

The Making of Juan Guaidó: US Regime-Change Laboratory Created Venezuela's Coup Leader

The Washington favorite has spent years at the forefront of a violent campaign of destabilization, write Dan Cohen and Max Blumenthal of Grayzone.

By **Dan Cohen** and **Max Blumenthal**

Grayzone



Before the fateful date of Jan. 22, fewer than 1-in-5 Venezuelans had heard of Juan Guaidó. Only a few months ago, the 35-year-old was an obscure character in a politically marginal far-right group closely associated with gruesome acts of street violence. Even in his own party, Guaidó had been a mid-level figure in the opposition-dominated National Assembly, which is now held under contempt according to Venezuela's constitution.

But after a single phone call from from U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, Guaidó proclaimed himself as president of Venezuela. Anointed as the leader of his country by Washington, a previously unknown political bottom dweller was vaulted onto the international stage as the U.S.-selected leader of the nation with the world's largest oil reserves.

Echoing the Washington consensus, *The New York Times* editorial board hailed Guaidó as a "credible rival" to President Nicolás Maduro with a "refreshing style and vision

of taking the country forward.” The *Bloomberg News* editorial board applauded him for seeking “restoration of democracy” and *The Wall Street Journal* declared him “a new democratic leader.” Meanwhile, Canada, numerous European nations, Israel, and the bloc of right-wing Latin American governments known as the Lima Group recognized Guaidó as the legitimate leader of Venezuela.



While Guaidó seemed to have materialized out of nowhere, he was, in fact, the product of more than a decade of assiduous grooming by the U.S. government’s elite regime change factories. Alongside a cadre of right-wing student activists, Guaidó was cultivated to undermine Venezuela’s socialist-oriented government, destabilize the country and one day seize power. Though he has been a minor figure in Venezuelan politics, he had spent years quietly demonstrating his worthiness in Washington’s halls of power.

“Juan Guaidó is a character that has been created for this circumstance,” Marco Teruggi, an Argentinian sociologist and leading chronicler of Venezuelan politics, told the *Grayzone*. “It’s the logic of a laboratory – Guaidó is like a

mixture of several elements that create a character who, in all honesty, oscillates between laughable and worrying.”

Diego Sequera, a Venezuelan journalist and writer for the investigative outlet, *Mision Verdad*, agreed: “Guaidó is more popular outside Venezuela than inside, especially in the elite Ivy League and Washington circles,” Sequera remarked to the *Grayzone*. “He’s a known character there, is predictably right-wing, and is considered loyal to the program.”

While Guaidó is today sold as the face of democratic restoration, he spent his career in the most violent faction of Venezuela’s most radical opposition party, positioning himself at the forefront of one destabilization campaign after another. His party has been widely discredited inside Venezuela, and is held partly responsible for fragmenting a badly weakened opposition.

““These radical leaders have no more than 20 percent in opinion polls,” wrote Luis Vicente León, Venezuela’s leading pollster. According to Leon, Guaidó’s party remains isolated because the majority of the population does not want war. “What they want is a solution.’”

But this is precisely why Guaidó was selected by Washington: he is not expected to lead Venezuela towards democracy, but to collapse a country that for the past two decades has been a bulwark of resistance to U.S. hegemony. His unlikely rise signals the culmination of a two decades-long project to destroy a robust socialist experiment.

Targeting ‘Troika of Tyranny’

Since the 1998 election of Hugo Chavez, the United States has fought to restore control over Venezuela and its vast oil reserves. Chavez's socialist programs may have redistributed the country's wealth and helped lift millions out of poverty, but they also earned him a target on his back. In 2002, Venezuela's right-wing opposition briefly ousted him with U.S. support and recognition, before the military restored his presidency following a mass popular mobilization. Throughout the administrations of U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, Chavez survived numerous assassination plots before succumbing to cancer in 2013. His successor, Nicolás Maduro, has survived three attempts on his life.

The Trump administration immediately elevated Venezuela to the top of Washington's regime change target list, branding it the leader of a "troika of tyranny." Last year, Trump's national security team attempted to recruit members of the military brass to mount a military junta, but that effort failed. According to the Venezuelan government, the U.S. was also involved in a plot codenamed Operation Constitution to capture Maduro at the Miraflores presidential palace, and another called Operation Armageddon to assassinate him at a military parade in July 2017. Just over a year later, exiled opposition leaders tried and failed to kill Maduro with drone bombs during a military parade in Caracas.

More than a decade before these intrigues, a group of right-wing opposition students were hand selected and groomed by an elite, U.S.-funded regime change training academy to topple Venezuela's government and restore the neoliberal order.

Training for Insurrection

On Oct. 5, 2005, with Chavez's popularity at its peak and his government planning sweeping socialist programs, five Venezuelan "student leaders" arrived in Belgrade, Serbia to begin training for an insurrection.

The students had arrived from Venezuela courtesy of the Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies, or CANVAS. This group is funded largely through the National Endowment for Democracy, a CIA cut-out that functions as the U.S. government's main arm of promoting regime change; and offshoots like the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. According to leaked internal emails from Stratfor, an intelligence firm known as the "shadow CIA," "[CANVAS] may have also received CIA funding and training during the 1999/2000 anti-Milosevic struggle."

CANVAS is a spinoff of Otpor, a Serbian protest group founded by Srdja Popovic in 1998 at the University of Belgrade. Otpor, which means "resistance" in Serbian, was the student group that gained international fame – and Hollywood-level promotion – by mobilizing the protests that eventually toppled Slobodan Milosevic. This small cell of regime change specialists was operating according to the theories of the late Gene Sharp, the "Clausewitz of non-violent struggle." Sharp had worked with a former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst, Col. Robert Helvey, to conceive a strategic blueprint that weaponized protest as a form of hybrid warfare, aiming it at states that resisted Washington's unipolar domination.

Otpor was supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, USAID and Sharp's Albert Einstein Institute. Sinisa Sikman, one of Otpor's main trainers, once said the group even received direct CIA funding. According to a leaked email from a Stratfor staffer, after running Milosevic out of power, "the kids who ran OTPOR grew up, got suits and designed CANVAS... or in other words an 'export-a-revolution' group that sowed the seeds for a NUMBER of color revolutions. They are still hooked into U.S. funding and basically go around the world trying to topple dictators and autocratic governments (ones that U.S. does not like)."

Stratfor revealed that CANVAS "turned its attention to Venezuela" in 2005 after training opposition movements that led pro-NATO regime change operations across Eastern Europe.

While monitoring the CANVAS training program, Stratfor outlined its insurrectionist agenda in strikingly blunt language: "Success is by no means guaranteed, and student movements are only at the beginning of what could be a years-long effort to trigger a revolution in Venezuela, but the trainers themselves are the people who cut their teeth on the 'Butcher of the Balkans.'" They've got mad skills. When you see students at five Venezuelan universities hold simultaneous demonstrations, you will know that the training is over and the real work has begun."

Generation 2007

The "real work" began two years later, in 2007, when Guaidó graduated from Andrés Bello Catholic University of Caracas. He moved to Washington, D.C., to enroll in the governance and political management program at George Washington

University under the tutelage of Venezuelan economist Luis Enrique Berrizbeitia, one of the top Latin American neoliberal economists. Berrizbeitia is a former executive director of the International Monetary Fund who spent more than a decade working in the Venezuelan energy sector under the oligarchic old regime that was ousted by Chavez.

That year, Guaidó helped lead anti-government rallies after the Venezuelan government declined to renew the license of Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV). This privately-owned station played a leading role in the 2002 coup against Hugo Chavez. RCTV helped mobilize anti-government demonstrators, falsified information blaming government supporters for acts of violence carried out by opposition members, and banned pro-government reporting amid the coup. The role of RCTV and other oligarch-owned stations in driving the failed coup attempt was chronicled in the acclaimed documentary, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.”

That same year, the students claimed credit for stymying Chavez’s constitutional referendum for a “21st century socialism” that promised “to set the legal framework for the political and social reorganization of the country, giving direct power to organized communities as a prerequisite for the development of a new economic system.”

From the protests around RCTV and the referendum, a specialized cadre of U.S.-backed class of regime change activists was born. They called themselves “Generation 2007.”

The Stratfor and CANVAS trainers of this cell identified Guaidó’s ally – a street organizer named Yon Goicoechea – as

a “key factor” in defeating the constitutional referendum. The following year, Goicochea was rewarded for his efforts with the Cato Institute’s Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty, along with a \$500,000 prize, which he promptly invested into building his own Liberty First (Primero Justicia) political network.

Friedman, of course, was the godfather of the notorious neoliberal Chicago Boys who were imported into Chile by dictatorial junta leader Augusto Pinochet to implement policies of radical “shock doctrine”-style fiscal austerity. And the Cato Institute is the libertarian Washington, D.C.-based think tank founded by the Koch brothers, two top Republican Party donors who have become aggressive supporters of the right-wing across Latin America.

WikiLeaks published a 2007 email that American ambassador to Venezuela William Brownfield sent to the State Department, National Security Council and Department of Defense Southern Command praising “Generation of ’07” for having “forced the Venezuelan president, accustomed to setting the political agenda, to (over)react.” Among the “emerging leaders” Brownfield identified were Freddy Guevara and Yon Goicoechea. He applauded the latter figure as “one of the students’ most articulate defenders of civil liberties.”

Flush with cash from libertarian oligarchs and U.S. government soft power outfits, the radical Venezuelan cadre took their Otpor tactics to the streets, along with a version of the group’s logo, as seen below:



Spinning Anti-Chavez Unrest

In 2009, the Generation 2007 youth activists staged their most provocative demonstration yet, dropping their pants on public roads and aping the outrageous guerrilla theater tactics outlined by Gene Sharp in his regime change manuals. The protesters had mobilized against the arrest of an ally from another newfangled youth group called JAVU. This far-right group “gathered funds from a variety of U.S. government sources, which allowed it to gain notoriety quickly as the hardline wing of opposition street movements,” according to academic George Ciccariello-Maher’s book, “Building the Commune.”

While video of the protest is not available, many Venezuelans have identified Guaidó as one of its key participants. While the allegation is unconfirmed, it is certainly plausible; the bare-buttocks protesters were

members of the Generation 2007 inner core that Guaidó belonged to, and were clad in their trademark Resistencia! Venezuela t-shirts, as seen below:



That year, Guaidó exposed himself to the public in another way, founding a political party to capture the anti-Chavez energy his Generation 2007 had cultivated. Called Popular Will, it was led by Leopoldo López, a Princeton-educated right-wing firebrand heavily involved in National Endowment for Democracy programs and elected as the mayor of a district in Caracas that was one of the wealthiest in the country. Lopez was a portrait of Venezuelan aristocracy, directly descended from his country's first president. He was also the first cousin of Thor Halvorssen, founder of the U.S.-based Human Rights Foundation that functions as a de facto publicity shop for U.S.-backed anti-government activists in countries targeted by Washington for regime change.

Though Lopez's interests aligned neatly with Washington's, U.S. diplomatic cables published by *WikiLeaks* highlighted the fanatical tendencies that would ultimately lead to Popular Will's marginalization. One cable identified Lopez

as “a divisive figure within the opposition... often described as arrogant, vindictive, and power-hungry.” Others highlighted his obsession with street confrontations and his “uncompromising approach” as a source of tension with other opposition leaders who prioritized unity and participation in the country’s democratic institutions.

By 2010, Popular Will and its foreign backers moved to exploit the worst drought to hit Venezuela in decades. Massive electricity shortages had struck the country due the dearth of water, which was needed to power hydroelectric plants. A global economic recession and declining oil prices compounded the crisis, driving public discontentment.

Stratfor and CANVAS – key advisors of Guaidó and his anti-government cadre – devised a shockingly cynical [plan](#) to drive a dagger through the heart of the Bolivarian revolution. The scheme hinged on a 70 percent collapse of the country’s electrical system by as early as April 2010.

“This could be the watershed event, as there is little that Chavez can do to protect the poor from the failure of that system,” the Stratfor internal memo declared. “This would likely have the impact of galvanizing public unrest in a way that no opposition group could ever hope to generate. At that point in time, an opposition group would be best served to take advantage of the situation and spin it against Chavez and towards their needs.”

By this point, the Venezuelan opposition was receiving a staggering \$40-50 million a year from U.S. government organizations like USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, according to [a report](#) by the Spanish think tank,

the FRIDE Institute. It also had massive wealth to draw on from its own accounts, which were mostly outside the country.

While the scenario envisioned by Statfor did not come to fruition, the Popular Will party activists and their allies cast aside any pretense of non-violence and joined a radical plan to destabilize the country.

Violent Destabilization

In November 2010, according to emails obtained by Venezuelan security services and presented by former Justice Minister Miguel Rodríguez Torres, Guaidó, Goicoechea, and several other student activists attended a secret five-day training at the Fiesta Mexicana hotel in Mexico City. The sessions were run by Otpor, the Belgrade-based regime change trainers backed by the U.S. government. The meeting had reportedly received the blessing of Otto Reich, a fanatically anti-Castro Cuban exile working in George W. Bush's Department of State, and the right-wing former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe.

At the Fiesta Mexicana hotel, the emails stated, Guaidó and his fellow activists hatched a plan to overthrow President Hugo Chavez by generating chaos through protracted spasms of street violence.

Three petroleum industry figureheads – Gustavo Torrar, Eligio Cedeño and Pedro Burelli – allegedly covered the \$52,000 tab to hold the meeting. Torrar is a self-described “human rights activist” and “intellectual” whose younger brother Reynaldo Tovar Arroyo is the representative in Venezuela of the private Mexican oil and gas company

Petroquímica del Golfo, which holds a contract with the Venezuelan state.

Cedeño, for his part, is a fugitive Venezuelan businessman who claimed asylum in the United States, and Pedro Burelli a former JP Morgan executive and the former director of Venezuela's national oil company, Petroleum of Venezuela (PDVSA). He left PDVSA in 1998 as Hugo Chavez took power and is on the advisory committee of Georgetown University's Latin America leadership program.

Burelli insisted that the emails detailing his participation had been fabricated and even hired a private investigator to prove it. The investigator declared that Google's records showed the emails alleged to be his were never transmitted.

Yet today Burelli makes no secret of his desire to see Venezuela's current president, Nicolás Maduro, deposed – and even dragged through the streets and sodomized with a bayonet, as Libyan leader Moammar Qaddafi was by NATO-backed militiamen.

.@NicolasMaduro, jamas me has hecho caso. Me has fustigado/perseguido como @chavezcandanga jamás osó. Óyeme, tienes sólo dos opciones en las próximas 24 horas:

1. Como Noriega: pagar pena por narcotráfico y luego a @IntlCrimCourt La Haya por DDHH.
2. 0 a la Gaddafi.

Escoge ya! pic.twitter.com/pMksCEXEmY

– Pedro Mario Burelli (@pburelli) [January 17, 2019](#)

The alleged Fiesta Mexicana plot flowed into another

destabilization plan revealed in a series of documents produced by the Venezuelan government. In May 2014, Caracas released documents detailing an assassination plot against President Nicolás Maduro. The leaks identified the Miami-based Maria Corina Machado as a leader of the scheme. A hardliner with a penchant for extreme rhetoric, Machado has functioned as an international liaison for the opposition, visiting President George W. Bush in 2005.

“I think it is time to gather efforts; make the necessary calls, and obtain financing to annihilate Maduro and the rest will fall apart,” Machado wrote in an email to former Venezuelan diplomat Diego Arria in 2014.

In another email, Machado claimed that the violent plot had the blessing of U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker. “I have already made up my mind and this fight will continue until this regime is overthrown and we deliver to our friends in the world. If I went to San Cristobal and exposed myself before the OAS, I fear nothing. Kevin Whitaker has already reconfirmed his support and he pointed out the new steps. We have a checkbook stronger than the regime’s to break the international security ring.”

Guaidó Heads to Barricades

That February, student demonstrators acting as shock troops for the exiled oligarchy erected violent barricades across the country, turning opposition-controlled quarters into violent fortresses known as *guarimbas*. While international media portrayed the upheaval as a spontaneous protest against Maduro’s iron-fisted rule, there was ample evidence that Popular Will was orchestrating the show.

“None of the protesters at the universities wore their university t-shirts, they all wore Popular Will or Justice First t-shirts,” a *guarimba* participant said at the time. “They might have been student groups, but the student councils are affiliated to the political opposition parties and they are accountable to them.”

Asked who the ringleaders were, the *guarimba* participant said, “Well if I am totally honest, those guys are legislators now.”

Around 43 were killed during the 2014 *guarimbas*. Three years later, they erupted again, causing mass destruction of public infrastructure, the murder of government supporters, and the deaths of 126 people, many of whom were Chavistas. In several cases, supporters of the government were burned alive by armed gangs.

Guaidó was directly involved in the 2014 *guarimbas*. In fact, he tweeted video showing himself clad in a helmet and gas mask, surrounded by masked and armed elements that had shut down a highway that were engaging in a violent clash with the police. Alluding to his participation in Generation 2007, he proclaimed, “I remember in 2007, we proclaimed, ‘Students!’ Now, we shout, ‘Resistance! Resistance!’”

Guaidó has deleted the tweet, demonstrating apparent concern for his image as a champion of democracy.

On Feb. 12, 2014, during the height of that year’s *guarimbas*, Guaidó joined Lopez on stage at a rally of Popular Will and Justice First. During a lengthy diatribe against the government, Lopez urged the crowd to

march to the office of Attorney General Luisa Ortega Diaz. Soon after, Diaz's office came under attack by armed gangs who attempted to burn it to the ground. She denounced what she called "planned and premeditated violence."

In a televised appearance in 2016, Guaidó dismissed deaths resulting from *guayas* – a *guarimba* tactic involving stretching steel wire across a roadway in order to injure or kill motorcyclists – as a "myth." His comments whitewashed a deadly tactic that had killed unarmed civilians like Santiago Pedroza and decapitated a man named Elvis Durán, among many others.

This callous disregard for human life would define his Popular Will party in the eyes of much of the public, including many opponents of Maduro.

Cracking Down on Popular Will

As violence and political polarization escalated across the country, the government began to act against the Popular Will leaders who helped stoke it.

Freddy Guevara, the National Assembly vice-president and second in command of Popular Will, was a principal leader in the 2017 street riots. Facing a trial for his role in the violence, Guevara took shelter in the Chilean embassy, where he remains.

Lester Toledo, a Popular Will legislator from the state of Zulia, was wanted by the Venezuelan government in September 2016 on charges of financing terrorism and plotting assassinations. The plans were said to be made with former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe. Toledo

escaped Venezuela and went on several speaking tours with Human Rights Watch, the U.S. government-backed Freedom House, the Spanish Congress and European Parliament.

Carlos Graffe, another Otpor-trained Generation 2007 member who led Popular Will, was arrested in July 2017. According to police, he was in possession of a bag filled with nails, C4 explosives and a detonator. He was released on Dec. 27, 2017.

Leopoldo Lopez, the longtime Popular Will leader, is today under house arrest, accused of a key role in the deaths of 13 people during the *guarimbas* in 2014. Amnesty International lauded Lopez as a “prisoner of conscience” and slammed his transfer from prison to house as “not good enough.” Meanwhile, family members of *guarimba* victims introduced a petition for more charges against Lopez.

Goicoechea, the Koch Brothers’ poster boy and U.S.-backed founder of Justice First, was arrested in 2016 by security forces who claimed they found found a kilo of explosives in his vehicle. In a *New York Times* op-ed, Goicoechea protested the charges as “trumped-up” and claimed he had been imprisoned simply for his “dream of a democratic society, free of Communism.” He was freed in November 2017.

Hoy, en Caricuao. Llevo 15 años trabajando con @jguaido. Confío en él. Conozco la constancia y la inteligencia con la que se ha construido a sí mismo. Está haciendo las cosas con bondad, pero sin ingenuidad. Hay una posibilidad abierta hacia la libertad. pic.twitter.com/Lidm8y5RTX

– Yon Goicoechea (@YonGoicoechea) January 20, 2019

David Smolansky, also a member of the original Otpor-trained Generation 2007, became Venezuela's youngest-ever mayor when he was elected in 2013 in the affluent suburb of El Hatillo. But he was stripped of his position and sentenced to 15 months in prison by the Supreme Court after it found him culpable of stirring the violent *guarimbas*.

Facing arrest, Smolansky shaved his beard, donned sunglasses and slipped into Brazil disguised as a priest with a Bible in hand and rosary around his neck. He now lives in Washington, D.C., where he was hand picked by Secretary of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro to lead the working group on the Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis.

This July 26, Smolansky held what he called a "cordial reunion" with Elliot Abrams, the convicted Iran-Contra felon installed by Trump as special U.S. envoy to Venezuela. Abrams is notorious for overseeing the U.S. covert policy of arming right-wing death squads during the 1980s in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. His lead role in the Venezuelan coup has stoked fears that another blood-drenched proxy war might be on the way.

Cordial reunión en la ONU con Elliott Abrams, enviado especial del gobierno de EEUU para Venezuela. Reiteramos que la prioridad para el gobierno interino que preside @jguaido es la asistencia humanitaria para millones de venezolanos que sufren de la falta de comida y medicinas. pic.twitter.com/vHfktVKgV4

– David Smolansky (@dsmolansky) [January 26, 2019](#)

Four days earlier, **Machado** rumbled another violent threat against Maduro, declaring that if he "wants to save his life, he should understand that his time is up."

Pawn in Their Game

The collapse of Popular Will under the weight of the violent campaign of destabilization it ran alienated large sectors of the public and wound much of its leadership up in exile or in custody. Guaidó had remained a relatively minor figure, having spent most of his nine-year career in the National Assembly as an alternate deputy. Hailing from one of Venezuela's least populous states, Guaidó came in second place during the 2015 parliamentary elections, winning just 26 percent of votes cast in order to secure his place in the National Assembly. Indeed, his bottom may have been better known than his face.

Guaidó is known as the president of the opposition-dominated National Assembly, but he was never elected to the position. The four opposition parties that comprised the Assembly's Democratic Unity Table had decided to establish a rotating presidency. Popular Will's turn was on the way, but its founder, Lopez, was under house arrest. Meanwhile, his second-in-charge, Guevara, had taken refuge in the Chilean embassy. A figure named Juan Andrés Mejía would have been next in line but for reasons that are only now clear, Juan Guaido was selected.

"There is a class reasoning that explains Guaidó's rise," Sequera, the Venezuelan analyst, observed. "Mejía is high class, studied at one of the most expensive private universities in Venezuela, and could not be easily marketed to the public the way Guaidó could. For one, Guaidó has common *mestizo* features like most Venezuelans do, and seems more like a man of the people. Also, he had not been overexposed in the media, so he could be built up into

pretty much anything.”

In December 2018, Guaidó sneaked across the border and junketed to Washington, Colombia and Brazil to coordinate the plan to hold mass demonstrations during the inauguration of President Maduro. The night before Maduro’s swearing-in ceremony, both Vice President Mike Pence and Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland called Guaidó to affirm their support.

A week later, Sen. Marco Rubio, Sen. Rick Scott and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart – all lawmakers from the Florida base of the right-wing Cuban exile lobby – joined President Trump and Vice President Pence at the White House. At their request, Trump agreed that if Guaidó declared himself president, he would back him.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met personally with Guaidó on Jan. 10, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. However, Pompeo could not pronounce Guaidó’s name when he mentioned him in a press briefing on Jan. 25, referring to him as “Juan Guido.”

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo just called the figure Washington is attempting to install as Venezuelan President "Juan *Guido*" – as in the racist term for Italians. America's top diplomat didn't even bother to learn how to pronounce his puppet's name. pic.twitter.com/HsanZXuSPR

– Dan Cohen (@dancohen3000) [January 25, 2019](#)

By Jan. 11, Guaidó’s *Wikipedia* page had been edited 37 times, highlighting the struggle to shape the image of a previously anonymous figure who was now a tableau for Washington’s regime change ambitions. In the end, editorial

oversight of his page was handed over to *Wikipedia's* elite council of "librarians," who pronounced him the "contested" president of Venezuela.

Guaidó might have been an obscure figure, but his combination of radicalism and opportunism satisfied Washington's needs. "That internal piece was missing," a Trump administration official said of Guaidó. "He was the piece we needed for our strategy to be coherent and complete."

"For the first time," Brownfield, the former American ambassador to Venezuela, gushed to *The New York Times*, "you have an opposition leader who is clearly signaling to the armed forces and to law enforcement that he wants to keep them on the side of the angels and with the good guys."

But Guaidó's Popular Will party formed the shock troops of the *guarimbas* that caused the deaths of police officers and common citizens alike. He had even boasted of his own participation in street riots. And now, to win the hearts and minds of the military and police, Guaido had to erase this blood-soaked history.

On Jan. 21, a day before the coup began in earnest, Guaidó's wife delivered a video address calling on the military to rise up against Maduro. Her performance was wooden and uninspiring, underscoring her husband's limited political prospects.

At a press conference before supporters four days later, Guaidó announced his solution to the crisis: "Authorize a humanitarian intervention!"

While he waits on direct assistance, Guaidó remains what he has always been – a pet project of cynical outside forces. “It doesn’t matter if he crashes and burns after all these misadventures,” Sequera said of the coup figurehead. “To the Americans, he is expendable.”

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including best-selling [“Republican Gomorrah,”](#) [“Goliath,”](#) [“The Fifty One Day War”](#), and [“The Management of Savagery.”](#) He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports, and several documentaries, including [“Killing Gaza.”](#) Blumenthal founded *The Grayzone* in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America’s state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.

[Dan Cohen](#) is a journalist and filmmaker. He has produced widely distributed video reports and print dispatches from across Israel-Palestine. Dan is a correspondent at RT America and tweets at [@DanCohen3000](#). See [his website](#) for more information.

America’s Deceptive Model for Aggression

Since NATO’s 1999 war on Serbia, U.S. officials have followed a script demonizing targeted foreign leaders, calling ultimatums “diplomacy,” lying about “war as a last resort” and selling aggression as humanitarianism, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

Across the political spectrum, U.S. leaders insist that they will only go to war “as a last resort.” They want us to believe that they will try every peaceful means to resolve differences with other countries before resorting to war. But if those “peaceful means” mean only ultimatums that are unacceptable to the target country, then U.S. leaders are simply going through a diplomatic charade

before going to war.

In such a case, “war as a last resort” refers only to the means of achieving a goal, not to the rights or wrongs of the goal itself. If the underlying purpose is to impose the will of the U.S. government on another country or society, then “war as a last resort” amounts to an illegal threat of war to compel a country to submit to U.S. demands, not a commitment to peace or to the rule of law.

As I wrote last February, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton uses the term “diplomacy” to mean precisely this kind of brinkmanship, which creates a pretext for war if the other side won’t back down and is quite different from diplomacy to resolve international disputes peacefully, as required by the United Nations Charter and customary international law.

When Clinton told a televised “national security” forum that she “view(s) force as a last resort, not a first choice,” she was echoing what she and Sen. Bernie Sanders both said in Democratic Party debates. But in Clinton’s case, using the phrase “last resort” in this way is a clever way to reassure her listeners without actually modifying her hawkish and coercive approach to international relations. By contrast, Sanders was on firmer ground since he voted against two wars on Iraq (in 1990 and 2002), but did vote for war on Yugoslavia in 1999, a vote he still defends.

In negotiations at Rambouillet, France, in 1999, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave Yugoslavia only a devil’s choice between agreeing to a NATO military occupation (of all its remaining territory, not just Kosovo) and a NATO assault. When President Slobodan Milosevic refused these impossible terms, the West blamed him for triggering a U.S.-led war that was neither a war of self-defense nor a U.N.-backed collective security operation. In other words, it was a war of aggression by the U.S. and NATO against a largely defenseless nation.

But Milosevic had been so thoroughly demonized that few Americans seriously considered Yugoslavia’s position. Today, even fewer Americans know that the man our leaders tagged as a “new Hitler” and the “Butcher of the Balkans” was eventually exonerated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), ten years after he died of a heart attack in a prison cell at The Hague.

Few also remember that the 1,380-member-strong Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was withdrawn six days before NATO began its aerial bombardment.

Pascal Neuffer, a Swiss member of the KVM, said, “The situation on the ground on the eve of the bombing did not justify a military intervention. We could

certainly have continued our work. And the explanations given in the press, saying the mission was compromised by Serb threats, did not correspond to what I saw. Let's say rather that we were evacuated because NATO had decided to bomb."

The political stage was set for NATO's assault on Yugoslavia by a battle in a village called Racak two months earlier. Yugoslav forces attacked CIA-backed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters who had terrorized the area and ambushed police patrols. The head of the KVM, former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador William Walker, arrived in Racak the next day and misreported the battle to uncritical Western media as a massacre of civilians by Serb forces.

But autopsies conducted by Yugoslav, Belarusian and Finnish medical examiners contradicted Walker's account. The dead did not appear to be victims of summary execution. They died from a variety of gunshot wounds, as in any firefight; only one of 40 corpses examined was shot at close range; and there were only one woman and one teenage boy among the otherwise adult male bodies.

While the Western media largely parroted Walker's false account, and the confirmation of the autopsy results by the Finnish medical examiners was only partially made public in a journal article two years later, two French reporters in Kosovo immediately challenged Walker's narrative based on Associated Press video footage of the battle and other anomalies.

Questioning a Massacre

Christophe Chatelet's article in *Le Monde* was headlined, "Were the dead in Racak really massacred in cold blood?" Describing how the KLA who reoccupied the village the evening after the battle appeared to have staged the scene to look like the result of a massacre, *Le Figaro's* veteran Yugoslavia correspondent Renaud Girard presciently concluded his story on Racak with a rhetorical question, "did the KLA seek to transform a military defeat into a political victory?"

Racak was the "atrocities" needed by President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Albright to rally the media, the public and otherwise progressive Members of Congress like Bernie Sanders to support a war of aggression. The U.S. and its allies then dropped 23,000 bombs and missiles on civilian as well as military targets across Yugoslavia, killing thousands of civilians and striking hospitals, schools, power stations, private homes, a TV station and the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

Kosovo was annexed as a NATO protectorate, and Hashim Thaci, the KLA leader and organized crime figure whom Albright had chosen over Kosovo's political leaders to head its delegation at Rambouillet, is now the president of a new nation that

has struggled for stability and international recognition.

But Thaci's days in the sun may be numbered – Le Figaro reported in March that an international court is preparing new charges against him. One shocking charge, already well documented by former ICTY prosecutor Carla Del Ponte and an investigation by the Council of Europe, is that Thaci was the head of a criminal gang that exploited the chaos of Kosovo under NATO bombing to murder up to 500 Serbian and Roma prisoners so that they could harvest their internal organs to sell on the international transplant market.

But the Kosovo Model has served Western warmongers well. The exaggeration or fabrication of atrocities by U.S. enemies and the blind eye turned to atrocities by U.S. allies are now standard fare whenever our leaders promote some new military intervention, and the subservient Western mainstream media remains reliable allies in these deceptions. If a foreign leader has been sufficiently demonized by Western propaganda, even baseless predictions of unlikely atrocities can serve as a *casus belli*, as was the case in Libya in 2011.

The U.K. parliament's foreign affairs committee recently concluded an inquiry into the Western destruction of Libya. One of its key findings was that the British government "failed to identify that the threat to civilians was overstated," because it "selectively took elements of Gaddafi's rhetoric at face value."

Of course, it was Western governments themselves who "overstated" the threat to civilians in Benghazi from Libyan government forces. The cherry-picking of Colonel Gaddafi's statements ignored his offer of amnesty to rebels who laid down their arms. There were also no massacres in other towns recaptured by Libyan government forces.

The committee also concluded that the emergence of "militant extremist groups" among the NATO-backed rebels was entirely predictable; and that the U.K. "drifted into an opportunistic policy of regime change" that "was not underpinned by a strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya."

Yet, just last April in a Democratic presidential debate, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was still repeating the same propaganda line, justifying the U.S.-supported "regime change" on the grounds that Gaddafi was a "genocidal" dictator.

If only the world had been presented with an honest account of our country's international crimes against Yugoslavia in 1999, the worldwide civil society resistance to Western aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya would have been strengthened by broader awareness of the dangers

of U.S. militarism and the deceptive role of Western propaganda in setting the stage for war.

We'll never know for sure, but that might just have tipped the balance in favor of those who insisted that only the guilty should be punished for the crimes of 9/11, not millions of innocent people in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

Massive Military Spending

Politicians and candidates keep telling us that the key to our safety and security lies in the strength of the U.S. military, which must therefore always be two or three times larger and more expensive than those of all its potential enemies combined. The U.S. today spends more on its military than the sum of our nine closest military competitors (most of whom are U.S. allies in any case) and more than the total military spending of 182 less militarized countries combined.

Despite the chaos unleashed by decades of military adventurism, U.S. leaders seem blissfully unaware that this lop-sided military imbalance is undermining global security and stability instead of improving it. After President George W. Bush oversaw the most expensive unilateral arms build-up in history, President Obama has achieved what would have seemed impossible to most Americans in 2008 – he has actually outspent Bush.

The reason that this imbalance is so dangerous lies in the very nature of military force. Weapons of war are designed to wound, maim or kill people, not to help them in any way. Bombs and missiles do not rebuild buildings, cities or societies – they only damage or destroy them.

The term “regime change” is a misnomer. Overwhelming military force does not “change” regimes – it just destroys them. We should understand by now that when our leaders threaten to “change” a regime by military force, that will replace it only with rubble, graveyards, chaos, corruption and poverty.

But this huge imbalance in military forces and expenditures creates the dangerous illusion that our leaders can threaten or use military force to reshape the world as they see fit, to solve any problem or achieve any geostrategic goal. Corporate media, from Hollywood to the *New York Times*, spin this military madness into a full-fledged fantasy in which a country that doesn't even provide its own people with basic human rights like healthcare, housing or a subsistence living, and instead manages poverty with aggressive, militarized policing and mass incarceration, is cast as a global warrior for democracy and human rights.

U.S. leaders saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as an ideological victory that

opened doors to expand the U.S.-based capitalist economic system to the four corners of the world. They have bullied and bribed compliant governments to join U.S.-led trade and investment schemes that prioritize concentration of wealth and power over people and the environment.

Countries that resist integration into this neoliberal system or try to develop alternative models are subject to withering propaganda, crippling sanctions, U.S.-backed coups and, in the “last resort,” to the threat and catastrophic use of military force.

This strategy and the role of the U.S. military in enforcing it have now been explicitly detailed in U.S. policy documents for 25 years, beginning with the original version of the Pentagon’s “Defense Planning Guidance” that was leaked to the *New York Times* in 1992. This U.S. policy of illegal, unilateral use of force to “protect vital U.S. interests,” explicitly defined to include “uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources,” was formally unveiled to the world in the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2002 National Security Strategy.

The late Sen. Edward Kennedy condemned the latter as “a call for 21st century American imperialism that no other country can or should accept.” But there is no hint that the spiral of violence and chaos our leaders have unleashed across the world has led them to rethink their commitment to the illegal threat and use of military force as an instrument of U.S. policy.

What we need from our political leaders and candidates is not the threat of more “last resort” wars on the Kosovo model, but a new commitment to peace and international law, most importantly to the U.N. Charter’s prohibition on the threat or use of military force.

Until then, we should interpret deceptive formulations like “force as a last resort” as meaning that our leaders remain committed to an endless state of war that they have no idea how to contain or control. If humanity and civilization are to survive, we must force them to consider a very different “last resort”: peace, disarmament and a rule of law that governs the rich and powerful as well as the poor and downtrodden.

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*.

Television Wars (Crossing a Line in Serbia)

From the Archive: President Bill Clinton's bombardment of Serbia in 1999 marked a grim turn in the practice of "information warfare," with a lethal NATO attack targeting a Serb TV station which criticized the war, observed war correspondent Don North.

By Don North (Originally published on May 4, 1999)

On April 23, 1999, at 2:06 a.m. Belgrade time, as NATO was preparing for its 50th anniversary celebration in Washington D.C., two cruise missiles struck the Radio Televizija Srbija (SRT) headquarters in Belgrade.

About 150 civilian journalists, producers, technicians and janitors were working the nightshift when the missiles hit with what NATO called "surgical precision."

The building's four stories collapsed to the ground, sandwiching offices, television equipment, transmitters and people into a pile of smoldering rubble only 15 feet high.

TV screens throughout Serbia went blank in the middle of a Houston, Texas, TV station's interview with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. Firemen rushed to the scene to remove the injured. One technician trapped by tons of concrete could be extracted only by the amputation of both legs.

As the smoke and dust settled, at least 16 people were confirmed dead, another 19 injured and others were missing and feared buried in the rubble. But NATO's premeditated attack on a civilian media target did little to drive SRT off the air.

By daylight, alternate transmitters had been activated and Serb TV was back on the air again. That morning, a blond woman was reading the morning news and calmly placed the devastation of SRT several minutes down the lineup of top news stories.

Few foreign journalists had believed that NATO actually would bomb SRT. But the Serbs did – and were prepared.

The Clinton administration and NATO made no apologies for the civilian dead. "Serb TV is as much a part of Milosevic's murder machine as his military," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon. "The media is one of the pillars of Milosevic's power machine. It is right up there with security forces and the

military.”

A Quiet Acceptance

The reaction to the SRT bombing was muted within many U.S. news organizations. Elsewhere, however, journalists and humanitarian organizations, including Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, condemned the strike against SRT.

Notable was a terse letter to NATO’s Secretary General Javier Solana from the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists: “NATO’s decision to target civilian broadcast facilities not only increases the danger for reporters now working in Yugoslavia but permanently jeopardizes all journalists as noncombatants in international conflicts as provided for in the Geneva Conventions. It represents an apparent change in NATO policy only days after your spokesman Jamie Shea offered assurances that civilian targets would be avoided.”

From Belgrade, the Association of Independent Electronic Media in Yugoslavia, a leading voice of Serbian anti-Milosevic sentiment, also condemned the attack. “History has shown that no form of repression, particularly the organized and premeditated murder of journalists, can prevent the flow of information, nor can it prevent the public from choosing its own sources of information,” the groups said.

The *New York Times* quoted a senior Serb journalist saying he thought NATO had crossed an ambiguous moral line: “The people who were there were just doing their jobs. They have no influence on the content or on Milosevic. I hate Serb television. [But] we can differentiate between big lies and little ones.” [NYT, April 24, 1999]

Yugoslav officials said NATO was trying to destroy the free marketplace of ideas and insure that just one side’s “propaganda” could be disseminated.

Offending NATO

There is no doubt that SRT was a propaganda organ for Milosevic and his regime. Since the NATO bombing campaign began on March 24, 1999, SRT also had deeply offended NATO’s sensibilities with its graphics.

The NATO symbol was regularly shown turning into a Nazi swastika and Madeleine Albright grew Dracula teeth in front of burning buildings.

While highlighting the suffering from NATO air attacks, SRT ignored the tens of thousands of Albanian refugees fleeing Kosovo with their tales of rape and

execution. SRT repeatedly showed video clips of old scenes: Milosevic meeting Serbian church leaders, Russian envoys and the Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova.

But the station also broadcast to the world dramatic images of destruction caused by the NATO bombing and gave credible estimates of civilian casualties. SRT scooped the world press when it disclosed that a NATO aircraft had killed scores of Kosovar refugees in a bombing attack.

After SRT broadcast the scenes of the civilian carnage, NATO flip-flopped through the next 24-hour news cycle. NATO's first response was: "We didn't do it, the Serbs did it." That changed to "we did bomb the column, but the Serbs killed the refugees." Finally, NATO accepted fault and apologized.

Still, NATO's glib cockney spokesman, Jamie Shea, pushed the edges of Orwellian doublespeak when he declared that the pilot had "dropped his bombs in good faith."

Later, NATO played an audio-tape supposedly of the pilot in question. But it turned out that the recorded pilot was involved in a completely different operation. The real tape was withheld.

The SRT bombing, however, was no mistake. Internally, NATO had been debating for weeks whether or not to destroy Serb television.

Shea even suggested that the network might be spared if it would begin broadcasting at least six hours of Western news reports reflecting NATO's views. Ironically, SRT had been broadcasting many of NATO's pronouncements, albeit focusing on the misstatements and contradictions.

Still, though the bombing of SRT may have been aimed at the Milosevic propaganda machine, it also set back American and other foreign TV efforts to document the siege of Belgrade. Most of the video broadcast on international TV showing the results of bombing raids was obtained from SRT.

Controlling Information

Even before the SRT attack, NATO's struggle to control the information flow had riled many leading Western media outlets.

On April 9, 1999, editors and executives of seven major U.S. news organizations – including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and CNN – protested to Defense Secretary William Cohen and urged him to loosen controls on information about the air strikes.

"Detailed information about the allied operation is vital to an informed public

discussion of this matter of national interest,” the letter said. “On many days, the state-controlled Yugoslav media has been more specific about NATO targets than the United States or NATO.”

Historically, of course, the U.S. military has always been uncomfortable with American journalists reporting from behind enemy lines. Many senior U.S. officers are veterans of the Vietnam War and believe that American journalists should tailor their reporting to support the cause.

In that vein, Harrison Salisbury, the famous war correspondent for The New York Times was hailed for his reporting from the siege of Leningrad in World War II, when the Soviet Union was allied with the United States.

But when Salisbury became the first correspondent from a major U.S. newspaper to report from Hanoi during the Vietnam War, he was denounced as disloyal. In December 1966, Salisbury wrote, “Whatever the explanation, one can see United States planes are dropping an enormous weight of explosives on purely civilian targets.” His work earned him the nickname “Ho Chi Salisbury” at the Pentagon.

CNN’s Peter Arnett smuggled a satellite phone into Baghdad and reported live during the Persian Gulf War. His stories included moving first-person accounts of civilian targets destroyed by U.S. air attacks. In Washington, Arnett was subjected to insults as traitorous “Baghdad Pete.”

Sparing Americans

Some similar tensions – though not as severe – have surfaced in the current war for Kosovo. In the case of the SRT attack, however, U.S. officials were careful not to worsen relations with the American news media by accidentally killing U.S. correspondents.

In mid-April, about a week before the cruise missiles were launched, the White House reportedly tipped off the CNN brass about the impending attack of SRT headquarters. CNN bosses called Belgrade and ordered CNN’s people out of the SRT building where they had been preparing TV reports for a month.

Other reporters, however, did not get the word, or chose not to believe it. *The London Independent’s* Robert Fisk, an intrepid Western reporter, said he was invited to the doomed building for coffee and orange juice by Goran Matic, a Serb government official. Matic was convinced that the TV studios were next on NATO’s target list.

“Yet, oddly, we didn’t take him seriously,” Fisk reported. “Even when the air raid siren sounded, I stayed for another coffee. ... Surely NATO wouldn’t waste its bombs on this tiresome station with its third-rate propaganda and old

movies, let alone kill its staff. Once you kill people because you don't like what they say, you change the rules of war."

The content of SRT broadcasts also was more complicated than NATO has asserted.

Besides serving as a Serb government voice, SRT was a center of cultural identity for the Serb nation. With the destruction of SRT headquarters, thousands of tapes and films have now been crushed to rubble, videos that once helped tell the Serbs and their children who they are – and provide some small comfort in their difficult lives.

Among the tapes smashed and burned was a program that I produced called "Servus, Adieu, Shalom," a documentary tracing the long history of Viennese Jews, their persecution, their suffering in the Holocaust and their community's resurgence in recent years.

The film was my donation to the UNESCO video bank. It was translated into the Serb language and distributed by UNESCO to SRT and other Balkan TV stations strapped for funds to buy quality programs.

My tape was being used in Belgrade as part of international efforts to encourage the region's ethnic groups to overcome their historic hatreds.

There is also the question whether NATO's briefings, aired live by CNN and other Western all-news networks, constitute propaganda as dubious as what appeared on SRT. On April 20, 1999, for instance, Shea reported that ethnic Albanian boys were forced to give blood for Serb casualties.

Though highly inflammatory, the allegation was made without attribution and without verifiable details. On April 22, Serbian Health Minister Leposava Milicevic denied Shea's report, and Shea did not respond.

The mix of NATO propaganda and the selection of Serb targets also may represent a broader psychological warfare campaign against the Serb people. Gen. Wesley Clark, the American NATO commander, announced that NATO was seeking targets to "see to it that the morale of the people in Serbia continues to erode."

Since the April 23 bombing, SRT transmissions have jumped from one site to another in hopes of avoiding the next bombs. Now, high on NATO's target list is Politico Television, another outlet of Milosevic's power structure in downtown Belgrade.

The London Guardian interviewed a 29-year-old tape editor, Vena Ducic, who was working the nightshift there along with about 100 other employees. "I am terrified," Ducic said. "But I have two boys, so if I give up my job what do we

do tomorrow?"

Beyond breaking the Serbs' will, however, the attack on SRT was a blow to the world's ability to view unfettered information, even when it is interspersed with propaganda.

Paul Scott Mowrer, a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* during World War I, understood the need for a maximum flow of news at a time when human lives are in the balance. He wrote: "In this nation of ours, the final political decisions rest with the people. And the people, so that they may make up their minds, must be given the facts, even in time of war, or perhaps, especially in time of war."

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

The Bogus 'Humanitarian' War on Serbia

NATO's war on Serbia in 1999 was the template for other "humanitarian" wars – in Iraq, Libya and now Syria – but it wasn't "news" when the Serbian leader was cleared, notes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

The exoneration of a man accused of the worst of crimes, genocide, made no headlines. Neither the BBC nor CNN covered it. The Guardian allowed a brief commentary. Such a rare official admission was buried or suppressed, understandably. It would explain too much about how the rulers of the world rule.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague has quietly cleared the late Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, of war crimes committed during the 1992-95 Bosnian war, including the massacre at Srebrenica.

Far from conspiring with the convicted Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, Milosevic actually "condemned ethnic cleansing," opposed Karadzic and tried to stop the war that dismembered Yugoslavia. Buried near the end of a 2,590-page judgment on Karadzic last February, this truth further demolishes the propaganda that justified NATO's illegal onslaught on Serbia in 1999.

Milosevic died of a heart attack in 2006, alone in his cell in The Hague, during

what amounted to a bogus trial by an American-invented “international tribunal.” Denied heart surgery that might have saved his life, his condition worsened and was monitored and kept secret by U.S. officials, as WikiLeaks has since revealed.

Milosevic was the victim of war propaganda that today runs like a torrent across our screens and newspapers and beckons great danger for us all. He was the prototype demon, vilified by the Western media as the “butcher of the Balkans” who was responsible for “genocide,” especially in the secessionist Yugoslav province of Kosovo. Prime Minister Tony Blair said so, invoked the Holocaust and demanded action against “this new Hitler.”

Exaggerating the Death Toll

David Scheffer, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes, declared that as many as “225,000 ethnic Albanian men aged between 14 and 59” may have been murdered by Milosevic’s forces.

This was the justification for NATO’s bombing, led by Bill Clinton and Blair, that killed hundreds of civilians in hospitals, schools, churches, parks and television studios and destroyed Serbia’s economic infrastructure.

It was blatantly ideological; at a notorious “peace conference” in Rambouillet in France, Milosevic was confronted by Madeleine Albright, the U.S. Secretary of State, who was to achieve infamy with her remark that the deaths of half a million Iraqi children were “worth it.”

Albright delivered an “offer” to Milosevic that no national leader could accept. Unless he agreed to the foreign military occupation of his country, with the occupying forces “outside the legal process,” and to the imposition of a neo-liberal “free market,” Serbia would be bombed.

This was contained in an “Appendix B,” which the media failed to read or suppressed. The aim was to crush Europe’s last independent “socialist” state.

Once NATO began bombing, there was a stampede of Kosovar refugees “fleeing a holocaust.” When it was over, international police teams descended on Kosovo to exhume the victims.

The FBI failed to find a single mass grave and went home. The Spanish forensic team did the same, its leader angrily denouncing “a semantic pirouette by the war propaganda machines.”

The final count of the dead in Kosovo was 2,788. This included combatants on both sides and Serbs and Roma murdered by the pro-NATO Kosovo Liberation Front.

There was no genocide. The NATO attack was both a fraud and a war crime.

All but a fraction of America's vaunted "precision guided" missiles hit not military but civilian targets, including the news studios of Radio Television Serbia in Belgrade. Sixteen people were killed, including cameramen, producers and a make-up artist. Blair described the dead, profanely, as part of Serbia's "command and control."

In 2008, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Carla Del Ponte, revealed that she had been pressured not to investigate NATO's crimes.

A Model for More Wars

This was the model for Washington's subsequent invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and, by stealth, Syria. All qualify as "paramount crimes" under the Nuremberg standard; all depended on media propaganda.

While tabloid journalism played its traditional part, it was serious, credible, often liberal journalism that was the most effective – the evangelical promotion of Blair and his wars by the Guardian, the incessant lies about Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction in the Observer and the New York Times, and the unerring drumbeat of government propaganda by the BBC in the silence of its omissions.

At the height of the bombing, the BBC's Kirsty Wark interviewed General Wesley Clark, the NATO commander. The Serbian city of Nis had just been sprayed with American cluster bombs, killing women, old people and children in an open market and a hospital. Wark asked not a single question about this, or about any other civilian deaths.

Others were more brazen. In February 2003, the day after Blair and Bush had set fire to Iraq, the BBC's political editor, Andrew Marr, stood in Downing Street and made what amounted to a victory speech. He excitedly told his viewers that Blair had "said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right."

Today, with a million dead and a society in ruins, Marr's BBC interviews are recommended by the U.S. Embassy in London.

Marr's colleagues lined up to pronounce Blair "vindicated." The BBC's Washington correspondent, Matt Frei, said, "There's no doubt that the desire to bring good, to bring American values to the rest of the world, and especially to the Middle East ... is now increasingly tied up with military power."

Obeisance to Power

This obeisance to the United States and its collaborators as a benign force “bringing good” runs deep in Western establishment journalism. It ensures that the present-day catastrophe in Syria is blamed exclusively on Bashar al-Assad, whom the West and Israel have long conspired to overthrow, not for any humanitarian concerns, but to consolidate Israel’s aggressive power in the region.

The jihadist forces unleashed and armed by the U.S., Britain, France, Turkey and their “coalition” proxies serve this end. It is they who dispense the propaganda and videos that becomes news in the U.S. and Europe, and provide access to journalists and guarantee a one-sided “coverage” of Syria.

The city of Aleppo is in the news. Most readers and viewers will be unaware that the majority of the population of Aleppo lives in the government-controlled western part of the city. That they suffer daily artillery bombardment from Western-sponsored Al Qaeda is not news. On 21 July, French and American bombers attacked a government village in Aleppo province, killing up to 125 civilians. This was reported on page 22 of the Guardian; there were no photographs.

Having created and underwritten jihadism in Afghanistan in the 1980s as Operation Cyclone – a weapon to destroy the Soviet Union – the U.S. is doing something similar in Syria. Like the Afghan Mujahedeen, the Syrian “rebels” are America’s and Britain’s foot soldiers. Many fight for Al Qaeda and its variants; some, like the Nusra Front, have rebranded themselves to comply with American sensitivities over 9/11. The CIA runs them, with difficulty, as it runs jihadists all over the world.

The immediate aim is to destroy the government in Damascus, which, according to the most credible poll (YouGov Siraj), the majority of Syrians support, or at least look to for protection, regardless of the barbarism in its shadows. The long-term aim is to deny Russia a key Middle Eastern ally as part of a NATO war of attrition against the Russian Federation that eventually destroys it.

Nuclear Risk

The nuclear risk is obvious, though suppressed by the media across “the free world”. The editorial writers of the Washington Post, having promoted the fiction of WMD in Iraq, demand that Obama attack Syria. Hillary Clinton, who publicly rejoiced at her executioner’s role during the destruction of Libya, has repeatedly indicated that, as president, she will “go further” than Obama.

Gareth Porter, a journalist reporting from Washington, recently revealed the names of those likely to make up a Clinton cabinet who plan an attack on Syria.

All have belligerent Cold War histories; the former CIA director, Leon Panetta, says that “the next president is gonna have to consider adding additional special forces on the ground.”

What is most remarkable about the war propaganda now in flood tide is its patent absurdity and familiarity. I have been looking through archive film from Washington in the 1950s when diplomats, civil servants and journalists were witch-hunted and ruined by Sen. Joe McCarthy for challenging the lies and paranoia about the Soviet Union and China. Like a resurgent tumor, the anti-Russia cult has returned.

In Britain, the Guardian’s Luke Harding leads his newspaper’s Russia-haters in a stream of journalistic parodies that assign to Vladimir Putin every earthly iniquity. When the Panama Papers leak was published, the front page said Putin, and there was a picture of Putin; never mind that Putin was not mentioned anywhere in the leaks.

Like Milosevic, Putin is Demon Number One. It was Putin who shot down a Malaysian airliner over Ukraine. Headline: “As far as I’m concerned, Putin killed my son.” No evidence required.

It was Putin who was responsible for Washington’s documented (and paid for) overthrow of the elected government in Kiev in 2014. The subsequent terror campaign by fascist militias against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was the result of Putin’s “aggression.” Preventing Crimea from becoming a NATO missile base and protecting the mostly Russian population who had voted in a referendum to rejoin Russia – from which Crimea had been annexed – were more examples of Putin’s “aggression”.

A Warmongering Media

Smear by media inevitably becomes war by media. If war with Russia breaks out, by design or by accident, journalists will bear much of the responsibility.

In the U.S., the anti-Russia campaign has been elevated to virtual reality. The New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, an economist with a Nobel Prize, has called Donald Trump the “Siberian Candidate” because Trump is Putin’s man, he says.

Trump had dared to suggest, in a rare lucid moment, that war with Russia might be a bad idea. In fact, he has gone further and removed American arms shipments to Ukraine from the Republican platform. “Wouldn’t it be great if we got along with Russia,” he said.

This is why America’s warmongering liberal establishment hates him. Trump’s

racism and ranting demagoguery have nothing to do with it. Bill and Hillary Clinton's record of racism and extremism can out-trump Trump's any day. (This week is the 20th anniversary of the Clinton welfare "reform" that launched a war on African-Americans). As for Obama: while American police gun down his fellow African-Americans the great hope in the White House has done nothing to protect them, nothing to relieve their impoverishment, while running four rapacious wars and an assassination campaign without precedent.

The CIA has demanded Trump is not elected. Pentagon generals have demanded he is not elected. The pro-war New York Times – taking a breather from its relentless low-rent Putin smears – demands that he is not elected. Something is up.

These tribunes of "perpetual war" are terrified that the multi-billion-dollar business of war by which the United States maintains its dominance will be undermined if Trump does a deal with Putin, then with China's Xi Jinping. Their panic at the possibility of the world's great power talking peace – however unlikely – would be the blackest farce were the issues not so dire.

"Trump would have loved Stalin!" bellowed Vice-President Joe Biden at a rally for Hillary Clinton. With Clinton nodding, he shouted, "We never bow. We never bend. We never kneel. We never yield. We own the finish line. That's who we are. We are America!"

Britain's War Party

In Britain, Jeremy Corbyn has also excited hysteria from the war-makers in the Labour Party and from a media devoted to trashing him. Lord West, a former admiral and Labour minister, put it well. Corbyn was taking an "outrageous" anti-war position "because it gets the unthinking masses to vote for him."

In a debate with leadership challenger Owen Smith, Corbyn was asked by the moderator: "How would you act on a violation by Vladimir Putin of a fellow NATO state?"

Corbyn replied: "You would want to avoid that happening in the first place. You would build up a good dialogue with Russia ... We would try to introduce a de-militarization of the borders between Russia, the Ukraine and the other countries on the border between Russia and Eastern Europe. What we cannot allow is a series of calamitous build-ups of troops on both sides which can only lead to great danger."

Pressed to say if he would authorize war against Russia "if you had to," Corbyn replied: "I don't wish to go to war – what I want to do is achieve a world that we don't need to go to war."

The line of questioning owes much to the rise of Britain's liberal war-makers. The Labour Party and the media have long offered them career opportunities.

For a while the moral tsunami of the great crime of Iraq left them floundering, their inversions of the truth a temporary embarrassment. Regardless of Chilcot and the mountain of incriminating facts, Blair remains their inspiration, because he was a "winner."

Dissenting journalism and scholarship have since been systematically banished or appropriated, and democratic ideas emptied and refilled with "identity politics" that confuse gender with feminism and public angst with liberation and willfully ignore the state violence and weapons profiteering that destroys countless lives in faraway places, like Yemen and Syria, and beckon nuclear war in Europe and across the world.

The stirring of people of all ages around the spectacular rise of Jeremy Corbyn counters this to some extent. His life has been spent illuminating the horror of war. The problem for Corbyn and his supporters is the Labour Party.

In America, the problem for the thousands of followers of Bernie Sanders was the Democratic Party, not to mention their ultimate betrayal by their great white hope.

In the U.S., home of the great civil rights and anti-war movements, it is Black Lives Matter and the likes of Codepink that lay the roots of a modern version.

For only a movement that swells into every street and across borders and does not give up can stop the warmongers. Next year, it will be a century since Wilfred Owen wrote the following. Every journalist should read it and remember it.

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

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