare and education and to give Libya the 5th highest GDP per capita in Africa and the highest development rating in Africa on the UN's HDI index, which measures health and education as well as income.

Gaddafi also used Libya's wealth to fund projects to give African countries more control of their own natural resources, like a Libyan-funded factory in Liberia to manufacture and export tire grade rubber instead of raw rubber. He also co-founded the African Union in 2002, which he envisioned growing into a military alliance and a common market with a single currency.

Militant Islamists within the military tried but failed to assassinate Gaddafi in 1993. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), formed by Libyans who had fought with CIA- and Saudi-backed forces in Afghanistan, was paid by the U.K.'s MI6 intelligence agency and Osama Bin-Laden to also try to kill him in 1996.

The U.K. gave asylum to some of LIFG's members, most of whom settled among the large Libyan community in Manchester.

The U.K. banned LIFG in 2005 and confiscated its members' passports due to its links with Al Qaeda. But that all changed again in 2011, their passports were returned, and MI6 helped many of them travel back to Libya to join the "NATO

rebels.” One LIFG member, Ramadan Abedi, took his 16-year old son Salman with him to Libya. Six years later, Salman struck his own blow for his family’s Islamist ideology, carrying out a suicide bombing that killed 23 young music fans at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in May 2017.

Western leaders’ eagerness to overthrow Gaddafi led France, the U.K., the U.S. and their NATO and Arab royalist allies to exploit a UN Security Council Resolution that authorized the use of force to protect civilians in Libya to overthrow the government, rejecting an African Union initiative to resolve the crisis peacefully.

The UN resolution called for an “immediate ceasefire” in Libya, but also authorized a “no-fly zone,” which became a pretext for bombing Libya’s military and civilian infrastructure with 7,700 bombs and missiles, and secretly deploying CIA officers and British, French and Qatari special operations forces to organize and lead Libyan rebel forces on the ground.

Qatar’s Chief of Staff, Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Atiya, told AFP, “We were among them and the numbers of Qataris on the ground were in the hundreds in every region. Training and communications had been in Qatari hands. Qatar... supervised the rebels’ plans because they are civilians and did not have enough military experience. We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces.”

Qatari forces were even spotted leading the final assault on Libya’s Bab al-Aziziya military headquarters in Tripoli.

After taking Tripoli, NATO and its Libyan and Qatari allies cut off food, water and electricity to the people of Sirte and Bani Walid as they bombarded them for weeks. The combination of aerial, naval and artillery bombardment, starvation and thirst on these civilian populations made a final, savage mockery of UNSCR 1973’s mandate to protect civilians.

Once the U.S. and its allies had destroyed Libya’s government, they abandoned it to chaos and civil war that still rage on six years later. Two competing governments control different parts of the country, while local militias control many smaller areas. Since 2011, human rights groups have reported that thousands of black Libyans and sub-Saharan Africans have suffered arbitrary detention and appalling abuse at the hands of the Libyan militias that the U.S. and its allies helped to take over the country. News reports of Africans being sold in slave markets in Libya are only the latest outrage.

As Libya struggles to dig its way out of the endless chaos the U.S. and its allies plunged it into, the U.S. has more or less washed its hands of the crisis in Libya. In 2016, U.S. foreign aid to Libya was only \$27 million.

Syria

The U.S. role in the civil war in Syria is a case study in how a CIA covert operation can fuel a conflict and destabilize a country to create pretexts for U.S. military intervention. The CIA began organizing the transport of fighters and weapons from Libya to Turkey in late 2011, as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were militarizing an uprising in Syria that grew out of Arab Spring protests earlier in the year. British and French special operations forces provided military training in Turkey, and the CIA managed the infiltration of fighters and the distribution of weapons across the Syrian border.

The Syrian government's repression contributed to the transition from peaceful protests to an armed uprising. But the primarily leftist groups that organized the political protests in 2011 were committed to opposing violence, sectarianism and foreign intervention. They have always blamed Syria's descent into war mainly on the foreign powers who supported the small Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and funneled more extreme foreign-based Islamist forces and thousands of tons of weapons into the country to ignite a full-scale civil war.

In 2012, as Kofi Annan tried to negotiate a ceasefire and a political transition in Syria, the U.S. and its allies poured in foreign fighters and heavier weapons and pledged even greater support to rebel forces at three Orwellian "Friends of Syria" conferences. One of these was timed to coincide with the date when Annan's ceasefire was to take effect, and their new pledges of weapons, money and support for the rebels were a flagrant move to undermine the ceasefire.

After Annan eventually got all sides to agree on a peace plan in Geneva on June 30th 2012, on the understanding that it would then be codified in a UN Security Council Resolution, the U.S. and its allies went back to New York and inserted new conditions and triggers for sanctions and military action in the resolution, leading to a Russian veto. Annan's Geneva Communique has been eclipsed by 5 more years of war and equally fruitless Geneva II, Geneva III and Geneva IV peace conferences.

Annan quit a month later and was characteristically guarded in his public statements. But UN officials told the Atlantic in 2013 that Annan blamed the U.S. government for the failure of his mission. "The U.S. couldn't even stand by an agreement that the Secretary of State had signed in Geneva," said one of Annan's closest aides. "He quit in frustration."

After shipping at least 2,750 tons of weapons from Libya to Turkey in 2011 and 2012, including howitzers, RPGs and sniper rifles, the CIA began scouring the Balkans for weapons left over from the wars in the 1990s that the Saudis and Qataris could buy to flood into Syria through Turkey and Jordan. They shipped

in up to 8,000 tons of weapons on flights from Croatia by March 2013.

Since then, the Saudis have bought more weapons from 8 different Balkan countries, as well as 15,000 TOW anti-tank missiles directly from the U.S. for \$1.1 billion in December 2013. That was despite U.S. officials admitting as early as October 2012 that most of the weapons shipped into Syria had gone to "hardline Islamic jihadists." Investigators in the Balkans report that the Saudis made their largest purchases ever in 2015, including brand new weapons straight off the production line. Only 60% of these weapons had been delivered by early 2017, meaning that the flood of weapons will continue as long as the CIA keeps facilitating it and U.S. allies like Turkey and Jordan keep acting as conduits.

The main innovation in U.S. war-making under the Obama administration was a doctrine of covert and proxy war that avoided heavy U.S. casualties at the expense of a reliance on aerial bombardment, drone killings, a huge expansion of deadly special forces operations and the use of foreign proxy forces. In every case, this fueled the global explosion of violence and chaos unleashed by Bush, and the main victims were millions of innocent civilians in country after country.

U.S. support for Al Qaeda splinter groups like Jabhat al-Nusra (now rebranded Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) and Islamic State turned the U.S. "war on terror" on its head. Only ten years after September 11th, the U.S. was ready to support these groups to destabilize Libya and Syria, where the CIA was looking for pretexts for war and regime change. The U.S. only reverted to its "war on terror" narrative after U.S. and allied support had built up these groups to the point that they could invade Iraq and take over its second largest city and a large swath of the country.

The U.S. covert proxy war in Syria led to the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since Vietnam, which has reduced several cities in Iraq and Syria to rubble and killed tens of thousands of civilians; a civil war in Syria that has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians; and a refugee crisis that has overwhelmed U.S. allies in the Middle East and Europe. After 6 years of war, Syria remains fragmented and mired in chaos. The Syrian government has regained control of many areas, but the future remains very dangerous and uncertain for the people of Syria. The U.S. currently has at least 1,723 troops on the ground in Syria, without any legal basis to be there, as well as 2,730 in Jordan and 2,273 in Turkey.

Ukraine

President Yanukovich of Ukraine was overthrown in a violent coup in February

2014. Originally peaceful protests in the Maidan, or central square, in Kiev had gradually become dominated by the extreme right-wing Svoboda Party and, since November 2013, by a shadowy new group called Right Sector. These groups displayed Nazi symbols, fought with police and eventually invaded the Ukrainian parliament building, prompting Yanukovich to flee the country.

On February 4th, 2014, leaked audio of a conversation between U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland revealed U.S. plans for a coup to remove Yanukovich and install U.S. favorite Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Prime Minister. Nuland and Pyatt used language like, “glue this thing,” “midwife this thing” and “we could land jelly side up on this thing if we move fast,” as well as the more widely reported “Fuck the EU,” who they didn’t expect to support their plan.

On February 18th, Right Sector led 20,000 protesters on a march to the parliament building. They attacked police with Molotov cocktails, stormed and occupied government buildings and the police attacked the protest camp in the Maidan. As running battles with the police continued over the next few days, an estimated 75 people were killed, including 10 police and soldiers. Mysterious snipers were reported firing from Philharmonic Hall and a hotel overlooking the Maidan, shooting at police and protesters.

Yanukovich and his government held meetings with opposition leaders, and the EU sent the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland to mediate the crisis.

On February 21st, Yanukovich agreed to hold new presidential and parliamentary elections before the end of the year.

But the protesters, now led by Svoboda and Right Sector, were not satisfied and took over the parliament building. Right Sector had broken into an armory in Lviv and seized assault rifles and pistols, and the police no longer resisted.

On February 22nd, the parliament failed to make a quorum (338 of 447 members), but the 328 members present voted to remove Yanukovich from office and hold a new election in May. Yanukovich issued defiant statements and refused to resign, then fled to Russia.

Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine refused to accept the results of the coup.

The Crimean parliament organized a referendum, in which 97% voted to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, which Crimea had been part of since 1783. As an administrative matter, Khrushchev had placed Crimea within the Ukrainian SSR in the 1950s, but when the USSR broke up, 94% of Crimeans voted to become an autonomous republic and 83% voted to keep dual Russian and Ukrainian citizenship.

Russia accepted the result of the referendum and now governs Crimea. The

greatest dangers to Russia from the coup in Kiev were that Ukraine would join NATO and Russia would lose its most strategic naval base at Sevastopol on the Black Sea. NATO issued a declaration in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO.” Also in 2008, Ukraine threatened not to renew the lease on the base at Sevastopol, which was due to expire in 2017, but it was eventually extended to 2042.

The UN has not recognized Russia’s reintegration of Crimea, and the U.S. has called it a violation of international law. But given the history and autonomous status of Crimea, and the importance of Sevastopol to Russia, it was an understandable and predictable response to the illegal U.S.-planned coup in Ukraine. It is the height of hypocrisy for U.S. officials to suddenly pose as champions of international law, which U.S. policy has systematically ignored, violated and undermined since the 1980s.

Russian-speaking majorities in Eastern Ukraine also declared independence from Ukraine as the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and appealed for Russian support, which Russia has covertly provided, although the extent of it is hotly debated. There were also large protests against the coup in Odessa on the Black Sea, and 42 protesters were killed when a Right Sector mob attacked them and set fire to the Trades Union building where they took refuge.

With the Ukrainian military unable or unwilling to launch a civil war against its Russian-speaking compatriots in the East, the post-coup government recruited and trained a new “National Guard” to do so. It was soon reported that the Azov Battalion and other National Guard units were linked to Svoboda and Right Sector, and that they were still displaying Nazi symbols as they assaulted Russian-speaking areas in Eastern Ukraine. In 2015, the Azov Battalion was expanded to a 1,000-strong Special Operations Regiment.

The civil war in Ukraine has killed more than 10,000 people. The Minsk agreements between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany in September 2014 and February 2015 established a tenuous ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons by both sides, but the political problems persist, fueling outbreaks of fighting.

The U.S. has now agreed to send Ukraine Javelin anti-tank missiles and other heavier weapons, which are likely to reignite heavier fighting and complicate political negotiations.

Giving Peace a Chance?

Giving war a chance has not worked out well, to put it mildly, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Honduras, Yemen, Libya, Syria or Ukraine. All remain mired in violence and chaos caused by U.S. invasions, bombing campaigns, coups and covert operations. In every case, U.S. policy decisions have either made these

countries' problems worse or are entirely responsible for the incredible problems afflicting them. Many of those decisions were illegal or criminal under U.S. and/or international law. The human cost to millions of innocent people is a historic tragedy that shames us all. In every case, the U.S. could have made different decisions, and in every case, the U.S. can still make different decisions.

As an American general once observed, "When the only tool you've got is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." The allocation of most of our federal budget to military spending both deprives the U.S. of other "tools" and creates political pressures to use the one we have already paid so much for, as implied in Albright's question to Powell in 1992.

In Mr. Trump's new national security strategy, he promised Americans that he will "preserve peace through strength." But the U.S. is not at peace today. It is a nation at war across the world. The U.S. has 291,000 troops stationed in 183 foreign countries, amounting to a global military occupation. It has deployed special operations troops on secret combat and training missions to 149 countries in 2017 alone. It has dropped 39,000 bombs and missiles on Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since Trump took office, and the U.S.- and Iraqi-led assault on Mosul alone killed an estimated 40,000 civilians. Pretending we are at peace and vowing to preserve it by diverting more of our resources to the military industrial complex is not a national security strategy. It is an Orwellian deception taken straight from the pages of *1984*.

At the dawn of 2018, nobody could accuse the American public of not giving war a chance. We have let successive presidents talk us into war over each and every international crisis, most of which were caused or fueled by U.S. aggression and militarism in the first place, in the belief that they may have finally found an enemy they can defeat and a war that will somehow make life better for somebody somewhere. But they haven't.

As we look forward to a new year, surely it is time to try something different and finally "Give Peace a Chance." My 15-year old self was willing to spend Christmas fasting on the cold steps of a church to do that in 1969. What can you do to give peace a chance in 2018?

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*.

Why North Korea Wants Nuke Deterrence

Exclusive: The revelation that North Korea hacked into South Korea's military secrets and found U.S. plans for a preemptive "decapitation" of Pyongyang's leadership explains its rush to build a nuclear deterrent, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

The Western media has been awash in speculation as to why, about a year ago, North Korea's "crazy" leadership suddenly launched a crash program to vastly improve its ballistic missile capabilities. That question has now been answered.

In September 2016, North Korean cyber-defense forces hacked into South Korean military computers and downloaded 235 gigabytes of documents. The BBC has revealed that the documents included detailed U.S. plans to assassinate North Korea's president, Kim Jong Un, and launch an all-out war on North Korea. The BBC's main source for this story is Rhee Cheol-Hee, a member of the Defense Committee of the South Korean National Assembly.

These plans for aggressive war have actually been long in the making. In 2003, the U.S. scrapped an agreement signed in 1994 under which North Korea suspended its nuclear program and the U.S. agreed to build two light water reactors in North Korea. The two countries also agreed to a step-by-step normalization of relations. Even after the U.S. scrapped the 1994 Agreed Framework in 2003, North Korea did not restart work on the two reactors frozen under that agreement, which could by now be producing enough plutonium to make several nuclear weapons every year.

However, since 2002-03, when President George W. Bush included North Korea in his "axis of evil," withdrew from the Agreed Framework, and launched an invasion of Iraq over bogus WMD claims, North Korea once again began enriching uranium and making steady progress toward developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them.

By 2016, the North Koreans also were keenly aware of the horrific fate of Iraq and Libya and their leaders after the countries did surrender their unconventional weapons. Not only did the U.S. lead bloody "regime change" invasions but the nations' leaders were brutally murdered, Saddam Hussein by hanging and Muammar Gaddafi sodomized with a knife and then summarily shot in the head.

So, the discovery of the U.S. war plan in 2016 sounded alarm bells in Pyongyang

and triggered an unprecedented crash program to quickly expand North Korea's ballistic missile program. Its nuclear weapons tests established that it can produce a small number of first-generation nuclear weapons, but it needed a viable delivery system before it could be sure that its nuclear deterrent would be credible enough to deter a U.S. attack.

In other words, North Korea's main goal has been to close the gap between its existing delivery systems and the missile technology it would need to actually launch a retaliatory nuclear strike against the United States. North Korea's leaders see this as their only chance to escape the same kind of mass destruction visited on North Korea in the first Korean War, when U.S.-led air forces destroyed every city, town and industrial area and General Curtis LeMay boasted that the attacks had killed 20 percent of the population.

Through 2015 and early 2016, North Korea only tested one new missile, the Pukkuksong-1 submarine-launched missile. The missile launched from a submerged submarine and flew 300 miles on its final, successful test, which coincided with the annual U.S.-South Korean military exercises in August 2016.

North Korea also launched its largest satellite to date in February 2016, but the launch vehicle seemed to be the same type as the Unha-3 used to launch a smaller satellite in 2012.

However, since the discovery of the U.S.-South Korean war plans a year ago, North Korea has vastly accelerated its missile development program, conducting at least 27 more tests of a wide range of new missiles and bringing it much closer to a credible nuclear deterrent. Here is a timeline of the tests:

–Two failed tests of Hwasong-10 medium-range ballistic missiles in October 2016.

–Two successful tests of Pukguksong-2 medium-range ballistic missiles, in February and May 2017. The missiles followed identical trajectories, rising to a height of 340 miles and landing in the sea 300 miles away. South Korean analysts believe this missile's full range is at least 2,000 miles, and North Korea said the tests confirmed it is ready for mass production.

–Four medium-range ballistic missiles that flew an average of 620 miles from the Tongchang-ri space center in March 2017.

–Two apparently failed missile tests from Sinpo submarine base in April 2017.

–Six tests of Hwasong-12 medium-range ballistic missiles (range: 2,300 to 3,700 miles) since April 2017.

–A failed test of a missile believed to be a "KN-17" from Pukchang airbase in

April 2017.

–Test of a Scud-type anti-ship missile that flew 300 miles and landed in the Sea of Japan, and two other tests in May 2017.

–Several cruise missiles fired from the East coast in June 2017.

–A test of a powerful new rocket engine, maybe for an ICBM, in June 2017.

–North Korea tested two Hwasong-14 “near-ICBMs” in July 2017. Based on these tests, the Hwasong-14 may be capable of hitting city-sized targets in Alaska or Hawaii with a single nuclear warhead, but cannot yet reach the U.S. West Coast.

–Four more missiles tested in August 2017, including a Hwasong-12 that flew over Japan and travelled 1,700 miles before breaking up, maybe as a result of a failure in a “Post Boost Vehicle” added to improve range and accuracy.

–Another ballistic missile flew 2,300 miles over the Pacific on September 15, 2017.

An analysis of the two tests of the Hwasong-14 in July by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS) concluded that these missiles are not yet capable of carrying a 500 kg payload as far as Seattle or other U.S. West Coast cities. BAS notes that a first generation nuclear weapon based on the Pakistani model that North Korea is believed to be following could not weigh less than 500 kg, once the weight of the warhead casing and a heat shield to survive reentry into the Earth’s atmosphere are taken into account.

Global Reaction

Awareness of the role of the U.S. war plan in spurring the dramatic escalation of North Korea’s missile program should be a game changer in the world’s response to the crisis over Korea, since it demonstrates that the current acceleration of the North Korean missile program is a defensive response to a serious and potentially existential threat from the United States.

If the United Nations Security Council was not diplomatically and militarily intimidated by the United States, this knowledge should trigger urgent action in the Security Council to require all sides to make a firm commitment to peaceful and binding diplomacy to formally end the Korean War and remove the threat of war from all the people of Korea. And the whole world would unite politically and diplomatically to prevent the U.S. from using its veto to avoid accountability for its leading role in this crisis. Only a unified global response to potential U.S. aggression could possibly convince North Korea that it would have some protection if it eventually halted its nuclear weapons

program.

But such unity in the face of a threat of U.S. aggression would be unprecedented. Most U.N. delegates quietly sat and listened on Sept. 19 when President Donald Trump delivered explicit threats of war and aggression against North Korea, Iran and Venezuela, while boasting about his missile strike against Syria on April 6 over dubious and disputed claims about a chemical weapons incident.

For the past 20 years or more, the United States has swaggered about as the “last remaining superpower” and the “indispensable nation,” a global law unto itself, using the dangers of terrorism and weapons proliferation and highly selective outrage over “dictators” as propaganda narratives to justify illegal wars, CIA-backed terrorism, its own weapons proliferation, and support for its favored dictators like the brutal rulers of Saudi Arabia and other Arab monarchies.

For even longer, the United States has been two-faced about international law, citing it when some adversary can be accused of a violation but ignoring it when the U.S. or its allies are trampling on the rights of some disfavored country. When the International Court of Justice convicted the United States of aggression (including acts of terrorism) against Nicaragua in 1986, the U.S. withdrew from the ICJ’s binding jurisdiction.

Since then, the U.S. has thumbed its nose at the entire structure of international law, confident in the political power of its propaganda or “information warfare” to cast itself as the guardian of law and order in the world, even as it systematically violates the most basic rules spelled out in the U.N. Charter and the Geneva Conventions.

U.S. propaganda treats the U.N. Charter and the Geneva Conventions, the world’s “Never again” to war, torture and the killing of millions of civilians in the Second World War, as relics of another time that it would be naive to take seriously.

But the results of the U.S. alternative – its lawless “might makes right” war policy – are now plain for all to see. In the past 16 years, America’s post-9/11 wars have already killed at least two million people, maybe many more, with no end in sight to the slaughter as the U.S.’s policy of illegal war keeps plunging country after country into intractable violence and chaos.

An Ally’s Fears

Just as North Korea’s missile programs are a rational defense strategy in the face of the threat Pyongyang faces from the U.S., the exposure of the U.S.’s war

plan by American allies in South Korea is also a rational act of self-preservation, since they too are threatened by the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula.

Now maybe other U.S. allies, the wealthy countries that have provided political and diplomatic cover for the U.S.'s 20-year campaign of illegal war, will finally reassert their humanity, their sovereignty and their own obligations under international law, and start to rethink their roles as junior partners in U.S. aggression.

Countries like the U.K., France and Australia will sooner or later have to choose between forward-looking roles in a sustainable, peaceful multi-polar world and a slavish loyalty to the ever-more desperate death throes of U.S. hegemony. Now might be a good moment to make that choice, before they are dragged into new U.S. wars in Korea, Iran or Venezuela.

Even Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is afraid that Donald Trump will lead humanity into World War III. But it might come as a surprise to people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and parts of a dozen other countries already engulfed by U.S.-driven wars to learn that they are not already in the midst of World War III.

Perhaps what really worries the Senator is that he and his colleagues may no longer be able to sweep these endless atrocities under the plush carpets of the halls of Congress without a genteel Barack Obama in the White House to sweet-talk U.S. allies around the world and keep the millions being killed in U.S. wars off U.S. TVs and computer screens, out of sight and out of mind.

If politicians in the U.S. and around the world need the ugliness of Donald Trump as a mirror for their own greed, ignorance and temerity, to shame them into changing their ways, so be it – whatever it takes. But it should not escape anyone anywhere that the signature on this diabolical war plan that now threatens to kill millions of Koreans was not Donald Trump's but Barack Obama's.

George Orwell might well have been describing the partisan blindness of the West's self-satisfied, so easily deluded, neoliberal society when he wrote this in 1945,

“Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage – torture, the use of hostages, forced labor, mass deportations, imprisonment without trial, forgery, assassination, the bombing of civilians – which does not change its color when it is committed by our side... The Nationalist not only does not disapprove of

atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.”

Here’s the bottom line: The United States has been planning to assassinate Kim Jong Un and to launch an all-out war on North Korea. There. You’ve heard it. Now, can you still be manipulated into believing that Kim Jong Un is simply “crazy” and North Korea is the gravest threat to world peace?

Or do you now understand that the United States is the real threat to peace in Korea, just as it was in Iraq, Libya and many other countries where the leaders were deemed “crazy” and U.S. officials (and the Western mainstream media) promoted war as the only “rational” alternative?

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*.

How ‘Regime Change’ Wars Led to Korea Crisis

Exclusive: The U.S.-led aggressions against Iraq and Libya are two war crimes that keep on costing, with their grim examples of what happens to leaders who get rid of WMDs driving the scary showdown with North Korea, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It is a popular meme in the U.S. media to say that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is “crazy” as he undertakes to develop a nuclear bomb and a missile capacity to deliver it, but he is actually working from a cold logic dictated by the U.S. government’s aggressive wars and lack of integrity.

Indeed, the current North Korea crisis, which could end up killing millions of people, can be viewed as a follow-on disaster to President George W. Bush’s Iraq War and President Barack Obama’s Libyan intervention. Those wars came after the leaders of Iraq and Libya had dismantled their dangerous weapons programs, leaving their countries virtually powerless when the U.S. government chose to invade.

In both cases, the U.S. government also exploited its power over global

information to spread lies about the targeted regimes as justification for the invasions – and the world community failed to do anything to block the U.S. aggressions.

And, on a grim personal note, the two leaders, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, were then brutally murdered, Hussein by hanging and Gaddafi by a mob that first sodomized him with a knife.

So, the neoconservatives who promoted the Iraq invasion supposedly to protect the world from Iraq's alleged WMDs – and the liberal interventionists who pushed the Libya invasion based on false humanitarian claims – may now share in the horrific possibility that millions of people in North Korea, South Korea, Japan and maybe elsewhere could die from real WMDs launched by North Korea and/or by the United States.

Washington foreign policy “experts” who fault President Trump's erratic and bellicose approach toward this crisis may want to look in the mirror and consider how they contributed to the mess by ignoring the predictable consequences from the Iraq and Libya invasions.

Yes, I know, at the time it was so exciting to celebrate the Bush Doctrine of preemptive wars even over a “one percent” suspicion that a “rogue state” like Iraq might share WMDs with terrorists – or the Clinton Doctrine hailed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's acolytes enamored by her application of “smart power” to achieve “regime change” in Libya.

However, as we now know, both wars were built upon lies. Iraq did not possess WMD stockpiles as the Bush administration claimed, and Libya was not engaged in mass murder of civilians in rebellious areas in the eastern part of the country as the Obama administration claimed.

Post-invasion investigations knocked down Bush's WMD myth in Iraq, and a British parliamentary inquiry concluded that Western governments misrepresented the situation in eastern Libya where Gaddafi forces were targeting armed rebels but not indiscriminately killing civilians.

But those belated fact-finding missions were no comfort to either Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi, nor to their countries, which have seen mass slaughters resulting from the U.S.-sponsored invasions and today amount to failed states.

There also has been virtually no accountability for the war crimes committed by the Bush and Obama administrations. Bush and Obama both ended up serving two terms as President. None of Bush's senior advisers were punished – and Hillary Clinton received the 2016 Democratic Party's nomination for President.

As for the U.S. mainstream media, which behaved as boosters for both invasions, pretty much all of the journalistic war advocates have continued on with their glorious careers. To excuse their unprofessional behavior, some even have pushed revisionist lies, such as the popular but false claim that Saddam Hussein was to blame because he pretended that he did have WMDs – when the truth is that his government submitted a detailed 12,000-page report to the United Nations in December 2002 describing how the WMDs had been destroyed (though that accurate account was widely mocked and ultimately ignored).

Pervasive Dishonesty

The dishonesty that now pervades the U.S. government and the U.S. mainstream media represents another contributing factor to the North Korean crisis. What sensible person anywhere on the planet would trust U.S. assurances? Who would believe what the U.S. government says, except, of course, the U.S. mainstream media?

Remember also that North Korea's nuclear program had largely been mothballed before George W. Bush delivered his "axis of evil" speech in January 2002, which linked Iran and Iraq – then bitter enemies – with North Korea. After that, North Korea withdrew from earlier agreements on limiting its nuclear development and began serious work on a bomb.

Yet, while North Korea moved toward a form of mutual assured destruction, Iraq and Libya chose a different path.

In Iraq, to head off a threatened U.S.-led invasion, Hussein's government sought to convince the international community that it had lived up to its commitments regarding the destruction of its WMD arsenal and programs. Besides the detailed declaration, Iraq gave U.N. weapons inspectors wide latitude to search on the ground.

But Bush cut short the inspection efforts in March 2003 and launched his "shock and awe" invasion, which led to the collapse of Hussein's regime and the dictator's eventual capture and hanging.

Gaddafi's Gestures

In Libya, Gaddafi also sought to cooperate with international demands regarding WMDs. In late 2003, he announced that his country would eliminate its unconventional weapons programs, including a nascent nuclear project.

Gaddafi also sought to get Libya out from under economic sanctions by taking responsibility for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Scotland, although he and his government continued to deny carrying out the terror attack that killed 270

people.

But these efforts to normalize Libya's relations with the West failed to protect him or his country. In 2011 when Islamic militants staged an uprising around Benghazi, Gaddafi moved to crush it, and Secretary of State Clinton eagerly joined with some European countries in seeking military intervention to destroy Gaddafi's regime.

The United Nations Security Council approved a plan for the humanitarian protection of civilians in and around Benghazi, but the Obama administration and its European allies exploited that opening to mount a full-scale "regime change" war.

Prominent news personalities, such as MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell, cheered on the war with the claim that Gaddafi had American "blood on his hands" over the Pan Am 103 case because he had accepted responsibility. The fact that his government continued to deny actual guilt – and the international conviction of Libyan Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was a judicial travesty – was ignored. Almost no one in the West dared question the longtime groupthink of Libyan guilt.

By October 2011, Gaddafi had fled Tripoli and was captured by rebels in Sirte. He was tortured, sodomized with a knife and then executed. Clinton, whose aides felt she should claim credit for Gaddafi's overthrow as part of a Clinton Doctrine, celebrated his murder with a laugh and a quip, "We came; we saw; he died."

But Gaddafi's warnings about Islamist terrorists in Benghazi came back to haunt Clinton when on Sept. 11, 2012, militants attacked the U.S. consulate and CIA station there, killing Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

The obsessive Republican investigation into the Benghazi attack failed to demonstrate many of the lurid claims about Clinton's negligence, but it did surface the fact that she had used a private server for her official State Department emails, which, in turn, led to an FBI investigation which severely damaged her 2016 presidential run.

Lessons Learned

Meanwhile, back in North Korea, the young dictator Kim Jong Un was taking all this history in. According to numerous sources, he concluded that his and North Korea's only safeguard would be a viable nuclear deterrent to stave off another U.S.-sponsored "regime change" war – with him meeting a similar fate as was dealt to Hussein and Gaddafi.

Since then, Kim and his advisers have made clear that the surrender of North

Korea's small nuclear arsenal is off the table. They make the understandable point that the United States has shown bad faith in other cases in which leaders have given up their WMDs in compliance with international demands and then saw their countries invaded and faced grisly executions themselves.

Now, the world faces a predicament in which an inexperienced and intemperate President Trump confronts a crisis that his two predecessors helped to create and make worse. Trump has threatened "fire and fury" like the world has never seen, suggesting a nuclear strike on North Korea, which, in turn, has vowed to retaliate.

Millions of people on the Korean peninsula and Japan – and possibly elsewhere – could die in such a conflagration. The world's economy could be severely shaken, given Japan's and South Korea's industrial might and the size of their consumer markets.

If such a horror does come to pass, the U.S. government and the U.S. mainstream media will surely revert to their standard explanation that Kim was simply "crazy" and brought this destruction on himself. Trump's liberal critics also might attack Trump for bungling the diplomacy.

But the truth is that many of Washington's elite policymakers – both on the Republican and Democratic sides – will share in the blame. And so too should the U.S. mainstream media.

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](#)).

Refusing to Learn Lessons from Libya

Exclusive: Official Washington never likes to admit a mistake no matter how grave or obvious. Too many Important People would look bad. So, the rationalizations never stop as with the Libyan fiasco, observes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

In recent weeks, the *Washington Post's* Cairo bureau chief Sudarsan Raghavan has published a series of remarkable dispatches from war-torn Libya, which is still reeling from the aftermath of NATO's March 2011 intervention and the subsequent

overthrow and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

On July 2, Raghavan reported on what amounts to Libya's modern-day slave trade. According to his report, Libya is "now home to a thriving trade in humans. Unable to pay exorbitant smuggling fees or swindled by traffickers, some of the world's most desperate people are being held as slaves, tortured or forced into prostitution."

The numbers help tell the tale. "The number of migrants departing from Libya is surging," writes Raghavan, "with more than 70,000 arriving in Italy so far this year, a 28 percent increase over the same period last year."

On August 1, Raghavan returned to the pages of the *Post* with a disturbing portrait of life in Tripoli, reporting that: "Six years after the revolution that toppled dictator Moammar Gaddafi, the mood in this volatile capital is a meld of hopelessness and gloom. Diplomatic and military efforts by the United States and its allies have failed to stabilize the nation; the denouement of the crisis remains far from clear. Most Libyans sense that the worst is yet to come."

Raghavan notes that "Under Gaddafi, the oil-producing country was once one of the world's wealthiest nations." Under his rule, "Libyans enjoyed free health care, education and other benefits under the eccentric strongman's brand of socialism." It would be difficult not to see, Raghavan writes, "the insecurity that followed Gaddafi's death has ripped apart the North African country."

Taken together, Raghavan's reports should come as a rude shock to stalwart supporters of NATO's intervention in Libya. Yet the embarrassing fervor with which many embraced the intervention remains largely undiminished – with, as we will see, one notable exception.

An Upside-Down Meritocracy

Anne Marie Slaughter, who served as policy planning chief at the State Department under Hillary Clinton, emailed her former boss after the start of the NATO operation, to say: "I cannot imagine how exhausted you must be after this week, but I have never been prouder of having worked for you."

Five months after the start of NATO operation against Gaddafi, Slaughter went public with her approval in an op-ed for the *Financial Times* titled "Why Libya Skeptics Were Proved Badly Wrong." Proving, if nothing else, that the foreign policy establishment is a reverse meritocracy, Slaughter holds an endowed chair at Princeton and is also the well-compensated president of the influential Washington think tank New America.

President Obama's decision to intervene received wide bipartisan support in the Congress and from media figures across the political spectrum, including Bill O'Reilly and Cenk Uyghur.

Yet the *casus belli* used to justify the intervention, as a U.K. parliamentary report made clear last September, was based on a lie: that the people of the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi were in imminent danger of being slaughtered by Gaddafi's forces.

The report, issued by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, states that "Despite his rhetoric, the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available evidence."

The report also noted that while "Many Western policymakers genuinely believed that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered his troops to massacre civilians in Benghazi ... this did not necessarily translate into a threat to everyone in Benghazi. In short, the scale of the threat to civilians was presented with unjustified certainty. US intelligence officials reportedly described the intervention as 'an intelligence-light decision.'"

Even as it became clear that the revolution had proved to be a disaster for the country, the arbiters of acceptable opinion in Washington continued to insist that NATO's intervention was not only a success, but the right thing to do. It is a myth that has gained wide purchase among D.C.'s foreign policy cognoscenti, despite the judgment of former President Barack Obama, who famously described the intervention as "a shit show."

Still Spinning

A full year after the commencement of NATO's campaign against Gaddafi, former NATO Ambassador Ivo Daalder and NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stravidis took to the pages of that reliable bellwether of establishment opinion, *Foreign Affairs*, to declare that "NATO's operation in Libya has rightly been hailed as a model intervention."

According to Daalder and Stravidis, "the alliance responded rapidly to a deteriorating situation that threatened hundreds of thousands of civilians rebelling against an oppressive regime."

In 2016, a Clinton campaign press release justifying the ill-starred intervention, claimed "Qadhafi and his regime made perfectly clear what their plans were for dealing with those who stood up against his reign, using disgusting language in urging his backers to cleanse the country of these rebels. This was a humanitarian crisis."

Astonishingly, the campaign “Factsheet” goes on to assert that, “there was no doubt that further atrocities were on the way, as Qadhafi’s forces storming towards the county’s second biggest city.” Yet there is, as both the U.K. parliamentary report and a Harvard study by Alan J. Kuperman found, no evidence for this whatsoever.

“Qaddafi did not perpetrate a ‘bloodbath’ in any of the cities that his forces recaptured from rebels prior to NATO intervention – including Ajdabiya, Bani Walid, Brega, Ras Lanuf, Zawiya, and much of Misurata – so there was,” writes Kuperman, “virtually no risk of such an outcome if he had been permitted to recapture the last rebel stronghold of Benghazi.”

Nevertheless, the myth persists. Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Shadi Hamid, the author of *Islamic Exceptionalism*, continues to insist, against all evidence, that the intervention was a success.

“The Libya intervention was successful,” says Hamid, “The country is better off today than it would have been had the international community allowed dictator Muammar Qaddafi to continue his rampage across the country.”

In this, Hamid is hardly alone. Left-activists in thrall to a Trotskyite vision of permanent revolution also continue to make the case that NATO’s intervention was a net positive for the country.

In a recent interview with *In These Times*, Leila Al-Shami claimed that “If Gaddafi had not fallen, Libya now would look very much like Syria. In reality, the situation in Libya is a million times better. Syrian refugees are fleeing to Libya. Far fewer people have been killed in Libya since Gaddafi’s falling than in Syria. Gaddafi being ousted was a success for the Libyan people.”

That danger in all this is that by refusing to learn the lessons of Libya (and Kosovo and Iraq and Syria) the U.S. foreign policy establishment will likely continue to find itself backing forces that seek to turn the greater Middle East into a fundamentalist Sunnistan, ruled by Sharia law, utterly hostile to religious pluralism, the rights of women, minorities and, naturally, U.S. national security interests in the region.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Hillary Clinton’s Failed Libya ‘Doctrine.’”]

James W. Carden served as an adviser on Russia policy at the US State Department. Currently a contributing writer at The Nation magazine, his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Quartz, The American Conservative and The National Interest.
