

How America Spreads Global Chaos

The U.S. government may pretend to respect a “rules-based” global order, but the only rule Washington seems to follow is “might makes right” – and the CIA has long served as a chief instigator and enforcer, writes Nicolas J.S. Davies.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

As the recent PBS documentary on the American War in Vietnam acknowledged, few American officials ever believed that the United States could win the war, neither those advising Johnson as he committed hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops, nor those advising Nixon as he escalated a brutal aerial bombardment that had already killed millions of people.

As conversations tape-recorded in the White House reveal, and as other writers have documented, the reasons for wading into the Big Muddy, as Pete Seeger satirized it, and then pushing on regardless, all came down to “credibility”: the domestic political credibility of the politicians involved and America’s international credibility as a military power.

Once the CIA went to work in Vietnam to undermine the 1954 Geneva Accords and the planned reunification of North and South through a free and fair election in 1956, the die was cast. The CIA’s support for the repressive Diem regime and its successors ensured an ever-escalating war, as the South rose in rebellion, supported by the North. No U.S. president could extricate the U.S. from Vietnam without exposing the limits of what U.S. military force could achieve, betraying widely held national myths and the powerful interests that sustained and profited from them.

The critical “lesson of Vietnam” was summed up by Richard Barnet in his 1972 book Roots of War. “At the very moment that the number one nation has perfected the science of killing,” Barnet wrote, “It has become an impractical means of political domination.”

Losing the war in Vietnam was a heavy blow to the CIA and the U.S. Military Industrial Complex, and it added insult to injury for every American who had lost comrades or loved ones in Vietnam, but it ushered in more than a decade of relative peace for America and the world. If the purpose of the U.S. military is to protect the U.S. from the danger of war, as our leaders so often claim, the “Vietnam syndrome,” or the reluctance to be drawn into new wars, kept the peace and undoubtedly saved countless lives.

Even the senior officer corps of the U.S. military saw it that way, since many

of them had survived the horrors of Vietnam as junior officers. The CIA could still wreak havoc in Latin America and elsewhere, but the full destructive force of the U.S. military was not unleashed again until the invasion of Panama in 1989 and the First Gulf War in 1991.

Half a century after Vietnam, we have tragically come full circle. With the CIA's politicized intelligence running wild in Washington and its covert operations spreading violence and chaos across every continent, President Trump faces the same pressures to maintain his own and his country's credibility as Johnson and Nixon did. His predictable response has been to escalate ongoing wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and West Africa, and to threaten new ones against North Korea, Iran and Venezuela.

Trump is facing these questions, not just in one country, Vietnam, but in dozens of countries across the world, and the interests perpetuating and fueling this cycle of crisis and war have only become more entrenched over time, as President Eisenhower warned that they would, despite the end of the Cold War and, until now, the lack of any actual military threat to the United States.

Ironically but predictably, the U.S.'s aggressive and illegal war policy has finally provoked a real military threat to the U.S., albeit one that has emerged only in response to U.S. war plans. As I explained in a recent article, North Korea's discovery in 2016 of a U.S. plan to assassinate its president, Kim Jong Un, and launch a Second Korean War has triggered a crash program to develop long-range ballistic missiles that could give North Korea a viable nuclear deterrent and prevent a U.S. attack. But the North Koreans will not feel safe from attack until their leaders and ours are sure that their missiles can deliver a nuclear strike against the U.S. mainland.

The CIA's Pretexts for War

U.S. Air Force Colonel Fletcher Prouty was the chief of special operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1955 to 1964, managing the global military support system for the CIA in Vietnam and around the world. Fletcher Prouty's book, *The Secret Team: The CIA and its Allies in Control of the United States and the World*, was suppressed when it was first published in 1973. Thousands of copies disappeared from bookstores and libraries, and a mysterious Army Colonel bought the entire shipment of 3,500 copies the publisher sent to Australia. But Prouty's book was republished in 2011, and it is a timely account of the role of the CIA in U.S. policy.

Prouty surprisingly described the role of the CIA as a response by powerful people and interests to the abolition of the U.S. Department of War and the creation of the Department of Defense in 1947. Once the role of the U.S.

military was redefined as one of defense, in line with the United Nations Charter's prohibition against the threat or use of military force in 1945 and similar moves by other military powers, it would require some kind of crisis or threat to justify using military force in the future, both legally and politically. The main purpose of the CIA, as Prouty saw it, is to create such pretexts for war.

The CIA is a hybrid of an intelligence service that gathers and analyzes foreign intelligence and a clandestine service that conducts covert operations. Both functions are essential to creating pretexts for war, and that is what they have done for 70 years.

Prouty described how the CIA infiltrated the U.S. military, the State Department, the National Security Council and other government institutions, covertly placing its officers in critical positions to ensure that its plans are approved and that it has access to whatever forces, weapons, equipment, ammunition and other resources it needs to carry them out.

Many retired intelligence officers, such as Ray McGovern and the members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), saw the merging of clandestine operations with intelligence analysis in one agency as corrupting the objective analysis they tried to provide to policymakers. They formed VIPS in 2003 in response to the fabrication of politicized intelligence that provided false pretexts for the U.S. to invade and destroy Iraq.

CIA in Syria and Africa

But Fletcher Prouty was even more disturbed by the way that the CIA uses clandestine operations to trigger coups, wars and chaos. The civil and proxy war in Syria is a perfect example of what Prouty meant. In late 2011, after destroying Libya and aiding in the torture-murder of Muammar Gaddafi, the CIA and its allies began flying fighters and weapons from Libya to Turkey and infiltrating them into Syria. Then, working with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Croatia and other allies, this operation poured thousands of tons of weapons across Syria's borders to ignite and fuel a full-scale civil war.

Once these covert operations were under way, they ran wild until they had unleashed a savage Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria (Jabhat al-Nusra, now rebranded as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham), spawned the even more savage "Islamic State," triggered the heaviest and probably the deadliest U.S. bombing campaign since Vietnam and drawn Russia, Iran, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Hezbollah, Kurdish militias and almost every state or armed group in the Middle East into the chaos of Syria's civil war.

Meanwhile, as Al Qaeda and Islamic State have expanded their operations across Africa, the U.N. has published a report titled *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, based on 500 interviews with African militants. This study has found that the kind of special operations and training missions the CIA and AFRICOM are conducting and supporting in Africa are in fact the critical “tipping point” that drives Africans to join militant groups like Al Qaeda, Al-Shabab and Boko Haram.

The report found that government action, such as the killing or detention of friends or family, was the “tipping point” that drove 71 percent of African militants interviewed to join armed groups, and that this was a more important factor than religious ideology.

The conclusions of *Journey to Extremism in Africa* confirm the findings of other similar studies. The Center for Civilians in Conflict interviewed 250 civilians who joined armed groups in Bosnia, Somalia, Gaza and Libya for its 2015 study, *The People’s Perspectives: Civilian Involvement in Armed Conflict*. The study found that the most common motivation for civilians to join armed groups was simply to protect themselves or their families.

The role of U.S. “counterterrorism” operations in fueling armed resistance and terrorism, and the absence of any plan to reduce the asymmetric violence unleashed by the “global war on terror,” would be no surprise to Fletcher Prouty. As he explained, such clandestine operations always take on a life of their own that is unrelated, and often counter-productive, to any rational U.S. policy objective.

“The more intimate one becomes with this activity,” Prouty wrote, “The more one begins to realize that such operations are rarely, if ever, initiated from an intent to become involved in pursuit of some national objective in the first place.”

The U.S. justifies the deployment of 6,000 U.S. special forces and military trainers to 53 of the 54 countries in Africa as a response to terrorism. But the U.N.’s *Journey to Extremism in Africa* study makes it clear that the U.S. militarization of Africa is in fact the “tipping point” that is driving Africans across the continent to join armed resistance groups in the first place.

This is a textbook CIA operation on the same model as Vietnam in the late 1950s and early 60s. The CIA uses U.S. special forces and training missions to launch covert and proxy military operations that drive local populations into armed resistance groups, and then uses the presence of those armed resistance groups to justify ever-escalating U.S. military involvement. This is Vietnam redux on a continental scale.

Taking on China

What seems to really be driving the CIA's militarization of U.S. policy in Africa is China's growing influence on the continent. As Steve Bannon put it in an [interview with the *Economist*](#) in August, "Let's go screw up One Belt One Road."

China is already too big and powerful for the U.S. to apply what is known as the Ledeen doctrine named for neoconservative theorist and intelligence operative Michael Ledeen who suggested that every 10 years or so, the United States "pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show we mean business."

China is too powerful and armed with nuclear weapons. So, in this case, the CIA's job would be to spread violence and chaos to disrupt Chinese trade and investment, and to make African governments increasingly dependent on U.S. military aid to fight the militant groups spawned and endlessly regenerated by U.S.-led "counterterrorism" operations.

Neither Ledeen nor Bannon pretend that such policies are designed to build more prosperous or viable societies in the Middle East or Africa, let alone to benefit their people. They both know very well what Richard Barnet already understood 45 years ago, that America's unprecedented investment in weapons, war and CIA covert operations are only good for one thing: to kill people and destroy infrastructure, reducing cities to rubble, societies to chaos and the desperate survivors to poverty and displacement.

As long as the CIA and the U.S. military keep plunging the scapegoats for our failed policies into economic crisis, violence and chaos, the United States and the United Kingdom can remain the safe havens of the world's wealth, islands of privilege and excess amidst the storms they unleash on others.

But if that is the only "significant national objective" driving these policies, it is surely about time for the 99 percent of Americans who reap no benefit from these murderous schemes to stop the CIA and its allies before they completely wreck the already damaged and fragile world in which we all must live, Americans and foreigners alike.

Douglas Valentine has probably studied the CIA in more depth than any other American journalist, beginning with his book on [The Phoenix Program](#) in Vietnam. He has written a new book titled [The CIA as Organized Crime: How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World](#), in which he brings Fletcher Prouty's analysis right up to the present day, describing the CIA's role in our current wars and the many ways it infiltrates, manipulates and controls U.S.

policy.

The Three Scapegoats

In Trump's speech to the U.N. General Assembly, he named North Korea, Iran and Venezuela as his prime targets for destabilization, economic warfare and, ultimately, the overthrow of their governments, whether by *coup d'etat* or the mass destruction of their civilian population and infrastructure. But Trump's choice of scapegoats for America's failures was obviously not based on a rational reassessment of foreign policy priorities by the new administration. It was only a tired rehashing of the CIA's unfinished business with two-thirds of Bush's "axis of evil" and Bush White House official Elliott Abrams' failed 2002 coup in Caracas, now laced with explicit and illegal threats of aggression.

How Trump and the CIA plan to sacrifice their three scapegoats for America's failures remains to be seen. This is not 2001, when the world stood silent at the U.S. bombardment and invasion of Afghanistan after September 11th. It is more like 2003, when the U.S. destruction of Iraq split the Atlantic alliance and alienated most of the world. It is certainly not 2011, after Obama's global charm offensive had rebuilt U.S. alliances and provided cover for French President Sarkozy, British Prime Minister Cameron, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Arab royals to destroy Libya, once ranked by the U.N. as the most developed country in Africa, now mired in intractable chaos.

In 2017, a U.S. attack on any one of Trump's scapegoats would isolate the United States from many of its allies and undermine its standing in the world in far-reaching ways that might be more permanent and harder to repair than the invasion and destruction of Iraq.

In Venezuela, the CIA and the right-wing opposition are following the same strategy that President Nixon ordered the CIA to inflict on Chile, to "make the economy scream" in preparation for the 1973 coup. But the solid victory of Venezuela's ruling Socialist Party in recent nationwide gubernatorial elections, despite a long and deep economic crisis, reveals little public support for the CIA's puppets in Venezuela.

The CIA has successfully discredited the Venezuelan government through economic warfare, increasingly violent right-wing street protests and a global propaganda campaign. But the CIA has stupidly hitched its wagon to an extreme right-wing, upper-class opposition that has no credibility with most of the Venezuelan public, who still turn out for the Socialists at the polls. A CIA coup or U.S. military intervention would meet fierce public resistance and damage U.S. relations all over Latin America.

Boxing In North Korea

A U.S. aerial bombardment or “preemptive strike” on North Korea could quickly escalate into a war between the U.S. and China, which has reiterated its commitment to North Korea’s defense if North Korea is attacked. We do not know exactly what was in the U.S. war plan discovered by North Korea, so neither can we know how North Korea and China could respond if the U.S. pressed ahead with it.

Most analysts have long concluded that any U.S. attack on North Korea would be met with a North Korean artillery and missile barrage that would inflict unacceptable civilian casualties on Seoul, a metropolitan area of 26 million people, three times the population of New York City. Seoul is only 35 miles from the frontier with North Korea, placing it within range of a huge array of North Korean weapons. What was already a no-win calculus is now compounded by the possibility that North Korea could respond with nuclear weapons, turning any prospect of a U.S. attack into an even worse nightmare.

U.S. mismanagement of its relations with North Korea should be an object lesson for its relations with Iran, graphically demonstrating the advantages of diplomacy, talks and agreements over threats of war. Under the Agreed Framework signed in 1994, North Korea stopped work on two much larger nuclear reactors than the small experimental one operating at Yongbyong since 1986, which only produces 6 kg of plutonium per year, enough for one nuclear bomb.

The lesson of Bush’s Iraq invasion in 2003 after Saddam Hussein had complied with demands that he destroy Iraq’s stockpiles of chemical weapons and shut down a nascent nuclear program was not lost on North Korea. Not only did the invasion lay waste to large sections of Iraq with hundreds of thousands of dead but Hussein himself was hunted down and condemned to death by hanging.

Still, after North Korea tested its first nuclear weapon in 2006, even its small experimental reactor was shut down as a result of the “Six Party Talks” in 2007, all the fuel rods were removed and placed under supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the cooling tower of the reactor was demolished in 2008.

But then, as relations deteriorated, North Korea conducted a second nuclear weapon test and again began reprocessing spent fuel rods to recover plutonium for use in nuclear weapons.

North Korea has now conducted six nuclear weapons tests. The explosions in the first five tests increased gradually up to 15-25 kilotons, about the yield of the bombs the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but estimates for the

yield of the 2017 test range from 110 to 250 kilotons, comparable to a small hydrogen bomb.

The even greater danger in a new war in Korea is that the U.S. could unleash part of its arsenal of 4,000 more powerful weapons (100 to 1,200 kilotons), which could kill millions of people and devastate and poison the region, or even the world, for years to come.

The U.S. willingness to scrap the Agreed Framework in 2003, the breakdown of the Six Party Talks in 2009 and the U.S. refusal to acknowledge that its own military actions and threats create legitimate defense concerns for North Korea have driven the North Koreans into a corner from which they see a credible nuclear deterrent as their only chance to avoid mass destruction.

China has proposed a reasonable framework for diplomacy to address the concerns of both sides, but the U.S. insists on maintaining its propaganda narratives that all the fault lies with North Korea and that it has some kind of “military solution” to the crisis.

This may be the most dangerous idea we have heard from U.S. policymakers since the end of the Cold War, but it is the logical culmination of a systematic normalization of deviant and illegal U.S. war-making that has already cost millions of lives in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan. As historian Gabriel Kolko wrote in *Century of War* in 1994, “options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles.”

Demonizing Iran

The idea that Iran has ever had a nuclear weapons program is seriously contested by the IAEA, which has examined every allegation presented by the CIA and other Western “intelligence” agencies as well as Israel. Former IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei revealed many details of this wild goose chase in his 2011 memoir, *Age of Deception: Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times*.

When the CIA and its partners reluctantly acknowledged the IAEA’s conclusions in a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), ElBaradei issued a press release confirming that, “the agency has no concrete evidence of an ongoing nuclear weapons program or undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran.”

Since 2007, the IAEA has resolved all its outstanding concerns with Iran. It has verified that dual-use technologies that Iran imported before 2003 were in fact used for other purposes, and it has exposed the mysterious “laptop documents” that appeared to show Iranian plans for a nuclear weapon as forgeries. Gareth

Porter thoroughly explored all these questions and allegations and the history of mistrust that fueled them in his 2014 book, *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, which I highly recommend.

But, in the parallel *Bizarro* world of U.S. politics, hopelessly poisoned by the CIA's endless disinformation campaigns, Hillary Clinton could repeatedly take false credit for disarming Iran during her presidential campaign, and neither Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump nor any corporate media interviewer dared to challenge her claims.

"When President Obama took office, Iran was racing toward a nuclear bomb," Clinton fantasized in a prominent foreign policy speech on June 2, 2016, claiming that her brutal sanctions policy "brought Iran to the table."

In fact, as Trita Parsi documented in his 2012 book, *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy With Iran*, the Iranians were ready, not just to "come to the table," but to sign a comprehensive agreement based on a U.S. proposal brokered by Turkey and Brazil in 2010. But, in a classic case of "tail wags dog," the U.S. then rejected its own proposal because it would have undercut support for tighter sanctions in the U.N. Security Council. In other words, Clinton's sanctions policy did not "bring Iran to the table", but prevented the U.S. from coming to the table itself.

As a senior State Department official told Trita Parsi, the real problem with U.S. diplomacy with Iran when Clinton was at the State Department was that the U.S. would not take "Yes" for an answer. Trump's ham-fisted decertification of Iran's compliance with the JCPOA is right out of Clinton's playbook, and it demonstrates that the CIA is still determined to use Iran as a scapegoat for America's failures in the Middle East.

The spurious claim that Iran is the world's greatest sponsor of terrorism is another CIA canard reinforced by endless repetition. It is true that Iran supports and supplies weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas, which are both listed as terrorist organizations by the U.S. government. But they are mainly defensive resistance groups that defend Lebanon and Gaza respectively against invasions and attacks by Israel.

Shifting attention away from Al Qaeda, Islamic State, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and other groups that actually commit terrorist crimes around the world might just seem like a case of the CIA "taking its eyes off the ball," if it wasn't so transparently timed to frame Iran with new accusations now that the manufactured crisis of the nuclear scare has run its course.

What the Future Holds

Barack Obama's most consequential international achievement may have been the triumph of symbolism over substance behind which he expanded and escalated the so-called "war on terror," with a vast expansion of covert operations and proxy wars that eventually triggered the heaviest U.S. aerial bombardments since Vietnam in Iraq and Syria.

Obama's charm offensive invigorated old and new military alliances with the U.K., France and the Arab monarchies, and he quietly ran up the most expensive military budget of any president since World War Two.

But Obama's expansion of the "war on terror" under cover of his deceptive global public relations campaign created many more problems than it solved, and Trump and his advisers are woefully ill-equipped to solve any of them. Trump's expressed desire to place America first and to resist foreign entanglements is hopelessly at odds with his aggressive, bullying approach to every foreign policy problem.

If the U.S. could threaten and fight its way to a resolution of any of its international problems, it would have done so already. That is exactly what it has been trying to do since the 1990s, behind both the swagger and bluster of Bush and Trump and the deceptive charm of Clinton and Obama: a "good cop – bad cop" routine that should no longer fool anyone anywhere.

But as Lyndon Johnson found as he waded deeper and deeper into the Big Muddy in Vietnam, lying to the public about unwinnable wars does not make them any more winnable. It just gets more people killed and makes it harder and harder to ever tell the public the truth.

In unwinnable wars based on lies, the "credibility" problem only gets more complicated, as new lies require new scapegoats and convoluted narratives to explain away graveyards filled by old lies. Obama's cynical global charm offensive bought the "war on terror" another eight years, but that only allowed the CIA to drag the U.S. into more trouble and spread its chaos to more places around the world.

Meanwhile, Russian President Putin is winning hearts and minds in capitals around the world by calling for a recommitment to the rule of international law, which prohibits the threat or use of military force except in self-defense. Every new U.S. threat or act of aggression will only make Putin's case more persuasive, not least to important U.S. allies like South Korea, Germany and other members of the European Union, whose complicity in U.S. aggression has until now helped to give it a false veneer of political legitimacy.

Throughout history, serial aggression has nearly always provoked increasingly

united opposition, as peace-loving countries and people have reluctantly summoned the courage to stand up to an aggressor. France under Napoleon and Hitler's Germany also regarded themselves as exceptional, and in their own ways they were. But in the end, their belief in their exceptionalism led them on to defeat and destruction.

Americans had better hope that we are not so exceptional, and that the world will find a diplomatic rather than a military "solution" to its American problem. Our chances of survival would improve a great deal if American officials and politicians would finally start to act like something other than putty in the hands of the CIA.

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*.

Agent Orange: Vietnam's Ongoing Calamity

The U.S. government's crime of saturating large swaths of Vietnam with poisonous Agent Orange got short shrift in PBS' "The Vietnam War," but it remains an ongoing calamity, write Marjorie Cohn and Jonathan Moore.

By Marjorie Cohn and Jonathan Moore

Watching the Ken Burns-Lynn Novick 18-hour series, "The Vietnam War," is an emotional experience. Whether you served in the U.S. military during the war or marched in the streets to end it, you cannot remain untouched by this documentary. The battle scenes are powerful, the stories of U.S. veterans and Vietnamese soldiers who fought on both sides of the war compelling.

The toll in human terms caused by the war is staggering. Nearly 58,000 Americans and 2 million to 3 million Vietnamese, many of them civilians, were killed in the war. Untold numbers were wounded. Many U.S. veterans of the war suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. More U.S. Vietnam War vets have committed suicide than died in the war. However, those numbers do not begin to tell the complete story of the war.

In one of its most serious omissions, the series gives short shrift to the destruction wreaked by the U.S. military's spraying of deadly chemical herbicides containing the poison dioxin over much of Vietnam, the most common of

which was Agent Orange. This is one of the most tragic legacies of the war. Yet, aside from a few brief mentions, the victims of Agent Orange/dioxin, both Vietnamese and American, are not portrayed in the series. More importantly, the ongoing harm created by this chemical warfare program is never mentioned.

Agent Orange/dioxin was an herbicidal chemical weapon manufactured by U.S. chemical companies like Dow and Monsanto and sprayed by the U.S. military from 1961 to 1971. Dioxin is one of the most toxic chemicals known to humankind. Approximately 3 million Vietnamese and thousands of U.S. and allied soldiers were exposed to Agent Orange/dioxin.

The U.S. government was aware that the use of poison as a weapon of war was forbidden by international law well before it authorized its use in Vietnam. In fact, the U.S. government suppressed a 1965 report, called the Bionetics study, that showed dioxin caused many birth defects in experimental animals. It was not until the results of that study were leaked that the use of Agent Orange/dioxin was stopped.

Horrific Birth Defects

Those exposed to Agent Orange/dioxin often have children and grandchildren born with serious illnesses and disabilities. There is a virtual unanimity of opinion within the international scientific community that exposure to Agent Orange/dioxin caused some forms of cancers, reproductive abnormalities, immune and endocrine deficiencies, and nervous system damage.

Second- and third-generation victims continue to be born in Vietnam, as well as to U.S. veterans and Vietnamese-Americans in the United States. For many of them and their progeny, the suffering continues.

Mai Giang Vu was exposed to Agent Orange while serving in the Army of South Vietnam. He carried barrels of chemicals to spray in the jungle. His sons were unable to walk or function normally. Their limbs gradually "curled up" and they could only crawl. By age 18, they were bedridden. One died at age 23, the other at age 25.

Nga Tran, a French Vietnamese woman who worked in Vietnam as a war correspondent, was there when the U.S. military began spraying chemical defoliants. A big cloud of the agent enveloped her. Shortly after her daughter was born, the child's skin began shedding. She could not bear to have physical contact with anyone. The child never grew. She remained 6.6 pounds – her birth weight – until her death at the age of 17 months.

Tran's second daughter suffers from alpha thalassemia, a genetic blood disorder rarely seen in Asia. Tran saw a woman who gave birth to a "ball" with no human

form. Many children are born without brains; others make inhuman sounds. There are victims who have never stood up. They creep and barely lift their heads.

Rosemarie Hohn Mizo is the widow of George Mizo, who fought for the U.S. Army in Vietnam. After he refused to serve a third tour, Mizo was court-martialed, spent 2½ years in prison and received a dishonorable discharge. Before his death from Agent Orange-related illnesses, Mizo helped found the Friendship Village where Vietnamese victims live in a supportive environment.

Dr. Jeanne Stellman, who wrote the seminal Agent Orange article in *Nature*, said, "This is the largest unstudied [unnatural] environmental disaster in the world."

Dr. Jean Grassman, of Brooklyn College at the City University of New York, stated dioxin is a potent cellular disregulator that alters several pathways and disrupts many bodily systems. She said children are very sensitive to dioxin, and the intrauterine or postnatal exposure to dioxin may result in altered immune, neurobehavioral and hormonal functioning. Women pass their exposure to their children both in utero and through the excretion of dioxin in breast milk.

These were some of the witnesses who testified at the International Peoples' Tribunal of Conscience in Support of the Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange, held in Paris in 2009.

Empty Promise of Compensation

In the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, the Nixon administration promised to contribute \$3 billion for compensation and postwar reconstruction of Vietnam. That promise remains unfulfilled.

In 2004, both U.S. veteran and Vietnamese victims sued the chemical companies who knowingly manufactured Agent Orange and other herbicides, which they knew contained an unnecessary but lethal amount of dioxin. The victims were prevented from suing the U.S. government because of the doctrine of sovereign immunity.

Despite agreeing to compensate U.S. veterans in an earlier lawsuit for some maladies caused by their exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides, the U.S. government and the chemical companies maintained before the courts and to this day that there was no evidence to support a connection between exposure and disease.

The efforts by veterans' groups and others to take care of our vets has resulted in a compensation scheme administered by the Veterans Administration. It annually pays out billions of dollars to veterans who can demonstrate they were in a contaminated part of Vietnam and have an illness that is associated with exposure to Agent Orange.

Unfortunately, the Vietnamese who were exposed to Agent Orange on a scale unheard of in modern warfare have been left out in the cold. The failure to include this history in the Burns/Novick series is unconscionable. Indeed, one could argue that even the mention of Agent Orange in the series was seriously misleading. For example, in the last episode, the narrator notes the spraying campaign but does so against a verdant backdrop of green fields and abundant crops.

The actions of the U.S. government and the U.S. manufacturers of Agent Orange and other deadly herbicides is a moral outrage. The U.S. government has funded the cleanup of dioxin at the Danang airport, only one of the 28 "hot spots" still contaminated by dioxin. But this effort ignores the damage caused to the people who live there and eat the crops, animals and fish from the surrounding area. All of these hot spots need to be remediated.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-California) has [introduced H.R. 334](#), the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2017, which has 23 co-sponsors. The bill would lead to the cleanup of dioxin and arsenic contamination still present in Vietnam. It would provide assistance to the public health system in Vietnam directed at the 3 million Vietnamese people affected by Agent Orange. It would also extend assistance to the affected children of male U.S. veterans who suffer the same set of birth defects covered for the children of female veterans. It would enable research on the extent of Agent Orange-related diseases in the Vietnamese-American community and provide them with assistance. Finally, it would support laboratory and epidemiological research on the effects of Agent Orange.

If you agree that much more needs to be done to address this ongoing calamity of the Vietnam War, contact your representative and ask him or her to sign on as a co-sponsor of H.R. 334. Effective compensation for Agent Orange/dioxin victims is a moral imperative.

?Marjorie Cohn <http://marjoriecohn.com/>, a veteran of the antiwar movement, is on the national advisory board of Veterans for Peace. She is co-author (with Kathleen Gilberd) of [Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent](#). And she served as one of seven judges from three continents at the [International Peoples' Tribunal of Conscience in Support of the Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange](#), held in Paris in 2009. Jonathan Moore was one of the attorneys who filed a lawsuit to gain compensation for Vietnamese who were exposed to Agent Orange/dioxin. Cohn and Moore are co-coordinators of the [Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign](#).

America's Long History of Warfare

Americans like to view their country as a force for peace in the world when the historical reality is almost the opposite, a reality ignored by the PBS Vietnam War documentary, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

If you go to the [Wikipedia page](#) that gives a timeline of U.S. foreign military operations between 1775 and 2010, you are likely to come away in shock. It seems that ever since the founding of the country, the United States has been at war. It is as if Americans just could not (and still cannot) sit still, but had to (and still have to) force themselves on others through military action.

Often this is aimed at controlling foreign resources, thus forcing upon others the consequences of their own capitalist avarice. At other times the violence is spurred on by an ideology that confuses U.S. interests with civilization and freedom. Only very rarely is Washington out there on the side of the angels. Regardless, the bottom line seems to be that peace has never been a deeply ingrained cultural value for the citizens of the United States. As pertains to foreign policy, America's national culture is a war culture.

It is against this historical backdrop that the recent Ken Burns 18-hour-long documentary on the Vietnam War comes off as superficial. There is a subtle suggestion that while those American leaders who initiated and escalated the war were certainly deceptive, murderously stubborn and even self-deluded, they were so in what they considered to be a good cause. They wanted to stop the spread of Communism at a time when the Cold War defined almost all of foreign policy, and if that meant denying the Vietnamese the right of national unification, so be it. The Burns documentary is a visual demonstration of the fact that such a strategy could not work. Nonetheless, American leaders, both civilian and military, could not let go.

What the Burns documentary does not tell us – and it is this that makes the work superficial – is that none of this was new. Almost all preceding American violence abroad had been rationalized by the same or related set of excuses that kept the Vietnam slaughter going: the Revolutionary War was about “liberty,” the genocidal wars against the Native Americans were about spreading “civilization,” the wars against Mexico and Spain were about spreading “freedom,” and once capitalism became officially synonymous with freedom, the dozens of bloody incursions into Central and South America also became about our “right” to carry on “free enterprise.” As time went by, when Washington wasn't spreading

“freedom,” it was defending it. And so it goes, round and round.

A Ghastly Process

Understanding the history of this ghastly process, one is likely to lose all faith in such rationales. However, it seems obvious that a large number of Americans, including most of their leaders, know very little of the history of American wars (as against knowing a lot of idealized pseudo-history). That is why Ken Burns and his associates can show us the awfulness of the Vietnam War to little avail. The average viewer will have no accurate historical context to understand it, and thus it becomes just an isolated tragedy. While it all might have gone fatally wrong, the American leaders were assumed to be well intentioned.

Describing the Vietnam War in terms of intentions is simply insufficient. In the case of war the hard-and-fast consequences of one's actions are more important than one's intentions. The United States killed roughly 2 million Vietnamese civilians for ideological reasons that its own leaders, and most of its citizens, never questioned.

Most of its citizens, but not all. There was, of course, a widespread and multifaceted anti-war movement. The anti-war protesters were, in truth, the real heroes, the real patriots of the moment. Along with the accumulating body bags, it was the anti-war movement that brought an end to the slaughter. However, once more Burns's documentary comes off as superficial.

Burns leaves the viewer with the impression that the only truly legitimate anti-war protesters were veterans and those associated with veterans. But those were only a small part of a much larger whole. Yet the millions of other Americans who protested the war are essentially slandered by Burns. The documentary presents them as mostly Communist fellow-travelers. We also see various representatives of that non-veteran part of the movement apologize for their positions. There is the implication that the movement had bad tactics.

Here is an example: one of the points that the Burns documentary makes is how distasteful was the labeling of returning soldiers as “baby killers.” Actually this did not happen very often, but when it did, one might judge the charge as impolitic – but not inaccurate. You can't kill 2 million civilians without killing a lot of babies. If we understand war in terms of the death of babies, then there might be fewer wars.

U.S. leaders also sent 58,000 of their own citizens to die in Vietnam. Why did these citizens go? After all, this was not like World War II. North Vietnam had not attacked the United States (the Bay of Tonkin incident was misrepresented to

Congress). The Vietcong were not Nazis. But you need an accurate take on history to recognize these facts, and that was, as usual, missing. And so, believing their politicians, the generals, and most of their civic leaders, many draftees and volunteers went to die or be maimed under false pretenses.

The inevitable post-war disillusionment was seen by subsequent U.S. leaders as a form of mental illness, and they labeled it "the Vietnam Syndrome." The "syndrome" was as short-lived as popular memory. In March 2003, President George W. Bush invaded Iraq under false pretenses and U.S. forces proceeded to kill half a million civilians.

In the end, American behavior in Vietnam was not just tragically flawed – it was criminal. But it was also historically consistent – an expression of a long-standing and deep-seated war culture, a culture that still defines the American worldview and has become the very linchpin of its domestic economy. That is why the wars, large and small, never stop.

A Gun Culture, Too

America's propensity to violence in other lands is but one side of a two-sided coin. Callous disregard for civilian lives abroad is matched by a willful promotion of violence at home. That willful promotion is the product of a right-wing ideological orientation (stemming from a misreading of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution) that demands a nearly open-ended right of all Americans to own an almost unlimited number and types of firearms. The result is gun regulation laws that are embarrassingly ineffective.

Again, the consequences of this position are much more profound than any claim that its supporters' intentions are to defend citizens rights to own guns. Since 1968 about as many Americans have been killed in-country by gun violence (1.53 million) as have died in all of America's wars put together (1.20 million). The numbers are too close to be dismissed as coincidence. Both reflect a culture of exceptionalism that grants at once the United States government, and its citizens, extensive rights to act in disregard of the safety and security of others.

You would think Americans would recognize an obvious contradiction here. You cannot maintain a safe population and, at the same time, allow citizens the right to own and, largely at their own discretion, use firearms. Nonetheless, some Americans imagine that they have squared this circle by claiming that their guns are for "self-defense" and therefore do make for a safer society.

This is just like the U.S. government's constant exposition that all its violence is committed in the name of civilization and freedom. In both cases we

have a dangerous delusion. Ubiquitous gun ownership makes us unsafe, just as does the endless waging of war.

The inability to see straight is not the sort of failing that can be restricted to one dimension. If you can't grasp reality due to ideological blinkers or historical ignorance, you are going to end up in trouble both at home and abroad – not just one place, but both.

And, the more weaponized you are, both as a state and as a citizen, the greater the potential for disaster. In the end the United States cannot stop killing civilians abroad unless it finds the wisdom to stop killing its own citizens at home – and vice versa. That is the U.S. conundrum, whether America's 320 million citizens realize it or not.

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Pilger Criticizes Ken Burns's 'The Vietnam War'

For decades, the U.S. mainstream media has shied away from a clear-eyed view of the Vietnam War, not wanting to offend the war's apologists, a residue of which tainted the recent PBS series, as John Pilger told Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Ken Burns's 18-hour documentary on the Vietnam War, which aired on PBS and BBC, presented extraordinary footage of the war's grotesque brutality but also soft-pedaled the motivations of U.S. policymakers as well-meaning albeit misguided, or as the prologue put it, a conflict begun in "good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings."

This glossing over of U.S. neocolonialism and its deadly consequences angered John Pilger, who cut his journalistic teeth covering the Vietnam War for a decade. I spoke to Pilger after he watched the first couple of hours of the highly touted series.

Dennis Bernstein: I was reading your piece called "[*The Killing of History*](#)" and

these lines stood out for me: "The revisionism never stops and the blood never dies. The invader is pitied and purged of guilt while 'searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy'." What is your initial response to the framework of the film?

John Pilger: That quote, "searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy," is from Lynn Novick, who is Ken Burns' collaborator on this series on the Vietnam War. If we don't understand the meaning of the Vietnam War by now, I don't know where our brains have been all these years.

Like so many colonial wars, it was an invasion based on a series of deceptions and lies. This is effectively denied in the Burns series. It starts off with the narrator saying that it was all conducted in good faith by decent people. It was all a big misunderstanding that grew out of the Cold War, and so on. That is complete nonsense.

The Vietnam War started specifically with the US arming the French to reclaim their colony in Indochina after the Second World War. It really got underway for the US with the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, following which Congress gave President Johnson the authority to start one of the longest bombing campaigns in the history of warfare, called "Rolling Thunder." The long litany of official documents say it all.

But these filmmakers put aside all this demonstrable truth and obfuscate what really happened in Vietnam. The word "invasion" was never used by the press during the Vietnam War and it still isn't being used. Instead that awful word "involved" is used. The United States was "involved" in Vietnam. It must be very difficult for truly decent Americans and especially veterans to watch. But it is very interesting, we get such a supply of special forces officers. Maybe we will see the drafted men later on. They were the truth-tellers, in my experience.

DB: You write in your piece *The Killing of History*: "The meaning of the Vietnam War is no different than the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the leveling of every city in North Korea. The aim was described by Colonel Edward Lansdale, the CIA man who served as the model for the character in the Graham Greene story 'The Quiet American.' He said, 'There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbors resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert.'"

JP: This is the concept of total war, which the US adopted from Korea. The devastation of the Korean War, the millions killed, the new weapons, including napalm, that were used, the dikes that were bombed, costing countless lives.

This was the model and it was during this time that the United States assumed its post-World War II imperial role. This concept of total war has been pursued in every colonial war that the US has been involved in since, either directly by the Americans or indirectly through proxies.

In Vietnam, for instance, they established "free fire zones." You ringed an enormous area with heavy artillery, then you bombed it from above and then you strafed it, so that it would be a miracle if anyone survived. When I went to the province of Quang Ngai, where the massacre of My Lai took place in the late 1960's, free fire zones had killed something like 50,000 people.

It happened also in neighboring Laos, the most bombed country in history. In southern Vietnam, since the end of the war, something like 40,000 people have died from unexploded ordnance, a great many of them children. We can go on forever talking in these terrible statistics.

You get some sense of that in this PBS series, the archive is really astonishing. But the way it is projected reminds me of the Newsweek cover that described the My Lai massacre as "an American tragedy." You get a sense of the same thing in the Burns film. Yes, they interview Vietnamese, yes, you see terrible things happening, but the overall sense you are meant to come away with is that it was a great perplexing tragedy, a great blunder.

The whole thing was genocidal. The bombing of Cambodia between 1969 and 1975 was something like five times the equivalent of Hiroshima. According to one study that seemed to have credibility, something like 750,000 Cambodians were killed in that bombing. And that was simply a sideshow to the main event in Vietnam. Total war is a form of industrialized killing. The obsession in Vietnam was with body counts and we get no sense of that from the Burns film.

DB: There is a lot of discussion now of how dangerous Trump is, but if you look back at the Vietnam policy, Trump seems to fit right in.

JP: Trump's specialty is abusing the world. But you're right, he is just the latest on the team. In fact, he is a bit of a wimp in comparison with the ones who have come before. Obama was probably one of the most violent presidents in US history. He conducted a record of seven simultaneous wars, not to mention his assassination campaign.

This is not to say that Trump cannot get up in speed to equal this terrible record. But Trump should be understood as a symptom and a caricature of a violent, extremist system. Once you understand that, you can understand how the past has helped create the present. Trump is not an aberration, he is a caricature. Much more interesting is the way the suave Obama went about his

violent presidency without due recognition.

DB: Let's not forget that Hillary Clinton threatened to "totally obliterate" Iran.

JP: She said that when she was running against Obama. Well, Iran has 80 million people.

DB: She and Colonel Lansdale were talking the same language.

JP: Yes, and President Truman was talking the same language when he dropped two atomic bombs for reasons that had nothing to do with making the Japanese surrender. These were the first terrible explosions in the Cold War, aimed at intimidating the Soviet Union.

DB: What responsibility does the corporate media have for the US and world population not knowing the real story?

JP: They are the gatekeepers. People turn to the media for their information, to be able to make some sense of a difficult world. And they don't get it. You will find that most of the exceptions are on the World Wide Web. That is where my article was published. It would not have been published in The Guardian, where I used to publish.

I don't agree that everyone is wildly enthusiastic about Burns' film. I think there has been a lot of critical response to the film as well. This is going to build, and I suppose he has done us a service in opening up the wound so that people who really experienced Vietnam can describe what happened.

DB: Burns also says he is grateful to "the entire Bank of America family."

JP: The Bank of America was a corporate prop of the invasion that killed up to 4 million people. That is just corporate speak and it rather demeans a filmmaker to talk like that.

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The Killing of History

PBS' "The Vietnam War" may show some of the conflict's horrors but still soft-pedals the horrific war crimes that America inflicted on Vietnam, fitting with a

corporate-dependent documentary project, writes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

One of the most hyped “events” of American television, “The Vietnam War,” has started on the PBS network. The directors are Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Acclaimed for his documentaries on the Civil War, the Great Depression and the history of jazz, Burns says of his Vietnam films, “They will inspire our country to begin to talk and think about the Vietnam War in an entirely new way.”

In a society often bereft of historical memory and in thrall to the propaganda of its “exceptionalism,” Burns’s “entirely new” Vietnam War is presented as an “epic, historic work.” Its lavish advertising campaign promotes its biggest backer, Bank of America, which in 1971 was burned down by students in Santa Barbara, California, as a symbol of the hated war in Vietnam.

Burns says he is grateful to “the entire Bank of America family” which “has long supported our country’s veterans.” Bank of America was a corporate prop to an invasion that killed perhaps as many as four million Vietnamese and ravaged and poisoned a once bountiful land. More than 58,000 American soldiers were killed, and around the same number are estimated to have taken their own lives.

I watched the first episode in New York. It leaves you in no doubt of its intentions right from the start. The narrator says the war “was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War misunderstandings.”

The dishonesty of this statement is not surprising. The cynical fabrication of “false flags” that led to the invasion of Vietnam is a matter of record – the Gulf of Tonkin “incident” in 1964, which Burns promotes as true, was just one. The lies litter a multitude of official documents, notably the *Pentagon Papers*, which the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg released in 1971.

There was no good faith. The faith was rotten and cancerous. For me – as it must be for many Americans – it is difficult to watch the film’s jumble of “red peril” maps, unexplained interviewees, ineptly cut archive and maudlin American battlefield sequences. In the series’ press release in Britain – the BBC will show it – there is no mention of Vietnamese dead, only Americans.

“We are all searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy,” Novick is quoted as saying. How very post-modern.

All this will be familiar to those who have observed how the American media and popular culture behemoth has revised and served up the great crime of the second

half of the Twentieth Century: from “The Green Berets” and “The Deer Hunter” to “Rambo” and, in so doing, has legitimized subsequent wars of aggression. The revisionism never stops and the blood never dries. The invader is pitied and purged of guilt, while “searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy.” Cue Bob Dylan: “Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?”

What ‘Decency’ and ‘Good Faith’?

I thought about the “decency” and “good faith” when recalling my own first experiences as a young reporter in Vietnam: watching hypnotically as the skin fell off napalmed peasant children like old parchment, and the ladders of bombs that left trees petrified and festooned with human flesh. General William Westmoreland, the American commander, referred to people as “termites.”

In the early 1970s, I went to Quang Ngai province, where in the village of My Lai, between 347 and 500 men, women and infants were murdered by American troops (Burns prefers “killings”). At the time, this was presented as an aberration: an “American tragedy” (*Newsweek*). In this one province, it was estimated that 50,000 people had been slaughtered during the era of American “free fire zones.” Mass homicide. This was not news.

To the north, in Quang Tri province, more bombs were dropped than in all of Germany during the Second World War. Since 1975, unexploded ordnance has caused more than 40,000 deaths in mostly “South Vietnam,” the country America claimed to “save” and, with France, conceived as a singularly imperial ruse.

The “meaning” of the Vietnam War is no different from the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the leveling of every city in North Korea. The aim was described by Colonel Edward Lansdale, the famous CIA man on whom Graham Greene based his central character in *The Quiet American*.

Quoting Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea*, Lansdale said, “There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbours resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert.”

Nothing has changed. When Donald Trump addressed the United Nations on Sept. 19 – a body established to spare humanity the “scourge of war” – he declared he was “ready, willing and able” to “totally destroy” North Korea and its 25 million people. His audience gasped, but Trump’s language was not unusual. His rival for the presidency, Hillary Clinton, had boasted she was prepared to “totally obliterate” Iran, a nation of more than 80 million people. This is the American Way; only the euphemisms are missing now.

Returning to the U.S., I am struck by the silence and the absence of an opposition – on the streets, in journalism and the arts, as if dissent once tolerated in the “mainstream” has regressed to a dissidence: a metaphoric underground.

Missing What Trump Means

There is plenty of sound and fury at Trump the odious one, the “fascist,” but almost none at Trump as the symptom and caricature of an enduring system of conquest and extremism. Where are the ghosts of the great anti-war demonstrations that took over Washington in the 1970s? Where is the equivalent of the Freeze Movement that filled the streets of Manhattan in the 1980s, demanding that President Reagan withdraw battlefield nuclear weapons from Europe?

The sheer energy and moral persistence of these great movements largely succeeded; by 1987 Reagan had negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) that effectively ended the Cold War.

Today, according to secret NATO documents obtained by the German newspaper, *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, this vital treaty is likely to be abandoned as “nuclear targeting planning is increased.” The German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has warned against “repeating the worst mistakes of the Cold War. ... All the good treaties on disarmament and arms control from Gorbachev and Reagan are in acute peril. Europe is threatened again with becoming a military training ground for nuclear weapons. We must raise our voice against this.”

But not in America. The thousands who turned out for Sen. Bernie Sanders’s “revolution” in last year’s presidential campaign are collectively mute on these dangers. That most of America’s violence across the world has been perpetrated not by Republicans, or mutants like Trump, but by liberal Democrats, remains a taboo.

Barack Obama provided the apotheosis, with seven simultaneous wars, a presidential record, including the destruction of Libya as a modern state. Obama’s overthrow of Ukraine’s elected government has had the desired effect: the massing of American-led NATO forces on Russia’s western borderland through which the Nazis invaded in 1941.

Obama’s “pivot to Asia” in 2011 signaled the transfer of the majority of America’s naval and air forces to Asia and the Pacific for no purpose other than to confront and provoke China. The Nobel Peace Laureate’s worldwide campaign of assassinations is arguably the most extensive campaign of terrorism since 9/11.

What is known in the U.S. as “the Left” has effectively allied with the darkest

recesses of institutional power, notably the Pentagon and the CIA, to prevent a peace deal between Trump and Vladimir Putin and to reinstate Russia as an enemy, on the basis of no evidence of its alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election.

The true scandal is the insidious assumption of power by sinister war-making vested interests for which no American voted. The rapid ascendancy of the Pentagon and the surveillance agencies under Obama represented an historic shift of power in Washington. Daniel Ellsberg rightly called it a coup. The three generals running Trump are its witness.

All of this fails to penetrate those “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” as Luciana Bohne noted memorably. Commodified and market-tested, “diversity” is the new liberal brand, not the class people serve regardless of their gender and skin color: not the responsibility of all to stop a barbaric war to end all wars.

“How did it fucking come to this?” says Michael Moore in his Broadway show, *Terms of My Surrender*, a vaudeville for the disaffected set against a backdrop of Trump as Big Brother.

I admired Moore’s film, *Roger & Me*, about the economic and social devastation of his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and *Sicko*, his investigation into the corruption of healthcare in America.

The night I saw his show, his happy-clappy audience cheered his reassurance that “we are the majority!” and calls to “impeach Trump, a liar and a fascist!” His message seemed to be that had you held your nose and voted for Hillary Clinton, life would be predictable again.

He may be right. Instead of merely abusing the world, as Trump does, Clinton, the Great Obliterator, might have attacked Iran and lobbed missiles at Putin, whom she likened to Hitler: a particular profanity given the 27 million Russians who died in Hitler’s invasion.

“Listen up,” said Moore, “putting aside what our governments do, Americans are really loved by the world!”

There was a silence.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger’s Web site is: www.johnpilger.com. His new film, “The Coming War on China,” is available in the U.S. from www.bullfrogfilms.com

PBS' 'Vietnam War' Tells Some Truths

Exclusive: The PBS 10-part Vietnam War series offers valuable insights into the horrific conflict but still treads lightly on U.S. leaders' guilt as they lied and connived to start and extend the slaughter, as war correspondent Don North describes.

By Don North (Correction: An earlier version incorrectly stated that the PBS series did not address the issue of Nixon's sabotage of Johnson's 1968 peace talks. The topic is mentioned.)

Vietnamese-American author Viet Thanh Nguyen observed in his 2016 book, *Nothing Ever Dies*, that "All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory." That is surely true of the Vietnam War, which – although it ended four decades ago – continues as a battle of memory, history and truth.

And, the stakes are still high since honest narratives about important past events can shape the future, even national destinies, and – perhaps most importantly – whether there will be more wars or possibly peace.

When PBS announced that it was broadcasting a 10-part, 18-hour series, entitled "The Vietnam War," I wasn't sure what to expect. As a network news correspondent who covered the war for five years through many of its bloodiest chapters, I have had mixed feelings about some of the other attempts to recount and explain the war.

Many of the previous efforts were colored by the political pressures of the moment, especially from policymakers and journalists who had career stakes in how assessments of the failed war would make them look. So, with some trepidation, I watched the entire 10-part series and read the companion book by writer Geoffrey C. Ward over the past week. To my pleasant surprise, I found many reasons to applaud the effort and my criticisms were relatively minor.

In my view, the PBS series, directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, represents the most honest and thorough account available to the general public. Over those 18 hours, the series reveals so much duplicity and mendacity that this real history makes even the most cynical movies about the war, such as "Apocalypse Now," and "The Deer Hunter," look tame by comparison.

I think that all Americans and Vietnamese who experienced the years of that war will find watching the series at least an educational experience, at best an inspiring one, and for some of us – who witnessed, fought or protested the war –

a profoundly emotional experience as well. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has recognized the series may bring up such stressful memories for combat veterans that it has offered a crisis line for counseling at 1-800-273-8255.

A Clear Narrative

The cement that holds together the interviews of some 80 participants is a clear narration written by Ward and performed by Peter Coyote without the “voice of God” style used in so many documentaries. Ward’s prologue to the first program is a sort of mission statement for the series, which I would criticize mostly because it still contains a residue of the longstanding desire to put a well-meaning gloss on the war’s justifications even when the evidence points elsewhere:

“America’s involvement in Vietnam began in secrecy. It ended thirty years later in failure witnessed by the entire world. It was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence, and cold war miscalculation. And it was prolonged because it seemed easier to muddle through than to admit it had been caused by tragic decisions, made by five American presidents, belonging to both political parties ... For those Americans who fought in it, and for those who fought against it back home – as well as those who merely glimpsed it on the nightly news – the Vietnam War was a decade of agony, the most divisive period since the Civil War.”

Yet, when you hear some of the secret telephone recordings of White House conversations by President Lyndon Johnson, Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, you’re not left with the impression that there was so much “good faith” by “decent people.”

For instance, one phone conversation between Johnson and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy reflected how Johnson really felt about Vietnam, contrary to the optimistic assessments that he was selling to the public and belying his assurances that the blood and treasure were worth the cost.

Johnson: I don’t know what in hell ... it looks like we’re getting into another Korea. I don’t think it’s worth fighting for and I don’t think we can get out. And it’s just the biggest damn mess.

Bundy: It is an awful mess.

Johnson: What in hell is Vietnam worth to me? What is it worth to the country?

Past the Talking Points

The PBS series interviews some 80 people on camera, including about 20 Vietnamese from both North and South. Drawing heavily from writers and poets, the series presents intelligent thoughts from all sides of the conflict. Novick, who is reported to have conducted most of the interviews, succeeded in getting people to go beyond the usual talking points.

When I returned to Vietnam shortly after the war to interview Vietnamese participants, there was always a government “minder” present. The results were hours of hearing Communist party dogma of little news value. That control seems to have broken down.

Foremost among the Vietnamese interviewed in the PBS series is Bao Ninh, a former North Vietnamese soldier and author of *The Sorrow of War*, a brutal and emotional novel about the war in the jungle and his bitter re-entry into society.

Bao remembers, “At the recruiting station they had singers and poets, working up the spirit of those signing up. There were two types of people – those full of anti-American spirit. And those like me. We were told to go and went.” Of 500 recruits in his brigade sent to fight in the South in 1969, he is one of ten who survived.

Duong Van Mai, now Duong Van Mai Elliot, was the daughter of a high official in the French colonial administration in Hanoi before fleeing south with her family after North and South were split. Mai later studied at Georgetown University and became an American. She is author of *Sacred Willows: Four Generations of a Vietnamese Family*.

One of the most articulate and compelling American witnesses is former U.S. Marine John Musgrave, so badly wounded in Vietnam that doctors rated him as expected to die. We follow Musgrave from his early training through battle, dropping out, alcoholism and war protesting, a veteran who still struggles with effects of his wounds.

Another Marine, Roger Harris, who pops up in almost every program, served in the deadly Con Thien base adjacent to the Demilitarized Zone. Harris recalls: “You go over there with one mind-set and then you adapt. You adapt to the atrocities of war. You adapt to the killing and dying, whatever. ... When I first arrived I questioned some of the Marines. I was made to realize this is war – and this is what we do.”

Karl Marlantis, a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, dropped out of school to join the U.S. Marines and led a platoon near the DMZ. Marlantis wrote *Matterhorn*, a Vietnam War classic. His frequent interview segments are articulate and

thoughtful as when he discusses his anger: "I can understand policy errors that kill a lot of people by mistake, but my bitterness is with the lying. Robert McNamara knew by 1965 the war was unwinnable and covering up killing people for your own ego and that's what makes me mad."

Secretary of Defense McNamara is often portrayed as a villain, but a very poignant interview is included with McNamara's son Craig who recalls his appeal to his father to provide him with information for a college debate supporting the war. He never receives it and concludes his father didn't believe in it himself.

Lack of Accountability

Tim O'Brian, another writer and author of *The Things They Carried*, served in the U.S Army's Americal Division and was familiar with the village the troops called "Pinkville," which became the scene of a massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai. O'Brian is critical that no soldiers involved in the massacre were ever sent to prison.

Lt. Commander Everett Alvarez, flying from the carrier USS Constellation, was the first American pilot to be shot down over North Vietnam and the first POW.

"When we approached the target coming down from altitude," recalled Alvarez, "it was obvious they could pick us up on their radar. I was a bit scared. But once we went in and they started firing at us, the fear went away. My plane, an A-4 Skyhawk, was like a ballet in the sky, and I was just performing. And then I got hit."

Alvarez spent eight years as a POW in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." In 1990 on a visit to Hanoi, I found that ironically a new Hilton Hotel had been built over what remained of the prison. Walking into the hotel bar, I was hailed by a middle-age man sitting on a barstool.

"Hey, you're an American aren't you?" he said. "Let me buy you a drink. I'm sitting over what used to be my prison cell for eight years."

The anti-war movement merits substantial time throughout the series and features many articulate protesters. Bill Zimmerman carries the protesters narrative from 1963 when he was a senior at the University of Chicago and member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) working for civil rights in Mississippi.

"We had watched the civil rights movement in the South to stand up against injustice, allow yourself to be beaten up or hit by a policeman," he recalled. "Then one day we saw on TV a picture of a burning monk in Saigon. I asked myself

what were we doing in Vietnam. Ending the war in Vietnam became my constant pre-occupation.”

The anti-war movement is not always portrayed in a favorable light, particularly in later years when bombings occurred and violent demonstrations became frequent. The hostility of many Americans toward the protesters is also captured in an interview with Jan Howard of Tennessee who describes her reaction to a student demonstrator asking her if she would join an anti-war march:

“I said ... my son is dead. One of the reasons he died was so you'd have the right to do this, so go ahead and demonstrate. Have at it. No, I won't be joining you. But I tell you what, if you ever ring my doorbell again I'll blow your damned head off with a .357 Magnum.”

Upsetting Hanoi

The series succeeds in cutting through the fog of the often secretive North Vietnamese leadership. Although the series includes interesting footage and photos of Ho Chi Minh, considered the father of modern Vietnam, and General Vo Nguyen Giap, the hero of Dien Bien Phu, the battle which effectively ended French colonial rule, the real power later shifted to Le Duan, a hard-line Communist of the Politburo and mastermind of the Tet offensive.

Newsweek reports that powerful figures in the Hanoi government are not happy with the series to such an extent that they ousted foreign ministry press officers who helped Burns and Novick set up interviews. The leaders' primary complaint is reported to be that the series exposed the dissension and rivalries throughout the war at the top levels of the Hanoi regime.

They are also annoyed that several Vietnamese who were interviewed spoke frankly about the massacre of civilians in Hue during the Tet offensive. In the past, the North Vietnamese blamed the deaths on American bombs and artillery. (Although PBS devoted considerable time and expense to create a Vietnamese-language version of the series, no one expects the government to allow it to be shown in Vietnam.)

Despite how ambitious the 18-hour series is, there were a few subjects and individuals conspicuous by their absence. For instance, you see Colonel Edward Lansdale meeting with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon but no mention of Lansdale's years running a psy-war program against the North Vietnamese.

Also, missing is a thorough examination of Nixon's decision to have 30,000 American soldiers and 50,000 South Vietnamese troops storm across the Cambodian border in April 1970, an invasion that contributed to the Khmer Rouge's

overthrow of the Cambodian government and the unleashing of one more Vietnam War-related tragedy, the deaths of as many as two million Cambodians from 1975 to 1979. Nixon's decision to expand the war merited only 2 minutes and 50 seconds in episode six.

But even in an 18-hour series, editorial judgments must be made about what works toward telling the necessary narrative and what doesn't make the cut (though I would disagree with some of those choices). I also found it confusing when Burns succumbed to some film school techniques, such as "foreshadowing" in episode one entitled "Déjà Vu" that juxtaposed black-and-white archival footage of the failed French colonial occupation of Vietnam with later color film of American troops on patrol.

But a powerful element of the series is the impact of photographs and film from both sides of the conflict. Most film in Vietnam was shot silent, so the sound of bombs and gunshots was mixed in along with popular music. Vietnam, after all, was the first war fought to a rock 'n roll beat. [Full disclosure: I provided some photographs for the series.]

There is no identification of the photographers who at great risk took many of the photos. Apparently, the producers thought jamming the screen with constant credits for photos and film would be distracting. But the classic photos, many of which have become icons of the war, are readily recognized as the work of Horst Faas, Larry Burrows, Eddie Adams, Tim Page, Don McCullin, Henri Huet and Nick Ut, among many others.

The war claimed the lives of 135 photojournalists. A special tribute to Vietnam photojournalists is included in the closing credits.

Publicity Campaign

For the past month, directors Burns and Novick have spearheaded a massive publicity campaign to promote the series. Last week, the Kennedy Center Opera House was filled for an advance screening of program highlights followed by a panel discussion. Before the screening, Burns asked anyone who served in the military during the war to stand and be recognized with applause. He then asked anyone who protested Vietnam to stand. At that point, two of the war's most famous veterans, Sen. John McCain and former Secretary of State John Kerry, joined in applauding the anti-war demonstrators, too.

It was a moment that set the tone of reconciliation and harmony the series producers said they had hoped for in documenting one of the most divisive chapters in American history. In the ensuing panel discussion, the 81-year-old McCain, who was a bomber pilot shot down over Hanoi and held as a POW for more

than five years, said, "Maybe we can look back on Vietnam and make sure we don't make the same mistakes again. We can learn lessons today because the world is in such turmoil: Tell the American people the truth!"

Winston Churchill once said, "The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward." That would surely be true for any careful study of the Vietnam War, an unwinnable war fought against a country that Americans knew virtually nothing about and in which the U.S. had no vital interests. It was a lesson in how arrogance, ignorance, ideology and political cowardice can be a deadly mix.

The war took the lives of more than 58,000 American soldiers. Although Vietnamese casualty estimates vary widely, the Vietnamese government tallied more than 1 million soldiers dead along with 2 million civilians.

In 2001, I interviewed historian Arthur Schlesinger at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba and asked him if we were learning from our history. "History is an argument without end," Schlesinger told me. "No historian would use the word definitive because new times bring new preoccupations and we historians realize we are prisoners of our own experience. As Oscar Wilde used to say 'One duty we owe to history is to re-write it.'"

As upsetting as the Vietnam War series may be, it holds out hope that we might still learn from history.

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

Seymour Hersh Honored for Integrity

An organization led by former U.S. intelligence officials has selected legendary journalist Seymour Hersh to be the recipient of an annual award for integrity and truth-telling, named for the late CIA analyst Sam Adams.

By Ray McGovern.

Journalist Seymour Hersh is to be honored with this year's Sam Adams Award for Integrity to be presented to him at the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence (SAAII) award ceremony on the evening of Sept. 22 at American University.

Sam Adams Associates, who selected Hersh last month from a truly impressive roster of truth-tellers, are enthusiastic at the prospect of Sy joining the ranks of the 15 earlier awardees – from Coleen Rowley (2002) to John Kiriakou (2016). Included among those in between are other patriots: like Katharine Gun, U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray, Col. Larry Wilkerson, Julian Assange, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Fingar, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and Bill Binney. [To learn more about previous honorees, as well as other material on whistleblowing, go to samadamsaward.ch.]

SAAII confers its annual award on a member of the intelligence profession or related field who exemplifies the courage, persistence and devotion to truth of Sam Adams, a CIA analyst on Vietnam who exposed the lies of the generals in Saigon and was then silenced. Later – but too late – Sam realized he should have gone public. (Yes, during the 1960s and 1970s, more of the U.S. media was able to put the national interest first and was open to whistleblowers.)

Sam, who was a fourth cousin seven times removed of President John Adams, died prematurely at age 55, nagged by the thought that had he not let himself be diddled by the system, thousands of lives might have been saved in Indochina. His story is told in *War of Numbers*, published posthumously. Several of Sam's former colleagues are included in SAAII, as well as others who hold up the experience he underwent as a lesson for those who now know that, if they wish to succeed in getting the truth out, "going thru channels" normally is not only quixotic but also dangerous.

In 1967, Sam discovered that there were more than a half-million Vietnamese Communists under arms in South Vietnam – roughly twice the number that the U.S. command in Saigon would admit to, lest the outside world learn that American generals' claims of "progress" were bogus. Commanding general William Westmoreland had put an artificial limit on the number that Army intelligence was allowed to carry on its books.

On Aug. 22, 1967, Westmoreland's deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams, specifically warned the Johnson administration back in Washington that the press would have a field day if Adam's numbers were released, and that this would weaken the war effort. In a *SECRET/EYES ONLY* cable from Saigon, Abrams wrote: "We have been projecting an image of success over recent months," and cautioned that if the higher figures became public, "all available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion."

The Communist countrywide offensive during Tet (January/February 1968) made it painfully clear that the generals had been lying and that Sam Adams's higher figures were correct. A few weeks after Tet, Daniel Ellsberg rose to the occasion and leaked the truth. Dan had learned that Westmoreland was asking for

206,000 more troops to widen the war into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam – right up to the border with China, and perhaps beyond.

After the 206,000 request was leaked by someone else to the *New York Times*, Ellsberg leaked Sam Adams' information on actual enemy strength. Dan had come to the view that leaking truth about a deceitful war would be "a patriotic and constructive act." It was his first unauthorized disclosure, and it was effective. On March 19, 1968, the *Times* published a stinging story based on Adams's figures.

On March 25, President Johnson complained to a small gathering, "The leaks to the *New York Times* hurt us. ... We have no support for the war. This is caused by the 206,000 troop request [by Westmoreland] and the leaks. ... I would have given Westy the 206,000 men." On March 31, 1968, Johnson introduced a bombing pause, opted for negotiations, and announced that he would not run for another term in November.

Enter Sy Hersh

Sy Hersh, who was already famous for bringing the My Lai massacre story to global attention in 1969, found Sam Adams and pursued this other story of Vietnam deception. Thus, there is poetic justice in Sy Hersh receiving this award named for Adams, since it was he who first reported (in the *New York Times* on Feb. 26, 1973) on Sam's David vs. Goliath struggle against a military/political/intelligence establishment eager to cover up the politically driven undercounting of Communist fighters in South Vietnam.

In an article on Feb. 26, 1973, Hersh duly quoted Army officials who were still disparaging Sam's courageous pursuit of the truth. But the quote that Sy chose to conclude the article reflects his well honed smell for the truth.

He wrote, "'The trouble with Sam is that he has always been right,' one former colleague remarked. 'He always told the truth and never cared whose toes he stepped on.'"

Sy Hersh has no doubt worn out several pairs of shoes stepping on the toes of a well-heeled Establishment. The current response from the mainstream media to Hersh's latest exposés that challenge the lies and propaganda of Official Washington is to say: "We'll show you, Hersh. Just you try to get published anywhere in the English-speaking world."

Sy tried in vain to find an American or British outlet that would publish his most recent report on President Donald Trump's lie that a Syrian aircraft carried out a "chemical weapons attack" in Syria's Idlib Province on April 4. This disclosure of a deception by the new President would have been a big

deal, at least by the journalistic standards of the past, since Trump openly attacked Syria with 59 cruise missiles on April 6 in ostensible “retaliation.”

Sy ended up having to go to the mainstream German newspaper *Die Welt* to get the results of his investigation published. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

As for the New York Times – the so-called “paper of record” – and its proud tradition of publishing “all the news that’s fit to print,” its hallowed pages have made no mention of Pulitzer Prize-winning Sy Hersh’s article on the chemical incident in Syria on April 4. The slogan should be changed to “all the news that fits neatly into the government narrative we print.” Many Sam Adams Associates have also been active with Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and have faced similar ostracism from the mainstream media for almost 15 years.

Until He Was Silenced

Besides revealing the My Lai massacre in 1969, Hersh exposed illegal CIA domestic operations against the antiwar movement in 1974. More recently, in 2004, he reported on the torture and other abuses at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, and he exposed the Obama administration’s lies used to justify a bloody proxy war in Syria. None of this, however has left him cynical or dulled his conscience.

Sy told *Die Welt* that he still gets upset with government lying and at the reluctance of the media to hold governments accountable. Summing up lessons from Trump’s reaction to the April 4 chemical event in Syria, Sy said this: “We have a President in America today who lies repeatedly ... but he must learn that he cannot lie about intelligence relied upon before authorizing an act of war. There are some in the Trump administration who understand this, which is why I learned the information I did.”

The common challenge we all face is getting such information into media outlets that Americans regularly access. Encouragement comes from Sy Hersh’s example of grit, integrity and stick-to-itiveness, which have already had a powerful influence on Sam Adams Associates. In sum, this year’s awardee is a wonderfully good fit.

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A former CIA analyst and colleague of Sam Adams, Ray co-founded Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence and Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs).

Truth and Lives vs. Career and Fame

Exclusive: As President Trump considers sending more troops to Afghanistan, it's worth recalling the modern U.S. dynamic of politicians and generals making misguided judgments about war, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Fifty years ago, I could have tried to stop the Vietnam War, but lacked the courage. On Aug. 20, 1967, we at CIA received a cable from Saigon containing documentary proof that the U.S. commander, Gen. William Westmoreland, and his deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams, were lying about their "success" in fighting the Vietnamese Communists. I live with regret that I did not blow the whistle on that when I could have.

(I wrote about this two years ago: "[The Lasting Pain from Vietnam Silence](#)," republished below.)

Why raise this now? Because President Donald Trump has surrounded himself with starry-eyed generals (or generals with their eyes focused on their careers). And he seems to have little inkling that they got their multiple stars under a system where the Army motto "Duty, Honor, Country" can now be considered as "quaint" and "obsolete" as the Bush-Cheney administration deemed the Geneva Conventions.

All too often, the number of ribbons and merit badges festooned on the breasts of U.S. generals these days (think of the be-medaled Gen. David Petraeus, for example) is in direct proportion to the lies they have told in saluting smartly and abetting the unrealistic expectations of their political masters (and thus winning yet another star).

In my apologia that follows, the concentration is on the crimes of Westmoreland and the generations of careerist generals who aped him. There is not enough space to describe (or even list) those sycophantic officers here.

There are, sadly, far fewer senior officers who were exceptions, who put the true interests of the country ahead of their own careers. The list of general officers with integrity – the extreme exceptions to the rule – is even shorter. Only three spring immediately to mind: two generals and one admiral, all three of them cashiered for doing their job with honesty. What they experienced was instructive and remains so to this day.

1-On February 25, 2003, three weeks before the attack on Iraq, **Army Chief of**

Staff Eric Shinseki warned the Senate Armed Services Committee that post-war Iraq would require “something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers.” He was immediately ridiculed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, for having exaggerated the requirement. Shinseki retired a few months later.

2-Army General David McKiernan was cut from the same cloth. When President Barack Obama took office, McKiernan was running the war in Afghanistan. Even before Obama’s election, he had expressed himself openly and strongly against applying the benighted Iraq-style “surge” of forces to Afghanistan, emphasizing that Afghanistan is “a far more complex environment than I ever found in Iraq,” where he had led U.S. ground forces.

“The word I don’t use for Afghanistan is ‘surge,’” McKiernan told a news conference on Oct. 1, 2008. He warned that a large, sustained military buildup would be necessary to achieve any meaningful success. Worse still for the Washington Establishment, McKiernan added a stunning “no-no” – he said to achieve anything approaching a satisfactory outcome would take a decade, perhaps 14 years. Imagine!

For his political bosses, that cautionary realism was too much. On May 11, 2009, the Defense Secretary whom Obama’s predecessor bequeathed to him, Robert Gates, sacked McKiernan, who had been in command less than a year. Gates replaced him with the swashbuckling Gen. Stanley McChrystal, a protégé of Gen. (and later CIA Director) David Petraeus.

Now, more than eight years later – with the American death toll almost quadrupled since the start of the Obama administration (now exceeding 2,400), with a vastly greater death toll among Afghan civilians and with the U.S. military position even more precarious – President Trump is receiving advice to dispatch more U.S. troops.

3-Admiral William J. (“Fox”) Fallon, one of the last Vietnam War veterans on active duty late into George W. Bush’s administration, took over as chief of the Central Command on March 16, 2007. Fallon had already come under heavy criticism from the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute for not being hawkish enough.

Fallon had also been confronting Vice President Dick Cheney’s desire to commit U.S. forces to another Mideast war, with Iran. As Fallon was preparing to take responsibility for U.S. forces in the region, he declared that a war with Iran “isn’t going to happen on my watch,” according to retired Army Col. Patrick Lang who told the Washington Post.

Fallon's lack of patience with yes-men turned out to be yet another bureaucratic black mark against him. Several sources have reported that Fallon was sickened by David Petraeus's earlier, unctuous pandering to ingratiate himself with Fallon, his superior (for all-too-short a time). Fallon is said to have been so turned off by all the accolades in a flowery introduction given him by Petraeus that he called him to his face "an ass-kissing little chicken-shit," adding, "I hate people like that."

Fallon lasted not quite a full year. On March 11, 2008, Gates announced the resignation of Fallon as CENTCOM Commander, but Fallon's resistance to a war on Iran bought enough time for the U.S. intelligence community to reach a consensus that Iran had stopped work on a nuclear bomb years earlier, thus removing President Bush's intended excuse for going to war.

A Troubling Message

Sadly, however, the message to aspiring military commanders from this history is that there is little personal gain in doing what's best for the American people and the world. The promotions and the prestige normally go to the careerists who bend to the self-aggrandizing realities of Official Washington. They are the ones who typically become esteemed "wise men," the likes of Gen. Colin Powell, who went with the political winds (from his days as a young officer in Vietnam through his tenure as Secretary of State).

Someone needs to tell President Trump what Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity told President George W. Bush in a memorandum for the President on February 5, 2003, immediately following Powell's deceptive testimony urging the United Nations' Security Council to support an invasion of Iraq. What we said then seems just as urgent now:

"[A]fter watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion beyond ... the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic."

And on the chance that President Trump remains tone-deaf to such advice, let me appeal to the consciences of those within the system who are privy to the kind of consequential deceit that has become endemic to the U.S. government. It is time to blow the whistle – now.

Take it from one who lives with regret from choosing not to step forward when it might have made a difference. Take it from Pentagon Papers truth-teller Daniel Ellsberg who often expresses regret that he did not speak out sooner.

Take it from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a passage ironically cited often by

President Obama: “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now ... there **is** such a thing as being too late.”

[Below is McGovern’s article from May 1, 2015]

The Lasting Pain from Vietnam Silence

Exclusive: Many reflections on America’s final days in Vietnam miss the point, pondering whether the war could have been won or lamenting the fate of U.S. collaborators left behind. The bigger questions are why did the U.S. go to war and why wasn’t the bloodletting stopped sooner, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern reflects.

By Ray McGovern

Ecclesiastes says there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. The fortieth anniversary of the ugly end of the U.S. adventure in Vietnam is a time to speak and especially of the squandered opportunities that existed earlier in the war to blow the whistle and stop the killing.

While my friend Daniel Ellsberg’s leak of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 eventually helped to end the war, Ellsberg is the first to admit that he waited too long to reveal the unconscionable deceit that brought death and injury to millions.

I regret that, at first out of naiveté and then cowardice, I waited even longer until my own truth-telling no longer really mattered for the bloodshed in Vietnam. My hope is that there may be a chance this reminiscence might matter now if only as a painful example of what I could and should have done, had I the courage back then. Opportunities to blow the whistle *in time* now confront a new generation of intelligence analysts whether they work on Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, ISIS or Iran.

Incidentally, on Iran, there was a very positive example last decade: courageous analysts led by intrepid (and bureaucratically skilled) former Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence Thomas Fingar showed that honesty can still prevail within the system, even when truth is highly unwelcome.

The unanimous intelligence community conclusion of a National Intelligence Estimate of 2007 that Iran had stopped working on a nuclear weapon four years earlier played a huge role in thwarting plans by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney to attack Iran in 2008, their last year in office. Bush says so in his memoir; and, on that one point, we can believe him.

After a half-century of watching such things closely, this is the only time in

my experience that the key judgment of an NIE helped prevent a catastrophic, unwinnable war. Sadly, judging from the amateurism now prevailing in Washington's opaque policymaking circles, it seems clear that the White House pays little heed to those intelligence officers still trying to speak truth to power.

For them I have a suggestion: Don't just wring your hands, with an "I did everything I could to get the truth out." Chances are you have *not* done all you can. Ponder the stakes the lives ended too early; the bodies and minds damaged forever; the hatred engendered against the United States; and the long-term harm to U.S. national interests and think about blowing the whistle publicly to prevent unnecessary carnage and alienation.

I certainly wish I had done so about what I learned of the unconscionable betrayal by senior military and intelligence officers regarding Vietnam. More recently, I know that several of you intelligence analysts with a conscience wish you had blown the whistle on the fraud "justifying" war on Iraq. Spreading some truth around is precisely what you need to do now on Syria, Iraq, Ukraine and the "war on terror," for example.

I thought that by describing my own experience negative as it is and the remorse I continue to live with, I might assist those of you now pondering whether to step up to the plate and blow the whistle now, before it is again too late. So below is an article that I might call "Vietnam and Me."

My hope is to spare you the remorse of having to write, a decade or two from now, your own "Ukraine and Me" or "Syria and Me" or "Iraq and Me" or "Libya and Me" or "The War on Terror and Me." My article, from 2010, was entitled "How Truth Can Save Lives" and it began:

If independent-minded Web sites, like WikiLeaks or, say, Consortiumnews.com, existed 43 years ago, I might have risen to the occasion and helped save the lives of some 25,000 U.S. soldiers, and a million Vietnamese, by exposing the lies contained in just one SECRET/EYES ONLY cable from Saigon.

I need to speak out now because I have been sickened watching the herculean effort by Official Washington and our Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) to divert attention from the violence and deceit in Afghanistan, reflected in thousands of U.S. Army documents, by shooting the messenger(s), WikiLeaks and Pvt. Bradley Manning.

After all the indiscriminate death and destruction from nearly nine years of war, the hypocrisy is all too transparent when WikiLeaks and suspected leaker Manning are accused of risking lives by exposing too much truth. Besides, I

still have a guilty conscience for what I chose NOT to do in exposing facts about the Vietnam War that might have saved lives.

The sad-but-true story recounted below is offered in the hope that those in similar circumstances today might show more courage than I was able to muster in 1967, and take full advantage of the incredible advancements in technology since then.

Many of my Junior Officer Trainee Program colleagues at CIA came to Washington in the early Sixties inspired by President John Kennedy's Inaugural speech in which he asked us to ask ourselves what we might do for our country. (Sounds corny nowadays, I suppose; I guess I'll just have to ask you to take it on faith. It may not have been Camelot exactly, but the spirit and ambience were fresh, and good.)

Among those who found Kennedy's summons compelling was Sam Adams, a young former naval officer out of Harvard College. After the Navy, Sam tried Harvard Law School, but found it boring. Instead, he decided to go to Washington, join the CIA as an officer trainee, and do something more adventurous. He got more than his share of adventure.

Sam was one of the brightest and most dedicated among us. Quite early in his career, he acquired a very lively and important account, that of assessing Vietnamese Communist strength early in the war. He took to the task with uncommon resourcefulness and quickly proved himself the consummate analyst.

Relying largely on captured documents, buttressed by reporting from all manner of other sources, Adams concluded in 1967 that there were twice as many Communists (about 600,000) under arms in South Vietnam as the U.S. military there would admit.

Dissembling in Saigon

Visiting Saigon during 1967, Adams learned from Army analysts that their commanding general, William Westmoreland, had placed an artificial cap on the official Army count rather than risk questions regarding "progress" in the war (sound familiar?).

It was a clash of cultures; with Army intelligence analysts saluting generals following politically dictated orders, and Sam Adams aghast at the dishonesty, *consequential* dishonesty. From time to time I would have lunch with Sam and learn of the formidable opposition he encountered in trying to get out the truth.

Commiserating with Sam over lunch one day in late August 1967, I asked what

could possibly be Gen. Westmoreland's incentive to make the enemy strength appear to be half what it actually was. Sam gave me the answer he had from the horse's mouth in Saigon.

Adams told me that in a cable dated Aug. 20, 1967, Westmoreland's deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams, set forth the rationale for the deception. Abrams wrote that the new, higher numbers (reflecting Sam's count, which was supported by all intelligence agencies except Army intelligence, which reflected the "command position") "were in sharp contrast to the current overall strength figure of about 299,000 given to the press."

Abrams emphasized, "We have been projecting an image of success over recent months" and cautioned that if the higher figures became public, "all available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion."

No further proof was needed that the most senior U.S. Army commanders were lying, so that they could continue to feign "progress" in the war. Equally unfortunate, the crassness and callousness of Abrams's cable notwithstanding, it had become increasingly clear that rather than stand up for Sam, his superiors would probably acquiesce in the Army's bogus figures. Sadly, that's what they did.

CIA Director Richard Helms, who saw his primary duty quite narrowly as "protecting" the agency, set the tone. He told subordinates that he could not discharge that duty if he let the agency get involved in a heated argument with the U.S. Army on such a key issue in wartime.

This cut across the grain of what we had been led to believe was the prime duty of CIA analysts, to speak truth to power without fear or favor. And our experience thus far had shown both of us that this ethos amounted to much more than just slogans. We had, so far, been able to "tell it like it is."

After lunch with Sam, for the first time ever, I had no appetite for dessert. Sam and I had not come to Washington to "protect the agency." And, having served in Vietnam, Sam knew first hand that thousands upon thousands were being killed in a feckless war.

What to Do?

I have an all-too-distinct memory of a long silence over coffee, as each of us ruminated on what might be done. I recall thinking to myself; someone should take the Abrams cable down to the *New York Times* (at the time an independent-minded newspaper).

Clearly, the only reason for the cable's SECRET/EYES ONLY classification was to hide deliberate deception of our most senior generals regarding "progress" in the war and deprive the American people of the chance to know the truth.

Going to the press was, of course, antithetical to the culture of secrecy in which we had been trained. Besides, you would likely be caught at your next polygraph examination. Better not to stick your neck out.

I pondered all this in the days after that lunch with Adams. And I succeeded in coming up with a slew of reasons why I ought to keep silent: a mortgage; a plum overseas assignment for which I was in the final stages of language training; and, not least, the analytic work, important, exciting work on which Sam and I thrived.

Better to keep quiet for now, grow in gravitas, and live on to slay other dragons. Right?

One can, I suppose, always find excuses for not sticking one's neck out. The neck, after all, is a convenient connection between head and torso, albeit the "neck" that was the focus of my concern was a figurative one, suggesting possible loss of career, money and status not the literal "necks" of both Americans and Vietnamese that were on the line daily in the war.

But if there is nothing for which you would risk your career "neck" like, say, saving the lives of soldiers and civilians in a war zone your "neck" has become your idol, and your career is not worthy of that. I now regret giving such worship to my own neck. Not only did I fail the neck test. I had not thought things through very rigorously from a moral point of view.

Promises to Keep?

As a condition of employment, I had signed a promise not to divulge classified information so as not to endanger sources, methods or national security. Promises are important, and one should not lightly violate them. Plus, there are legitimate reasons for protecting some secrets. But were any of those legitimate concerns the real reasons why Abrams's cable was stamped SECRET/EYES ONLY? I think not.

It is not good to operate in a moral vacuum, oblivious to the reality that there exists a hierarchy of values and that circumstances often determine the morality of a course of action. How does a written promise to keep secret everything with a classified stamp on it square with one's moral responsibility to stop a war based on lies? Does stopping a misbegotten war not supersede a secrecy promise?

Ethicists use the words "supervening value" for this; the concept makes sense to

me. And is there yet another value? As an Army officer, I had taken a solemn oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

How did the lying by the Army command in Saigon fit in with that? Were/are generals exempt? Should we not call them out when we learn of deliberate deception that subverts the democratic process? Can the American people make good decisions if they are lied to?

Would I have helped stop unnecessary killing by giving the *New York Times* the not-really-secret, SECRET/EYES ONLY cable from Gen. Abrams? We'll never know, will we? And I live with that. I could not take the easy way out, saying Let Sam Do It. Because I knew he wouldn't.

Sam chose to go through the established grievance channels and got the royal run-around, even after the Communist countrywide offensive at Tet in January-February 1968 proved beyond any doubt that his count of Communist forces was correct.

When the Tet offensive began, as a way of keeping his sanity, Adams drafted a caustic cable to Saigon saying, "It is something of an anomaly to be taking so much punishment from Communist soldiers whose existence is not officially acknowledged." But he did not think the situation at all funny.

Dan Ellsberg Steps In

Sam kept playing by the rules, but it happened that unbeknown to Sam Dan Ellsberg gave Sam's figures on enemy strength to the *New York Times*, which published them on March 19, 1968. Dan had learned that President Lyndon Johnson was about to bow to Pentagon pressure to widen the war into Cambodia, Laos and up to the Chinese border perhaps even beyond.

Later, it became clear that his timely leak together with another unauthorized disclosure to the *Times* that the Pentagon had requested 206,000 more troops prevented a wider war. On March 25, Johnson complained to a small gathering, "The leaks to the *New York Times* hurt us. We have no support for the war. I would have given Westy the 206,000 men."

Ellsberg also copied the Pentagon Papers the 7,000-page top-secret history of U.S. decision-making on Vietnam from 1945 to 1967 and, in 1971, he gave copies to the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other news organizations.

In the years since, Ellsberg has had difficulty shaking off the thought that, had he released the Pentagon Papers sooner, the war might have ended years earlier with untold lives saved. Ellsberg has put it this way: "Like so many

others, I put personal loyalty to the president above all else above loyalty to the Constitution and above obligation to the law, to truth, to Americans, and to humankind. I was wrong.”

And so was I wrong in not asking Sam for a copy of that cable from Gen. Abrams. Sam, too, eventually had strong regrets. Sam had continued to pursue the matter within CIA, until he learned that Dan Ellsberg was on trial in 1973 for releasing the Pentagon Papers and was being accused of endangering national security by revealing figures on enemy strength.

Which figures? The same old faked numbers from 1967! “Imagine,” said Adams, “hanging a man for leaking faked numbers,” as he hustled off to testify on Dan’s behalf. (The case against Ellsberg was ultimately thrown out of court because of prosecutorial abuses committed by the Nixon administration.)

After the war drew down, Adams was tormented by the thought that, had he not let himself be diddled by the system, the entire left half of the Vietnam Memorial wall would not be there. There would have been no new names to chisel into such a wall.

Sam Adams died prematurely at age 55 with nagging remorse that he had not done enough.

In a letter appearing in the (then independent-minded) *New York Times* on Oct. 18, 1975, John T. Moore, a CIA analyst who worked in Saigon and the Pentagon from 1965 to 1970, confirmed Adams’s story after Sam told it in detail in the May 1975 issue of *Harper’s* magazine.

Moore wrote: “My only regret is that I did not have Sam’s courage. The record is clear. It speaks of misfeasance, nonfeasance and malfeasance, of outright dishonesty and professional cowardice.

“It reflects an intelligence community captured by an aging bureaucracy, which too often placed institutional self-interest or personal advancement before the national interest. It is a page of shame in the history of American intelligence.”

Tanks But No Thanks, Abrams

What about Gen. Creighton Abrams? Not every general gets the Army’s main battle tank named after him. The honor, though, came not from his service in Vietnam, but rather from his courage in the early day of his military career, leading his tanks through German lines to relieve Bastogne during World War II’s Battle of the Bulge. Gen. George Patton praised Abrams as the only tank commander he considered his equal.

As things turned out, sadly, 23 years later Abrams became a poster child for old soldiers who, as Gen. Douglas MacArthur suggested, should “just fade away,” rather than hang on too long after their great military accomplishments.

In May 1967, Abrams was picked to be Westmoreland’s deputy in Vietnam and succeeded him a year later. But Abrams could not succeed in the war, no matter how effectively “an image of success” his subordinates projected for the media. The “erroneous and gloomy conclusions of the press” that Abrams had tried so hard to head off proved all too accurate.

Ironically, when reality hit home, it fell to Abrams to cut back U.S. forces in Vietnam from a peak of 543,000 in early 1969 to 49,000 in June 1972, almost five years after Abrams’s progress-defending cable from Saigon. By 1972, some 58,000 U.S. troops, not to mention two to three million Vietnamese, had been killed.

Both Westmoreland and Abrams had reasonably good reputations when they started out, but not so much when they finished.

And Petraeus?

Comparisons can be invidious, but Gen. David Petraeus is another Army commander who has wowed Congress with his ribbons, medals and merit badges. A pity he was not born early enough to have served in Vietnam where he might have learned some real-life hard lessons about the limitations of counterinsurgency theories.

Moreover, it appears that no one took the trouble to tell him that in the early Sixties we young infantry officers already had plenty of counterinsurgency manuals to study at Fort Bragg and Fort Benning. There are many things one cannot learn from reading or writing manuals, as many of my Army colleagues learned too late in the jungles and mountains of South Vietnam.

Unless one is to believe, contrary to all indications, that Petraeus is not all that bright, one has to assume he knows that the Afghanistan expedition is a folly beyond repair. So far, though, he has chosen the approach taken by Gen. Abrams in his August 1967 cable from Saigon. That is precisely why the ground-truth of the documents released by WikiLeaks is so important.

Whistleblowers Galore

And it’s not just the WikiLeaks documents that have caused consternation inside the U.S. government. Investigators reportedly are rigorously pursuing the source that provided the *New York Times* with the texts of two cables (of 6 and 9 November 2009) from Ambassador Eikenberry in Kabul. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Obama Ignores Key Afghan Warning.”](#)]

To its credit, even today's far-less independent *New York Times* published a major story based on the information in those cables, while President Barack Obama was still trying to figure out what to do about Afghanistan. Later the *Times* posted the entire texts of the cables, which were classified Top Secret and NODIS (meaning "no dissemination" to anyone but the most senior officials to whom the documents were addressed).

The cables conveyed Eikenberry's experienced, cogent views on the foolishness of the policy in place and, implicitly, of any eventual decision to double down on the Afghan War. (That, of course, is pretty much what the President ended up doing.) Eikenberry provided chapter and verse to explain why, as he put it, "I cannot support [the Defense Department's] recommendation for an immediate Presidential decision to deploy another 40,000 here."

Such frank disclosures are anathema to self-serving bureaucrats and ideologues who would much prefer depriving the American people of information that might lead them to question the government's benighted policy toward Afghanistan, for example.

As the *New York Times*/Eikenberry cables show, even today's FCM (fawning corporate media) may sometimes display the old spunk of American journalism and refuse to hide or fudge the truth, even if the facts might cause the people to draw "an erroneous and gloomy conclusion," to borrow Gen. Abrams's words of 43 years ago.

Polished Pentagon Spokesman

Remember "Baghdad Bob," the irrepressible and unreliable Iraqi Information Minister at the time of the U.S.-led invasion? He came to mind as I watched Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell's chaotic, quixotic press briefing on Aug. 5 regarding the WikiLeaks exposures. The briefing was revealing in several respects. Clear from his prepared statement was what is bothering the Pentagon the most. Here's Morrell:

"WikiLeaks's webpage constitutes a brazen solicitation to U.S. government officials, including our military, to break the law. WikiLeaks's public assertion that submitting confidential material to WikiLeaks is safe, easy and protected by law is materially false and misleading. The Department of Defense therefore also demands that WikiLeaks discontinue any solicitation of this type."

Rest assured that the Defense Department will do all it can to make it unsafe for any government official to provide WikiLeaks with sensitive material. But it is contending with a clever group of hi-tech experts who have built in

precautions to allow information to be submitted anonymously. That the Pentagon will prevail anytime soon is far from certain.

Also, in a ludicrous attempt to close the barn door after tens of thousands of classified documents had already escaped, Morrell insisted that WikiLeaks give back all the documents and electronic media in its possession. Even the normally docile Pentagon press corps could not suppress a collective laugh, irritating the Pentagon spokesman no end. The impression gained was one of a Pentagon Gulliver tied down by terabytes of Lilliputians.

Morrell's self-righteous appeal to the leaders of WikiLeaks to "do the right thing" was accompanied by an explicit threat that, otherwise, "We shall have to compel them to do the right thing." His attempt to assert Pentagon power in this regard fell flat, given the realities.

Morrell also chose the occasion to remind the Pentagon press corps to behave themselves or face rejection when applying to be embedded in units of U.S. armed forces. The correspondents were shown nodding docilely as Morrell reminded them that permission for embedding "is by no means a right. It is a privilege." The generals giveth and the generals taketh away.

It was a moment of arrogance, and press subservience, that would have sickened Thomas Jefferson or James Madison, not to mention the courageous war correspondents who did their duty in Vietnam. Morrell and the generals can control the "embeds"; they cannot control the ether. Not yet, anyway.

And that was all too apparent beneath the strutting, preening, and finger waving by the Pentagon's fancy silk necktie to the world. Actually, the opportunities afforded by WikiLeaks and other Internet Web sites can serve to diminish what few advantages there are to being *in bed* with the Army.

What Would I Have Done?

Would I have had the courage to whisk Gen. Abrams's cable into the ether in 1967, if WikiLeaks or other Web sites had been available to provide a major opportunity to expose the deceit of the top Army command in Saigon? The Pentagon can argue that using the Internet this way is not "safe, easy, and protected by law." We shall see.

Meanwhile, this way of exposing information that people in a democracy should know will continue to be sorely tempting, and a lot easier than taking the risk of being photographed lunching with someone from the *New York Times*.

From what I have learned over these past 43 years, supervening moral values can, and should, trump lesser promises. Today, I would be determined to "do the right

thing,” if I had access to an Abrams-like cable from Petraeus in Kabul. And I believe that Sam Adams, if he were alive today, would enthusiastically agree that this would be the morally correct decision.

My article from 2010 ended with a footnote about the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence (SAAII), an organization created by Sam Adams’s former CIA colleagues and other former intelligence analysts to hold up his example as a model for those in intelligence who would aspire to the courage to speak truth to power.

At the time there were seven recipients of an annual award bestowed on those who exemplified Sam Adam’s courage, persistence and devotion to truth. Now, there have been 14 recipients: Coleen Rowley (2002), Katharine Gun (2003), Sibel Edmonds (2004), Craig Murray (2005), Sam Provance (2006), Frank Grevil (2007), Larry Wilkerson (2009), Julian Assange (2010), Thomas Drake (2011), Jesselyn Radack (2011), Thomasingar (2012), Edward Snowden (2013), Chelsea Manning (2014), William Binney (2015).

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a close colleague of Sam Adams; the two began their CIA analyst careers together during the last months of John Kennedy’s administration. During the Vietnam War, McGovern was responsible for analyzing Soviet policy toward China and Vietnam.

The Goal of ‘Not Losing’ in Afghanistan

Exclusive: America’s adventures in Afghanistan – dating back to the 1980s – have led to one disaster after another with President Trump and other politicians afraid to finally admit failure, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

“Let’s get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghans we train and we waste billions there. Nonsense!” – Donald Trump, January 11, 2013

Taking a break from his defense of the “very fine people” who marched with Nazis in Charlottesville, President Trump will reportedly meet with his national security team today (Friday, August 18) at Camp David to discuss a far deadlier but ironically less controversial issue: the war in Afghanistan.

That war, the longest in our history, has cost the United States more than 2,350

killed, 20,000 injured, and a trillion dollars. Yet unlike Charlottesville, it arouses little passion. It gained impeccably bipartisan credentials through successive Republican and Democratic administrations. Although a huge majority of Americans today oppose the war, they lack sufficient conviction to prevent Congress from continuing to appropriate tens of billions of dollars each year to fund it.

Trump is in a bind. As Taliban forces continue to rack up military and political gains across their country, no serious expert can possibly believe that continued U.S. intervention will deliver “victory.” Sixteen years of experience show that almost every U.S. tactic has not only failed, but backfired.

Far from winning hearts and minds, nighttime Special Forces raids and bombing runs have turned countless villagers against the Afghan government and its foreign backers. Far from bolstering Kabul’s resources, tens of billions of dollars in U.S. aid created an epidemic of corruption that decimated the government’s credibility and put money and weapons in the hands of the Taliban.

Far from defeating Islamist tyranny, the United States has empowered viciously cruel warlords. Far from promoting law and order, U.S. anti-drug campaigns turned poppy-growing peasants into allies and funders of the Taliban. And far from closing off Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan, Washington’s surly relations with Islamabad have amplified dangerous anti-American sentiments in that nuclear-armed, Islamic state.

A Parallel Disaster

“It is most disturbing to find that after [many] years [the country] appears less, not more, stable than it was at the outset,” said one prominent U.S. senator. “It appears more removed from, rather than closer to, the achievement of popularly responsible and responsive government.”

That was actually the observation of Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, D-Montana, reporting on a study mission to Vietnam in the fall of 1962. It applies just as well to Afghanistan today.

Yet as Trump’s national security experts huddle with the President, most are almost certainly advocating an increased troop commitment to Afghanistan – not to bear the brunt of the fighting, but ostensibly to train government forces to stand on their own. That, of course, was the mission of U.S. military advisers sent to Vietnam in the early 1960s, before that war ballooned into a national disaster.

Trump’s generals – McMaster, Mattis and Kelly – know this history as well as anyone. (H. R. McMaster’s book, *Dereliction of Duty*, is considered a classic

history of failed military leadership in the Vietnam War.) So does John McCain, the Senate's most famous Vietnam veteran, who nonetheless insists on doing whatever it takes to "turn the tide" in Afghanistan. So why do they – like Obama's team before them – keep calling for throwing away more lives and money on a lost cause?

The answer to that also lies in Vietnam. As former Defense Department official and Pentagon Papers leaker Daniel Ellsberg argued in a seminal 1971 essay, "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine," U.S. leaders knew full well, every step of the way, that their successive escalations of that war would not bring victory. Instead, their goal was to prevent defeat – and with it, a repetition of the political traumas that followed the "loss of China" and the rise of McCarthyism in the early 1950s.

"If I tried to pull out completely now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands," President John F. Kennedy told Sen. Mansfield in 1963. The assassination of Kennedy that November precluded any possibility that he would pull out after his reelection. Two days later, President Lyndon Johnson told a White House meeting, "I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."

The Cost of 'Not Losing'

Forty-six years later, a *Washington Post* story on America's longest war reports, "talk of 'winning' is scarce. The goal now seems more akin to 'not losing.'" Pundits like former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta now talk of staying in Afghanistan for decades. It's a replay of the Vietnam stalemate – but with more manageable costs, little TV coverage, and no mass anti-war demonstrations.

Most Washington leaders hardly know or care whether any U.S. "national interests" are actually at stake in Afghanistan. But they view the political risks of pulling out as worse than the risks of keeping the stalemate going. They don't dare face charges that they allowed Afghanistan to become once again a haven for terrorists. No matter that Islamist jihadists operate just fine today without bases in Afghanistan – in our post-reality world, what counts are not the facts, but what fire-breathing analysts on Fox News will say about any apparent retreat.

No one knows what would happen if the United States were to pull out of Afghanistan. But if the Vietnam analogy holds, the consequences, though not pretty, would surely be less disastrous than many pundits predict. It's hard to dispute the (admittedly self-serving) words of one Taliban spokesman, who said a U.S. withdrawal "will prevent further loss of its manpower and economy . . . This will be a means of salvage for us Afghans, too. . . Therefore, if America's

occupation comes to an end, it means that the problem between the two nations will end, too.”

Donald Trump, who had no trouble advising President Obama to quit the war, has reportedly ruled out a withdrawal from Afghanistan and complained to his military advisers that they aren't giving him a strategy to win. If those reports are correct, he will forfeit his last opportunity to blame the war on his predecessor and cut his losses.

Senator McCain had it partly right when he said in July, “Eight [try 16] years of a ‘don't lose’ strategy have cost us lives and treasure in Afghanistan. Our troops deserve better.”

So do American taxpayers – and Afghan civilians. Unfortunately, McCain, like most members of the Washington foreign policy “blob,” can only envision further military escalation to maintain the stalemate. What the United States desperately needs now is a mass movement to resist not only racism and plutocracy at home, but endless militarism abroad.

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.

Mythical Powers of a Memorial Wall

America, like other countries, surrounds itself with myths about the founding and reasons for wars, all the better to control the population and justify government actions, explains Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Walls (here we mean monolithic structures that are not part of buildings) seem to hold a special fascination for many people. Some walls feed a tribal passion, a strong us-versus-them mentality. The apartheid wall produced by the Israeli government, as well as the wall envisioned by the Trump administration for the southern U.S. border, are of that type.

However, there are other kinds of walls, such as those that memorialize the dead. For instance, in Washington, D.C., there is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall. This wall (actually two walls that meet at a ninety degree angle) is roughly 494 feet long and is inscribed with the names of 58,318 servicemen and women killed or missing in that war.

Just by way of comparison, one might ask how long would be a similar memorial to

the approximately three million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians killed in the same war. It would have to be about 51 times larger, extending over 25,000 feet. That is about 4.7 miles long.

Of course, nations do not commemorate the dead of their adversaries, for to do so would call into question the value of their own citizens' sacrifices. And sacrifice – indeed patriotic sacrifice – is certainly how most Americans would describe the deaths of those whose names appear on this wall.

As one veteran who visits the site often put it, “We lost all those wonderful kids. It’s very moving to see all names at once, all the sacrifice, the enormity of it.”

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall is immensely popular – for the relatives and friends of the dead it memorializes are still well represented among the living. More than three million visitors a year (about the same number as Vietnamese dead!) visit the wall in Washington. To this we can add the fact that, for the last 13 years, there has been a portable replica of the wall traveling about the country.

The fact that this replica will soon show up in a town not far from where I live has led me to consider the various ways the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall, be it stationary or mobile, can be contextualized.

Patriotic Sacrifice?

The problem with the assertion that all of those 58,318 dead servicemen and women performed some sort of patriotic sacrifice is that it is, at least in good part, ahistorical. In other words, the claim doesn't fit the facts very well, though it does fit the prevailing official storyline.

(1) The official story is that the Vietnam War was all about containing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Communist North Vietnam supposedly wanted to conquer “democratic” South Vietnam in order to spread its Communist ideology, and if successful, this conquest would trigger a “domino” effect that would result in most of Southeast Asia becoming Communist. To save millions of people from this fate, the United States sent all “those wonderful kids” to war.

(2) A contrasting account, one that has much more of a factual foundation, is that North Vietnam and South Vietnam were really one country and the latter existed only as an artificial creation of French imperialism (France controlled Vietnam from the 1880s through to 1954). The main motivation of the North Vietnamese in fighting the United States was to achieve national unification.

That made their leader, Ho Chi Minh, first and foremost a Vietnamese patriot.

His Communist ideology was a secondary factor in the eyes of most of his fellow Vietnamese (the small Catholic minority in the south being an exception). By the way, Ho had only become a Communist after World War I because the Soviet Union was the only powerful nation willing to help him in his struggle against French colonial occupation.

Finally, the OSS/CIA came up with a National Intelligence Estimate as early as 1945 that predicted the difficulties of fighting in Vietnam, and also remarked on the popularity of Ho Chi Minh as a founding father figure in all parts of the country. This estimate was rejected by the political leadership in Washington. Why so?

After World War II, the worldview in Washington was dominated by a strident anti-Communist outlook that blinded American leaders to all "Third World" nationalist impulses. Whether it was in Ho's Vietnam, Nasser's Egypt or Castro's Cuba, among many others, the alleged drive of Communism for world domination was assumed to be lurking somewhere behind the scenes.

There are other motivations that came into play in Washington by the mid-1960s. The Democratic Party was in control of the White House, and there was fear that if Democrats did not take a stand in South Vietnam, the Republicans would relentlessly accuse them of weakness, and "losing Vietnam," as earlier Democrats had allegedly "lost China" to Communism.

All of this led ultimately to the purposeful exaggeration of the August 1964 naval incident in the Gulf of Tonkin. During this episode a U.S. destroyer fired warning shots at nearby North Vietnamese gunboats. This incident was misleadingly described by President Lyndon Johnson to Congress as an attack by the gunboats on a U.S. ship, and it led to Congress passing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowing the President to deploy conventional forces in "defense" of South Vietnam.

We can now ask ourselves which of these two storylines supports the claim of patriotic sacrifice? Obviously it is the first one. If the Vietnam War was all about halting the spread of a totalitarian ideology and preventing the destruction of a democratic system of government held dear by the U.S., then friends and relatives of those inscribed on the Memorial wall, as well as those who survived the war, can feel a certain pride and carry on the belief that all the sacrifices were not in vain.

Victimization, Anyone?

However, as suggested above, that emotionally satisfying explanation is not the historically most accurate one. The evidence more strongly suggests that those

U.S. servicemen and women were sent to their deaths because ideologically and politically driven American leaders refused to see what was happening in Vietnam as a national effort at reunification – an effort which, if accurately portrayed to the American people, may have caused a widespread reluctance to go to war.

National leaders were so blinded by their anti-Communism that they (not for the last time) refused to accept accurate intelligence reports that contradicted their own tragic groupthink.

Under these circumstances all those patriotic dead soldiers become victims – victims of a powerful ideological conviction. But it is not the ideology coming out of Hanoi that killed them. It was the ideology coming out of Washington that transformed patriotic sacrifice into victimization. And, as victims, the American dead stand on the same plane with the roughly three million Vietnamese who perished in the same conflict. They were all victims of ideology.

All cultures have their patriotic stories – stories about founders, heroes, how the nation is special, and so forth. The first and foremost criterion for such stories is not that they be historically accurate, but rather that they be celebratory in a patriotic and public fashion.

Belief in such stories is part of the glue that holds societies together, and so they are learned and reinforced in multiple ways from childhood on. Soon the sanctity of the idols and causes presented in the stories become the stuff of faith and, unless a culture is on the verge of collapse, extremely difficult to widely call into question.

As part of this context, all soldiers serve in good causes, and those who die do likewise. That is why, here in the United States, people now go around saying “thank you for your service” – it is like a mantra – to soldiers and veterans, even though they have no idea what the service is or was really all about.

And what about the few people who somehow become “social mistakes”? That is, those who no longer believe in the emotionally reassuring stories? Well, some of us write blogs and then go fishing, others try to push their points within the political and media arenas, and many may ultimately give in to alienation and a sort of socio-political melancholy.

Whichever way it goes, it is the fate of such people to always be outnumbered, not only by the patriots, but also by the dead.

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