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the true costs  
of war"

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## Birth of the National Security State

by Philip Giraldi

[Editor's note: This article was first published in October of 2010—with pre-science. In September of 2011, a Hellfire missile from an American drone extrajudicially assassinated U.S. citizen Anwar al-Alwaki; two weeks later his sixteen-year-old son was murdered in the same manner. In May of this year, Edward Snowden revealed to a shocked world the extent of the National Security Agency's technological intrusion into private communications. The national security state was scary three years ago. It's much scarier now.]

*The National Security State uses fascism to protect capitalism while they say they're protecting democracy from communism.*

—Michael Parenti

It is not farfetched to speculate that the United States has, over the past ten years, been sliding into a form of authoritarianism that retains only some aspects of the constitution and a limited rule of law. America's president can, for example, commit soldiers to combat overseas without a constitutionally mandated declaration of war by congress while it is quite possible to be detained by the authorities and locked up without any prospect of trial or opportunity to defend oneself. The government even believes it can kill American citizens based only on suspicion. I prefer to think of this transformation as the National Security State because it rests on a popular consensus that liberties must be sacrificed in exchange for greater public safety from various threats, international terrorism being the most prominent. It might just as well be called the National Warfare State as it also requires constant conflict to justify its existence.

Three elements are necessary for the creation of a National Security State. First, there must be a narrative that can be sold to the public justifying the

(continued on page 9)

In this issue:

### The Sorry State of Security

"The national security state" is a misnomer. The common people of the nation are *not* secure—they are frequently searched and seized and restricted from assembling peaceably; they are put in the way of harm fighting the state's wars; and they are subject to acts of terror in response to the state's foreign policies.

But some people within the nation are very secure. These are the elite who hold most of the power and most of the wealth in "the elite security state." They personally fight no wars; but they profit handsomely from them. They are safely protected from any danger by layers of internal security forces.

In these pages, we define the condition and deplore the security state we're in. We describe how our culture enables the disease; how the state tries to rewrite history, and we name the enemy that Pogo told us about. We learn various ways that veterans have dealt with invisible wounds. And we provide some alternatives.

### 7 Characteristics of a National Security State

adapted from Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer's book *Brave New World Order*

- 1 The military is the highest authority. In a National Security State the military not only guarantees the security of the state against all internal and external enemies, it has enough power to determine the overall direction of the society. In a National Security State the military exerts important influence over political, economic, as well as military affairs.
- 2 Political democracy and democratic elections are viewed with suspicion, contempt, or in terms of political expediency. National Security States often maintain an appearance of democracy. However, ultimate power rests with the military or within a broader National Security Establishment.
- 3 The military and related sectors wield substantial political and economic power. They do so in the context of an ideology which stresses that "freedom" and "development" are possible only when capital is concentrated in the hands of elites.
- 4 A National Security State is obsessed with enemies. There are enemies of the state everywhere. Defending against external and/or internal enemies becomes a

leading preoccupation of the state, a distorting factor in the economy, and a major source of national identity and purpose.

5 An ideological foundation of a National Security State is that the enemies of the state are cunning and ruthless. Therefore, any means used to destroy or control these enemies is justified.

6 A National Security State restricts public debate and limits popular participation through secrecy or intimidation. Authentic democracy depends on participation of the people. National Security States limit such participation in a number of ways: They sow fear and thereby narrow the range of public debate; they restrict and distort information; and they define policies in secret and implement those policies through covert channels and clandestine activities. The state justifies such actions through rhetorical pleas of "higher purpose" and vague appeals to "national security."

7 Finally, the church is expected to mobilize its financial, ideological, and theological resources in service to the National Security State.

Conditioning the people  
for martial law

### The militarization of America

by Bill Van Auken

The deployment on July 23 of Blackhawk helicopters in Chicago is only the latest in a series of "urban warfare training" exercises that have become a familiar feature of American life.

As elsewhere, this exercise was sprung unannounced on a startled civilian population. Conducted in secrecy, apparently with the collusion of local police agencies and elected officials, Democrats and Republicans alike, the ostensible purpose of these exercises is to give U.S. troops experience in what Pentagon doctrine refers to as "Military Operations on Urban Terrain."

Such operations are unquestionably of central importance to the U.S. military. Over the past decade, its primary mission, as evidenced in Afghanistan and Iraq, has been the invasion and occupation of relatively powerless countries and the subjugation of

(continued on page 8)

**Thanks WCT**

Thanks for sending me the issue of *War Crimes Times* that contained my article (“Keeping the world Safe for Hypocrisy,” Summer 2013). I’m pleased that it could appear in so fine a publication, alongside so many important, moving, and clearly written pieces.

Makes one wonder why more people do not “get it” when it comes to understanding the real motivations behind the country’s actions. It is a mark of distinction for the propaganda apparatus that there are so few.

It’s good to know that Veterans For Peace are on the right side of the barricades.

James Rothenberg  
North Chatham, NY

**Standing the Test of Time (Sad to Say)**

*I wrote this letter, “Dear America: An Open Letter to my Country” on April 1, 2003, thirteen days after the U.S. launched its crime of invading Iraq. Everything in the letter is just as relevant now in 2013, more than ten years later on the eve of Obomber’s intentions to rain missiles and bombs on the Syrian people.*

Brian

**Dear America: An Open Letter to my Country**

April 1, 2003

Dear America,

Once again you have shown your ever-increasing military might with a massive display of explosive weapons that overwhelmingly outmatch your adversary. You have murdered countless civilians in the process, along with members of their army who were legally defending their homeland from your illegal, criminal invasion. Every bullet fired, every missile launched, and every bomb dropped was an egregious criminal act in violation of international and U.S. Constitutional law. You now physically occupy new oil fields, guaranteeing more petrol under your control and allowing continued denial of your dangerous dependency upon a resource facing imminent depletion.

Let us be honest. Your latest manifestation of psychotic behavior is not war, but

# Letters

another massacre against a nation that you insisted on disarming before unleashing your latest firepower. Your obsession with military violence and global hegemony, if not arrested soon, will surely doom the world to a series of catastrophes that may lead to our species’ extinction.

I wonder how you are feeling—I mean really deep down in your heart and soul? Are you feeling satisfied or do you yearn for more bloodletting? Is this a trial run for a series of barbaric “preventive wars” against virtually defenseless countries in the greater Middle East, eastern Asia, South America, and elsewhere? Are you so racist and paranoid that you will murder anyone you imagine not being subservient to your demands, whether or not they are able to defend themselves? What deep, unmet needs do you suppose are driving you to continually commit such barbarism, such madness? From where did our apparent unconscious sense of invalidation and alienation originate, demanding such distracting, brutish behavior?

Though many of your citizens are cheering your actions like rabid dogs in a wild pack, including some from my own family, I am feeling depressed. I am enraged that your lack of empathy, and your addiction to violence, causes so much needless harm in the world. I feel sick to my stomach. I am hurt and grief-stricken, anguished beyond comprehension, that so much carnage is committed in my name as one of your natural born citizens, all for lies. I wonder how and when the forces of the cosmos will ultimately require an accounting?

Perhaps our unwillingness to admit our wrongs in Vietnam remain like an oozing sore in our psyche. The piercing of our sense of invincibility, our humiliation, could have led to an honest reckoning with our distorted view of ourselves, and profound healing. Instead it has stirred us to pump ourselves up with evermore technological superiority enabling conquest without protracted conflicts or too many U.S. body bags.

I reluctantly see now, America, that your whole existence is rooted in patterns of nearly incomprehensible violence, and that this forms the essence of your cultural ethos. You seem obsessed with a sense of superiority, drunk with brute power, unable to feel empathy and compassion, think clearly, or act responsibly, and your actions endanger us all. Your behavior fits diagnoses of mental illness and criminal psychopathy. You need a shaking up, a moment equivalent to the storming of the Bastille nearly 215 years ago.

When and how will this happen?

I wonder whether and when you might be able to listen to a deeper place in your own heart and soul? My hope, and that of billions of other human beings around the globe, is that someday soon you will experience a huge “aha!” — a relief and joy that enables you to let go of your need for superiority and become an equal part of the awesome interweave of life that is the ultimate guiding wisdom of the universe. I repeat: Does it ever occur to you that your thinking and behavior likely will lead our species to extinction after an incredible 7-million-year evolutionary journey?

America, I weep endlessly knowing in my heart that at a deep, unconscious level you are experiencing pain and deprivation that you are desperately avoiding. If you are willing to endure a painful but liberating healing process by honestly facing these uncomfortable hurts, then you will no longer feel the need for violent, macho behavior. You will be able to let go of your defensiveness. You’ll be able to stop looking over your shoulder and breathe freely, maybe for the first time. Honest healing will create win-win for all. Continuing your destructive behavior will create lose-lose for the world, and for us.

I’m hoping for a quantum leap in consciousness. Are you game? The stakes could not be higher—our very survival!

Brian Willson  
Portland, OR

**Rejected LTEs**

Here’s an idea (I think it was Mike Ferner’s first) for a forum that would show letters to the mainstream newspaper editors that weren’t printed so we could track subjects they were censoring or restricting. I’d like to know: Is it my style or my substance that they reject?

So, I’m suggesting a regular *WCT* feature: letters sent by peace activists that were rejected by mainstream papers. They would have to be letters written seriously with the object of being published in the first paper.

What would this accomplish? What would we learn? That the mainstream defends the lies of the government? I think we already know that. But, it might encourage more people to attempt a letter to the editor.

Below is the 100th letter I’ve sent to the *New York Times* since January 2002. Only one was printed, the only one that was complimentary.

I Wish I Was As Brave As Chelsea Manning

**Letter to the Editor  
The New York Times  
August 3, 2013**

**Who is Aiding the Enemy?**

At PFC Bradley Manning’s sentencing hearing, retired general Robert A. Carr testified that the Pentagon feared that PFC Manning’s revelations would cause great harm to the United States. (*NYT*, August 1) It’s true that great harm has been done to the United States but the Pentagon is blaming the wrong person. PFC Manning is not responsible for the harm done to American soldiers and Iraqi and Afghan civilians. That responsibility lies with those who falsely justified these wars and those military officers who accepted the immoral task of managing these wars.

A recent Pentagon assessment says that “... so long as the Taliban can find haven in Pakistan, defeating them on the battlefield will be difficult if not impossible.” (*NYT*, July 31) You reported on “The Taliban’s reliance on Pakistan for shelter and support during the past 12 years...” (July 22) It seems our government knew from the beginning that Pakistan’s agenda was incompatible with freedom for Afghanistan. Did our government sacrifice our soldiers while agreeing that Pakistan will have some control over Afghanistan? Does the tradeoff involve U.S. access to the sea from Afghanistan and Central Asia? If so, it is our own government that has been aiding the enemy.

While those who directed this tragedy win undue praise and respect from Washington society, Bradley sits like Buddha in a ten-foot cell, an innocent man in a living hell. That is a disgrace. (Apologies to Bob Dylan.)

Bill Distler  
Bellingham, WA



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[veteransforpeace.org](http://veteransforpeace.org)

*The Prince of the security state***Obama: More Orwellian than Machiavellian****Dear Mr. President,**

I watched a video with clips of Candidate Obama in 2008 juxtaposed against clips of a President Obama press conference after Edward Snowden blew the whistle on the NSA.

Here's what you said in 2008: "No more illegal wiretapping of American citizens, no more national security letters to spy on citizens who are not suspected of a crime, no more tracking citizens who do nothing more than protest a misguided war, no more ignoring the law when it is inconvenient."

After Snowden revealed the scope of illegal surveillance and bald-faced lies to Congress and the American public by Clapper, Alexander, and others, here's what you said, picking and choosing your weasel-words carefully: "The relevant intelligence committees are fully briefed on these programs. These are programs that have been authorized by broad bipartisan majorities repeatedly since 2006."

That statement was refuted by numerous legislators, and one author of the Patriot Act said they never intended it to be interpreted as you have. Intercepting phone calls and internet traffic is not just illegal, it's creepy.

Here's what else is creepy: a secret FISA court with no oversight; secret laws that can't be revealed; assassination of American citizens (and foreigners) without legal recourse; Kill Lists (now called a "disposition matrix"); indefinite detention; force-feeding hunger strikers in Guantanamo. More lies: an article in the *Guardian* on July 14 revealed that we still run black sites in east Africa, we still render suspected terrorists to prisons run by Allies in the Middle East and Central Asia, and we still "rendition to justice"—the latest euphemism for kidnapping a suspect, hooding him and flying him to the U.S. for trial (Mahdi Hashi, for example).

The Obama legacy is more Orwellian than Machiavellian, more Kafkaesque than Alice in Wonderland, and it proves you were not the lesser of two evils in 2012 but the more effective evil. Romney would have been a disaster but the Democrats and the Left would have been forced to come out of their somnolent trance and oppose the evil rather than keeping their eyes closed to it.

I read in the *New York Times* that Malala Yousafzai [the Pakistani student/activist who survived a Taliban assassination attempt] has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Edward Snowden should also be nominated. And your prize should be rescinded.

—Robert Yoder

*Robert writes a letter each day at [dearmrpresident-letters.blogspot.com](http://dearmrpresident-letters.blogspot.com).*

*A sane alternative to the National Security State***10 Ways to Reduce the Threat of Terrorist Attacks on Americans**

by Medea Benjamin

**This 10-point plan would significantly reduce terrorist threats, save taxpayers billions of dollars, and make Americans more loved and admired in the world. After a decade of wielding the military stick, it's time for some carrots.**

**1** Declare a moratorium on drone strikes: The head of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is calling on jihadists to retaliate for U.S. drone strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen. The Yemeni group Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), where the U.S. says the threats are emanating from, is also calling for retaliation for drone strikes (there have been four strikes in Yemen since July 28). Drone strikes have become the number one recruiting tool for extremists. By grounding the drones, we will stop creating new enemies faster than we can kill them.

**2** Close the U.S. drone base in Saudi Arabia. One of the reasons Obama bin Laden said he hated the United States was that the U.S. had military bases in the Holy Lands in Saudi Arabia. President Bush quietly closed those bases in 2003, but in 2010 President Obama secretly reopened a base there for launching drones into Yemen. It's a national security threat ripe for blowback. So are many of the over 800 U.S. bases peppered all over the world. We can save billions of taxpayer dollars, and make ourselves safer, by closing them.

**3** Free the 86 Guantanamo prisoners cleared for release. The U.S. treatment of Guantanamo prisoners, holding people indefinitely without charges or trials, and brutally force-feeding the hunger strikers, is an affront to people throughout the Muslim world and a blatant hypocrisy of our American values. Of the 166 prisoners left in Guantanamo, 86 have been cleared for release, meaning the U.S. government has determined they represent no threat to our nation. President Obama can use the waiver system, certifying to Congress that it is in the U.S. national interest to release them. He just did this, for the first time, for two Algerian prisoners. He should do this for all 86 cleared prisoners, then bring the remaining prisoners to the U.S. for trials.

**4** Apologize and compensate innocent victims. There is a perception in the Muslim world that the U.S. government does not value their lives. Airstrikes have killed many innocent people and only in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq has there been a way, albeit woefully inadequate, for aggrieved families to seek redress. The U.S. should agree to apologize and compensate the families of innocent people who have been killed or maimed by the U.S. armed forces or CIA.

**5** Go for the "zero option" in Afghanistan: withdraw all U.S. troops. The 11-year U.S. occupation of Afghanistan has provided fodder for the Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, while propping up an unpopular and corrupt regime in Kabul. And if the U.S. troops were not in Afghanistan, the Taliban would not be trying to cross the Pakistani border to kill U.S. soldiers. President Obama promised to end the U.S. occupation by the end of 2014, but is now weighing options for keeping thousands of troops and military contractors behind. Bad idea.

**6** Sit down and talk. The Taliban opened an office in Qatar in June to finally start long-delayed talks with the U.S. But due to President Karzai's objections, the talks were nixed. It's long past the time to talk to the Taliban, and then move on to talk to those elements

in Al Qaeda who are more rational and open to negotiations. If you look at the Rand Corporation's study of the demise of 268 terrorist groups, 43% dissolved by joining the political process, 40% from better policing, and only 7% through military action. We've been using military action for over a decade; it's time for another approach.

**7** Stop supporting dictatorships and repressive militaries. The U.S. recently signed the largest arms deal in history with the monarchy of Saudi Arabia, the same government that rolled its tanks into neighboring Bahrain to crush the democratic uprising there. In Egypt, U.S. weapons and tear gas were used for decades against peaceful demonstrators, and continue to be used against peaceful protesters supporting ousted Muslim Brotherhood. While weapons sales to undemocratic and/or unstable regimes might be good for U.S. weapons manufacturers, they are bad for the reputation and security of the American people.

**8** Support non-violent democracy movements. Terrorists thrive best where there is chaos and instability. Nurturing democratic institutions and non-violent civil society are key to thwarting the growth of extremist movements. The U.S. needs to do more than support these efforts; it also needs to listen to them. In Yemen, the U.S. is helping to fund the 6-month experiment in democracy called the National Dialogue Conference, where 565 extremely diverse members of society are meeting daily to map out the nation's future. The Conference recently passed, by overwhelming vote, a resolution declaring drones strikes and all extrajudicial killing illegal. Unfortunately, the U.S. has refused to abide by the popular will thus far.

**9** Adhere to the international rule of law. In its war on terror, the U.S. has been killing terror suspects with blatant disregard for international law and national sovereignty. A July 18 Pew poll of 39 nations found fierce global opposition to U.S. drone strikes, particularly in the Muslim world. If the U.S. wants help and sympathy in rooting out would-be attackers, it has to show the world it will stop using extrajudicial assassinations and start adhering to international law.

**10** Spend foreign aid money on education, health-care, and lifting people out of poverty. For a fraction of the money we keep wasting each month on the failed war in Afghanistan or supporting the already wealthy Israeli military, we could be building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan, helping Yemenis find a solution to their water shortages, and providing humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. We'll make a lot more friends building clinics, wells, electrical grids, and schools than vaporizing people with Hellfire missiles.



*Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Global Exchange and CODEPINK: Women for Peace, is the author of Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control. Her previous books include Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart, and (with Jodie Evans) Stop the Next War Now: Effective Responses to Violence and Terror.*

# Moral Disengagement: America's Missing Conscience

by Kathie Malley-Morrison and Ross Caputi

American foreign policy, for a long time, has been manipulative, aggressive, and downright murderous. How is this possible in a country filled with good and caring people, whose values are completely out of line with their country's actions abroad? Are our leaders immoral and conniving people? Are our soldiers brutal thugs? What about the American public? Have they become apathetic and callous?

Albert Bandura, Professor Emeritus of Social Science in Psychology at Stanford University, has done extensive research on this all too common contradiction between people's character and their actions. He has identified a number of unconscious mechanisms that allow people to morally disengage from morally reprehensible behavior. That is, they allow

**Euphemistic labeling: *deceptive and vague language used to mask the extent to which killing is an action with real moral consequences, such as the "pacification" of Fallujah.***



An M-198 155mm Howitzer of the US Marines firing at Fallujah, Iraq, during the Second Battle of Fallujah, November 11, 2004. (USMC photo)

individuals to behave immorally or tolerate immorality by others, even when doing so violates their own moral standards.

Moral Disengagement involves, for example, reframing inhumane behavior so that it seems moral or harmless (e.g., fighting a war to end all wars), minimizing the consequences of inhumane behavior (as in bragging about the incredible accuracy of one's weapons), blaming the victim (e.g., having to confront the "axis of evil"), and denying personal responsibility (e.g., "a good soldier must follow orders"). The thought processes are called "unconscious" because people don't deliberately say to themselves, "I am going to make myself feel better about our wars in Iraq by pretending we are doing it on behalf of democracy, by referring to accidental killing of Americans by

Americans as 'friendly fire,' and by blaming our victims for what we are doing to them." They simply think in those terms—probably in part because of ingrained self-protective ways of dealing with a harsh world and in part because of the relentless propaganda fed to everyone through the corporate media.

These mechanisms of moral disengagement are copious in American foreign policy discourse. Perhaps the most common, and easiest to spot, are *Pseudomoral Justifications*. Using such justifications, people try to convince themselves and others that some form of immoral behavior, such as killing or torture, is personally and socially acceptable because it is motivated by and leads to socially worthy or moral purposes.

For example, then Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, stated that "suc-

cess in Fallujah will deal a blow to the terrorists in the country, and should move Iraq further away from a future of violence to one of freedom and opportunity for the Iraqi people." He never acknowledged that "success" turned Fallujah into one of the most destroyed, policed, and polluted cities in the world.

Another mechanism is *Euphemistic Labeling*. Military and political discourse is filled with sanitizing words and phrases that mask

the immorality of what is being referenced. The Shock and Awe bombing of Baghdad, which killed roughly 7,000 civilians, was called a "liberation," as was the 2nd siege of Fallujah, which also killed several thousand civilians.

In Fallujah, the destruction of the city was referred to as "taking down . . . a sanctuary for the insurgents," the annihilation of popular resistance was called a "pacification," and the killing of civilians was simply "collateral damage." Such deceptive and vague language masks the extent to which killing is an action with real moral consequences. Consider this bland and detached quote from Major General Richard F. Natonski, Commanding General of 1st Marine Division during the 2nd siege of Fallujah:

Probably my biggest disappointment was, because of collateral damage and positive ID limitations, we could not hit as many targets as we wanted . . . You had to definitely ascertain that they were enemy and that the collateral damage would not hurt or kill a specific number, as given to us by higher headquarters. That number is classified as well.

How cool and detached he sounds as he explains that he was unable to kill more "targets" (i.e., Iraqi resistance fighters) because of constraints imposed regarding endangering innocent civilians when the "enemy" (those Iraqi resistance fighters) could not be positively identified.

*Advantageous Comparisons* are another mechanism by which we morally disengage. At the most basic level, they involve comparing any harm done by oneself or one's group with some other occurrence or potential occurrence that is so horrible that one's own misdeeds look mild by comparison. An example would be when George Bush Sr. compared Saddam Hussein to Hitler during the buildup to the first Gulf War. If Saddam Hussein is similar to Hitler, then anything the U.S. did in Iraq should seem good in comparison to the horrors imposed by a Hitler-like monster. Some advantageous comparisons are less obvious, though.

For example, Major General Natonski asked, "How could you have control in Iraq when you have this cancer called Fallujah? So it had to be eradicated before you could even conceive of having a successful election in January." In likening the city of Fallujah to cancer, he not only makes Fallujah out to be a disease and the U.S. military out to be the surgeon, but he also uses a certain logic to convince people of the nobility of the undertaking. Cancers must be eradicated.

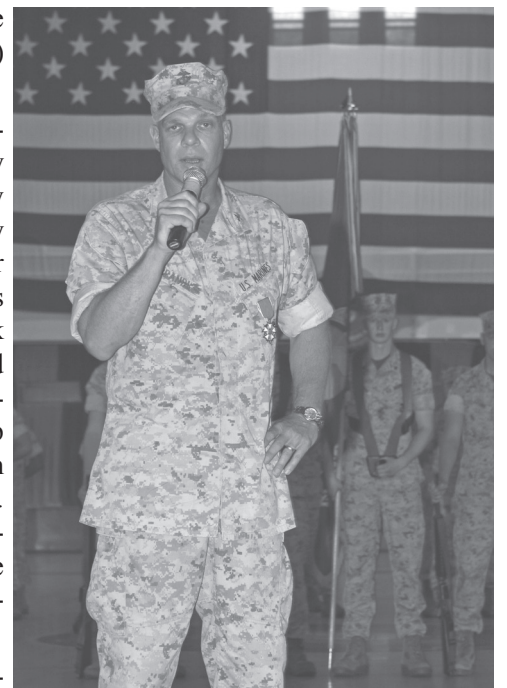
*Displacement of Responsibility* is another common mechanism of moral disengagement. Blaming all the violence in Iraq on "terrorists" and "foreign fighters" is an almost comically ironic example, since the U.S. military was, in fact, a foreign army imposing an illegal occupation, and much of the violence it committed in Iraq, from Shock and Awe bombing to the "symbolic" assault on Fallujah, can be characterized as terrorism.

Another example is the common refrain heard from occupying soldiers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine that the enemy uses "human shields." What is meant by this is not that the enemy physically grabs civilians and uses them as an actual shield, but that the so-called enemy hides (lives) in densely populated areas. The blame is thus shifted from the occupiers, who bemoan the absence of a traditional battlefield void of noncombatants, to those resisting occupation, who

have no choice but to defend their homes from where they stand.

We also often see the *Diffusion* or the *Displacement of Responsibility*. The diffusion

**Dehumanization is perhaps the most well-known mechanism of moral disengagement.**



"The enemy has got a face—he's called Satan, he's in Fallujah, and we're going to destroy him."

—Lt. Colonel Gareth Brandl (shown above in USMC photo)

of responsibility occurs in situations like Abu Ghraib or the Haditha Massacre, where many people played contributing roles, but nobody wants to take responsibility for their actions. In such situations, the common tactic is to search for a scapegoat or to conclude that if everyone is guilty, then no one is guilty.

The displacement of responsibility can be seen in classic cop outs like "I was just following orders," or in assertions that "our hand was forced"—we had no choice but to invade Iraq because of the threat it posed; we must intervene in Syria because we cannot sit by as Assad murders his own people; we cannot let PFC Manning or Snowden threaten our national security by revealing information that for the security of us all must be kept secret.

The *Disregard or Distortion of Consequences* is common in those who do not want to attend to the moral consequences of their actions. In a speech given by Barack Obama to mark the official end of the U.S. occupation of Iraq (though it still continues unofficially in many ways), Obama told the troops at Fort Bragg,

Never forget that you are part of an unbroken line of heroes spanning

two centuries—from the colonists who overthrew an empire, to your grandparents and parents who faced down fascism and communism, to you—men and women who fought for the same principles in Fallujah and Kandahar, and delivered justice to those who attacked us on 9/11.

This statement distorts the legacy of American wars and those who fought in them, and it disregards the human destruction that has been the result of every American war, from Wounded Knee to the Philippines, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to My Lai, to Fallujah. The “principles” for which these wars have been fought have always been empire and profit, and neither of our assaults on Iraq or Afghanistan have brought justice to the victims of 9/11.

Dehumanization is perhaps the most well-known mechanism of moral disengagement. It is particularly common in war. Just as American soldiers in Vietnam referred to the Vietnamese as “gooks,” American soldiers in Iraq referred to Iraqis as “hajjis.” But dehumanization is not always racial. Even the term “insurgent” is mildly dehumanizing, but those who fought against occupation in Iraq were called much worse. They often were referred to as “criminals,” “terrorists” (almost always without any evidence that any of them had committed an act of terror), and even “Satan.”

“The enemy has got a face—he’s called Satan, he’s in Fallujah, and we’re going to destroy him.”

—Lieutenant Colonel Gareth Brandl  
Battalion Command 1st Battalion 8th Marines

It is far easier for people to kill when they do not think of their victims as husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons. If they are merely “satan” or “hajjis,” they can be killed, and their killer can avoid feeling the guilt and shame that killers often feel.

We often find these mechanisms of moral disengagement in the words of politicians and military leaders, which are echoed and amplified by the media. Should we believe that our politicians, generals, and media are manipulative and deceitful, using language to shape how we think about issues? Or do they believe their own lies, unconscious of their own moral disengagement? It could be a mix of both, but either way, it is clear that the words of our politicians, generals, and media provide us with ready-made justifications for our nation’s actions abroad, thus contributing to our seeming lack of a national conscience.

*Ross Caputi is a veteran of the 2nd siege of Fallujah. His experience there compelled him to start the Justice For Fallujah Project. Today he is an activist, a graduate student, and a documentary film maker.*

*Kathie Malley-Morrison is a professor of psychology at Boston University, specializing in the study of violence and non-violence. She has published six books and numerous articles on war and peace, and maintains a blog, [engagingpeace.com](http://engagingpeace.com), and monthly newsletter.*

## From Hiroshima to Syria, the enemy whose name we dare not speak

by John Pilger

On my wall is the front page of *Daily Express* of September 5, 1945, and the words: “I write this as a warning to the world.” So began Wilfred Burchett’s report from Hiroshima. It was the scoop of the century. For his lone, perilous journey that defied the U.S. occupation authorities, Burchett was pilloried, not least by his embedded colleagues. He warned that an act of premeditated mass murder on an epic scale had launched a new era of terror.

Almost every day now, he is vindicated. The intrinsic criminality of the atomic bombing is borne out in the U.S. National Archives and by the subsequent decades of militarism camouflaged as democracy. The Syria psychodrama exemplifies this. Yet again, we are held hostage to the prospect of a terrorism whose nature and history even the most liberal critics still deny. The great unmentionable is that humanity’s most dangerous enemy resides across the Atlantic [from the UK].

John Kerry’s farce and Barack Obama’s pirouettes are temporary. Russia’s peace deal over chemical weapons will, in time, be treated with the contempt that all militarists reserve for diplomacy. With Al-Qaida now among its allies, and U.S.-armed coupmasters secure in Cairo, the U.S. intends to crush the last independent states in the Middle East: Syria first, then Iran. “This operation [in Syria],” said the former French foreign minister Roland Dumas in June, “goes way back. It was prepared, pre-conceived, and planned.”

When the public is “psychologically scarred,” as the Channel 4 reporter Jonathan Rugman described the British people’s overwhelming hostility to an attack on Syria, reinforcing the unmentionable is made urgent. Whether or not Bashar al-Assad or the “rebels” used gas in the suburbs of Damascus, it is the U.S. not Syria that is the world’s most prolific user of these terrible weapons. In 1970, the Senate reported, “The U.S. has dumped on Vietnam a quantity of toxic chemical (dioxin) amounting to six pounds per head of population.” This was Operation Hades, later renamed the friendlier Operation Ranch Hand: the source of what Vietnamese doctors call a “cycle of fetal catastrophe.” I have seen generations of young children with their familiar, monstrous deformities. John Kerry, with his own blood-soaked war record, will remember them. I have seen them in Iraq, too, where the U.S. used depleted uranium and white phosphorous, as did the Israelis in Gaza, raining it down on UN schools and hospitals. No Obama “red line” for them. No showdown psychodrama for them.

The repetitive debate about whether “we” should “take action” against selected dictators (i.e. cheer on the U.S. and its acolytes in yet another aerial killing spree) is part of our brainwashing. Richard Falk, emeritus professor of international law and UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine, describes it as “a self-righteous, one-way, legal/moral screen [with] positive images of Western values and innocence portrayed as threatened, validating a campaign of unrestricted political violence.” This “is so widely accepted as to be virtually unchallengeable.”

It is the biggest lie: the product of “liberal realists” in Anglo-American politics, scholarship, and the media who ordain themselves as the world’s crisis managers, rather than the cause of a crisis.

Stripping humanity from the study of nations and congealing it with jargon that serves Western power designs, they mark “failed,” “rogue,” or “evil” states for “humanitarian intervention.”

An attack on Syria or Iran or any other U.S. “demon” would draw on a fashionable variant, “Responsibility to Protect,” or R2P, whose lectern-trotting zealot is the former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans, co-chair of a “Global Centre,” based in New York. Evans and his generously funded lobbyists play a vital propaganda role in urging the “international community” to attack countries where “the Security Council rejects a proposal or fails to deal with it in a reasonable time.”

Evans has form. He appears in my 1994 film, *Death of a Nation*, which revealed the scale of genocide in East Timor. Canberra’s smiling man is raising his champagne glass in a toast to his Indonesian equivalent as they fly over East Timor in an Australian aircraft, having just signed a treaty that pirated the oil and gas of the stricken country below where Indonesia’s tyrant, Suharto, killed or starved a third of the population.

Under the “weak” Obama, militarism has risen perhaps as never before. With not a single tank on the White House lawn, a military coup has taken place in Washington. In 2008, while his liberal devotees dried their eyes, Obama accepted the entire Pentagon of his predecessor, George Bush: its wars and war crimes. As the constitution is replaced by an emerging police state, those who destroyed Iraq with shock and awe, and piled up the rubble in Afghanistan and reduced Libya to a

Hobbesian nightmare, are ascendant across the U.S. administration. Behind their beribboned façade, more former U.S. soldiers are killing themselves than are dying on battlefields. Last year, 6,500 veterans took their own lives. Put out more flags.

The historian Norman Pollack calls this “liberal fascism.” “For goose-steppers,” he wrote, “substitute the seemingly more innocuous militarization of the total culture. And for the bombastic leader, we have the reformer manqué, blithely at work, planning and executing assassination, smiling all the while.” Every Tuesday, the “humanitarian” Obama personally oversees a worldwide terror network of drones that “bugsplat” people, their rescuers and mourners. In the West’s comfort zones, the first black leader of the land of slavery still feels good, as if his very existence represents a social advance, regardless of his trail of blood. This obeisance to a symbol has all but destroyed the U.S. anti-war movement: Obama’s singular achievement.

In Britain, the distractions of the fakery of image and identity politics have not quite succeeded. A stirring has begun, though people of conscience should hurry. The judges at Nuremberg were succinct: “Individual citizens have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity.” The ordinary people of Syria, and countless others, and our own self respect, deserve nothing less now.

*John Pilger is an award-winning journalist and documentary filmmaker. His newest film, Utopia, is scheduled for release this fall. This article first appeared in the Guardian, UK, and is reprinted with the author’s permission. Follow John Pilger on twitter @johnpilger.*



***“I write this as a warning to the world.” Wilfred Burchett warned that an act of premeditated mass murder on an epic scale had launched a new era of terror.***

## An Iraq veteran gains a new awareness

# U.S. Wars, Dehumanization, and Me

by Brandon Toy

I arrived in Baghdad believing that Iraqis were simple people in need of having civilization thrust upon them, and that we were the enlightened civil ones who would show them the right way to live. To me, they were less than human.

One pivotal night three years ago, I bragged to my wife and cousins about a family I had terrified by pointing my rifle at them to get them to stop in traffic. I laughed about the way the father and mother had frantically waved their arms at me, begging not to be shot.



Soldiers deploy from Stryker armored fighting vehicle during training exercise in Daegu, Republic of Korea, March 20, 2005. (US Navy photo)

When I told this story in the past to my fellow soldiers, they had laughed and told me similar stories of their own. On this night, no one laughed. To my great surprise, my wife, my cousin, and his girlfriend were horrified. I even scared the waitress. They let me know in no uncertain terms that it was wrong to laugh about such a thing.

I was immediately defensive. “You guys don’t understand,” I told them. “If you had been there, you would get it.” But, they insisted that it wasn’t funny.

Where I saw humor, they saw a terrified family whose only crime was traveling from one place to another.

The conversation stuck with me. I began to wonder why it was funny to me and not to them. Why was I unmoved by that family’s fears, while my family was horrified by my laughter?

### Self-Education

I began searching for information about U.S. wars. I discovered the writing of Noam Chomsky, Glenn Greenwald, Chris Hedges, and many more progressive thinkers and writers. I was introduced to Wikileaks, Anonymous, and Julian Assange. I started watching *Democracy*

*Now!* in the morning and *The Young Turks* at night. I browsed Common Dreams and Salon on a daily basis. And of course, I followed the story of whistleblower Bradley Manning, without whom many of these revelations would be impossible.

Around this time, I saw the “Collateral Murder” video for the first time. I recognized my own attitudes reflected in the pilots’ apathetic chatter. I thought of my own laughter at the suffering of civilians.

In the spring of 2012, I immersed myself in World War II history. I was particularly fascinated and repulsed by the

atrocities committed by the Germans. How could so many people be so culpable in the mass murder of millions of innocent people? I watched and read everything I could find, trying to gain an understanding of exactly how it had all happened. How had the German people become willing accomplices in the biggest mass murder in recorded history?

Of course, Germany didn’t go from depressed nation to genocidal superpower overnight. Boundaries were crossed one by one until they culminated in the near total destruction of Europe and horrible crescendo now known as the holocaust.

I studied every major war crime I could find record of, including those committed by the U.S. government. I came to realize that, without exception, each of these acts was committed under the banner of a government in the name of the common good. Every killing of civilians has a pretext. Take these pretexts away and these events all look the same: dead men, women, and children whose only crime is being in the wrong place and time.

### Change of Heart

I was experiencing an epiphany; a complete spiritual awakening that became

almost unbearable at times. I was overwhelmed by a new connection to humanity. A part of me that had been dead, or never alive, bloomed. At times I felt on the verge of being uprooted and washed away. I sought spiritual guidance from friends, family, coworkers, pastors, and therapists. I searched for a higher power everywhere.

I became keenly aware of my connection [now working for General Dynamics] to the never-ending war. I no longer saw myself as removed from the events taking place overseas. I was part of the same power structure; it was the Department of Defense that signed my paychecks and the Army that used the vehicles I was helping design. Each new revelation—each new report of another criminal government action—felt like a self-betrayal.

I carried on in this state of cognitive dissonance, alternating between acceptance and revulsion. I was making a choice but hadn’t chosen. Would I surrender and accept the moral emptiness of my profession and the safety and security it provided me, or would I follow what I knew in my heart was right?

My disillusionment was complete the night I watched the U.S. *Dirty Wars* in Iraq exposé by BBC Arabic and the *Guardian*. Realizing that I had unwittingly been aiding the training, transporting, and equipping of U.S.-sanctioned death squads was the last betrayal.

### Taking Action

I didn’t sleep for several nights. I was irate and wanted to leave General Dynamics immediately. I spent the weekend pouring my soul into my resignation letter and planning my exit. My wife was worried sick. She persisted to push back on the plan, insisting that I find work before I left my job. I reluctantly agreed and set aside my letter, telling myself that I was playing my part for the good of my family and nothing else.

I hit a new low point in mid-June. It became a chore of Olympic proportions



Brandon Toy: “I have always believed that if every foot soldier threw down his rifle war would end. I hereby throw mine down.”

just to slog through my days. Some mornings I woke up and dry heaved at the thought of going to work. I chain smoked five to six cigarettes during my 25-minute drive. I moved in slow motion, forcing my feet to move my body into the building.

On July 4th I went and watched Jeremy Scahill’s film *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield*. I was moved to tears by the pain of the family members of the victims of U.S. drones strikes, particularly the children. I walked out of the theatre in a daze. I no longer questioned if it was really my country that was doing these things. I knew in my heart that it was.

On July 8th, the *Guardian* released the second part of Glenn Greenwald’s interview with Edward Snowden in which he said this:

...I enlisted in the army shortly after the invasion of Iraq and I believed in the goodness of what we were doing, I believed in the nobility of our intentions to free oppressed people overseas. But over time, over the length of my career, as I watched the news and I increasingly was exposed to true information that had not been propagandized in the media that we were actually involved in misleading the public and misleading all



Shipment of Strykers arriving at Anniston Army Depot, March 10, 2011. General Dynamics manufactures these 19-ton vehicles which cost \$4.94 million each. (US Army photo)

### Resignation Letter

I hereby resign in protest effective immediately.

I have served the post-9/11 military-industrial complex for 10 years, first as a soldier in Baghdad, and now as a defense contractor.

At the time of my enlistment, I believed in the cause. I was ignorant, naïve, and misled. The narrative, professed by the state, and echoed by the mainstream press, has proven false and criminal. We have become what I thought we were fighting against.

Recent revelations by fearless journalists of war crimes including counterinsurgency “dirty” wars, drone terrorism, the suspension of due process, torture, mass surveillance, and widespread regulatory capture have shed light on the true nature of the current U.S. Government. I encourage you to read more about these topics at the links I have provided below [on Common Dreams post].

Some will say that I am being irresponsible, impractical, and irrational. Others will insist that I am crazy. I have come to believe that the true insanity is doing nothing. As long as we sit in comfort, turning a blind eye to the injustices of the world, nothing will change. It is even worse to play an active part, protesting all along that I am not the true criminal.

I was only a foot soldier, and am now a low level clerk. However, I have always believed that if every foot soldier threw down his rifle war would end. I hereby throw mine down.

Sincerely,

Brandon M. Toy  
Stryker Engineering Project Management  
General Dynamics Land Systems  
Sterling Heights, Michigan

publics not just the American public in order to create a certain mindset in the global consciousness and I was actually a victim of that....

When I watched this in the first time, I heard my own thoughts coming out of Mr. Snowden’s mouth. It filled me with hope.

I had known that there were people out there who had been through the same exact experience I had been through, but here was someone who had risked everything to tell the truth. It inspired me.

My livelihood was dependent on the continuing war I had turned against. If I wanted to advance in my career, send my children to college, buy a house, and do all of those things that we generically call the American dream, I needed more war. The hours I toiled were in the service of those committing the very war atrocities I despised. More importantly, as long as I served the corporate war masters my voice, which had become one of dissent, was silenced.

I brought my wife flowers that night and sat her on the bed and told her that I must do this thing. She again resisted but could tell I had made up my mind. We made an accounting of the meager amount of money we had, discussed the possible repercussions, and planned the actions we would need to take. I called my cousin, who came over and helped

me edit my letter. I took a sleeping aide and went to bed.

### No Turning Back

I am a coward in the morning. I awoke with a panic and walked nervously up and down our little apartment, mindlessly dressing myself. I drove the long way to work. I parked down the street, behind a vacant building and walked in through the security gate. I went straight to my desk and downloaded the letter, which I had sent to myself buried in an email titled “Birthday Party.” I carefully copied it over into two emails: one addressed to the entire company, and one slimmed down to just the bare essentials: a few friends, the journalists I respected the most, and my corporate chain-of-command.

I found an empty conference room and connected to the internet. I carefully set down my company phone, badge, and General Dynamics property slip. I stared at the emails, rereading them one more time.

I can only remember one other such unquestionably pivotal moment in my life: the day I signed my enlistment papers. At that moment, sitting in front of the recruiter, I had thought to myself: Are

you sure you want to do this, because there is no turning back?

As I had then, I had made one small motion and changed the course of my life. Ten years ago, that small motion had sent me to a war I didn’t understand. On this day, I hit send and left that war.

Change will not be foisted on us from above—at least not the change we desire. It will come from us, those who have given our consent to the state. Until we take back our explicit or tacit support of the criminal actions taken in our name, nothing will change.

*Brandon Toy resigned his job working for U.S. defense contractor General Dynamics as an Engineering Project Manager building Stryker armored fighting vehicles on July 16, 2013. Previously, Brandon served in the Michigan Army National Guard as a Multiple Launch Rocket System Fire Direction Specialist, Team Leader and Vehicle Commander. He was deployed as a military policeman to Baghdad, Iraq in 2004-2005.*

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### Documentary in the works

Brandon Toy has a new project—a feature-length documentary film titled *Back from Hell: The War at Home* that will focus on the post-9/11 veterans. It’s major themes will include PTSD, veteran suicide, homelessness, and disillusionment. The anti-war/pro-peace movement will be featured prominently. The goal is to raise awareness of veteran issues and educate the public on exactly how we got to this point as a nation.

**You can help.** The project needs funding. The project needs post-9/11 veterans who have unique stories to tell. Learn more at [thewarathome.org](http://thewarathome.org).

Brandon will be available for appearances and interviews to discuss his resignation letter, the film, and anything else. Contact Brandon at [bmtoy79@gmail.com](mailto:bmtoy79@gmail.com) or Twitter: [@bmtoy79](https://twitter.com/bmtoy79).

**“The pioneers of a warless world are the young men who refuse military service.”**

**—Albert Einstein**

### Einstein also wrote:

The tendencies we have mentioned [the willingness to bow to the authority of the military] are something new for America. They arose when, under the influence of the two World Wars and the consequent concentration of all forces on a military goal, a predominantly military mentality developed, which with the almost sudden victory became even more accentuated. The characteristic feature of this mentality is that people place the importance of what Bertrand Russell so tellingly terms “naked power” far above all other factors which affect the relations between peoples. The Germans, misled by Bismarck’s successes in particular, underwent just such a transformation of their mentality—in consequences of which they were entirely ruined in less than a hundred years.

I must frankly confess that the foreign policy of the United States since the termination of hostilities has reminded me, sometimes irresistibly, of the attitude of

Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II, and I know that, independent of me, this analogy has most painfully occurred to others as well. *It is characteristic of the military mentality that non-human factors (atom bombs, strategic bases, weapons of all sorts, the possession of raw materials, etc.) are held essential, while the human being, his desires and thoughts—in short, the psychological factors—are considered as unimportant and secondary.* [emphasis added] Herein lies a certain resemblance to Marxism, at least in so far as its theoretical side alone is kept in view. The individual is degraded to a mere instrument; he becomes “human material.” The normal ends of human aspiration vanish with such a viewpoint. Instead, the military mentality raises “naked power” as a goal in itself—one of the strangest illusions to which men can succumb.

In our time the military mentality is still more dangerous than formerly because the offensive weapons have become much more powerful than the defensive ones. Therefore it leads, by necessity, to preventative war. The

general insecurity that goes hand in hand with this results in *the sacrifice of the citizen’s civil rights to the supposed welfare of the state.* [emphasis added] Political witch-hunting, controls of all sorts (e.g., control of teaching and research, of the press, and so forth) appear inevitable, and for this reason do not encounter that popular resistance, which, were it not for the military mentality, would provide a protection. A reappraisal of all values gradually takes place in so far as everything that does not clearly serve the utopian ends is regarded and treated as inferior.

I see no other way out of prevailing conditions than a far-seeing, honest, and courageous policy with the aim of establishing security on supranational foundations. Let us hope that men will be found, sufficient in number and moral force, to guide the nation on this path so long as a leading role is imposed on her by external circumstances. Then problems such as have been discussed here will cease to exist.

—excerpted from “The Military Mentality,” *The American Scholar*, New York, Summer, 1947

## The militarization of America

(Continued from page 1)

their resisting populations, often in house-to-house fighting in urban centers.

The Army operates a 1,000-acre Urban Training Center in south-central Indiana that boasts over 1,500 “training structures” designed to simulate houses, schools, hospitals, and factories. The center’s web site states that it “can be tailored to replicate both foreign and domestic scenarios.”

What does flying Blackhawks low over Chicago apartment buildings or rolling armored military convoys through the streets of St. Louis accomplish that cannot be achieved through the sprawling training center’s simulations? Last year alone, there were at least seven such exercises, including in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Tampa, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Creeds, Virginia.

The most obvious answer is that these exercises accustom troops to operating in U.S. cities, while desensitizing the American people to the domestic deployment of U.S. military might.

Preparations for such deployments are already far advanced. Over the past decade, under the pretext of prosecuting a “global war on terror,” Washington has enacted a raft of repressive legislation and created a vast new bureaucracy of state control under the Department of Homeland Security. Under the Obama administration, the White House has claimed the power to throw enemies of the state into indefinite military detention or even

**Part of this process has been the ceaseless growth of the power of the U.S. military and its increasing intervention into domestic affairs. In 2002, the creation of the U.S. Northern Command for the first time dedicated a military command to operations within the U.S. itself.**

assassinate them on U.S. soil by means of drone strikes, while radically expanding electronic spying on the American population.

Part of this process has been the ceaseless growth of the power of the U.S. military and its increasing intervention into domestic affairs. In 2002, the creation of the U.S. Northern Command for the first time dedicated a military command to operations within the U.S. itself.

Just last May, the Pentagon announced the implementation of new rules of engagement for U.S. military forces operating on American soil to provide “support” to “civilian law enforcement authorities, including responses to civil disturbances.”

The document declares sweeping and unprecedented military powers under a section entitled “Emergency Authority.” It asserts the authority of a “federal military commander” in “extraordinary emergency circumstances where prior authorization by the president is impossible and duly constituted local authorities are unable to control the situation, to engage temporarily in activities that are necessary to quell large-scale, unexpected civil disturbances.” In other words, the Pentagon brass claims the unilateral authority to impose martial law.

These powers are not being asserted for the purpose of defending the U.S. population against terrorism or to counter some hypothetical emergency. The U.S. military command is quite conscious of where the danger lies.

In a recent article, a senior instructor at the Fort Leavenworth Command and General Staff College and former director of the Army’s School of Advanced Military Studies laid out a telling scenario for a situation in which the military could intervene.

The Great Recession of the early twenty-first century lasts far longer than anyone anticipated. After a change in control of the White House and Congress in 2012, the governing party cuts off all funding that had been dedicated to boosting the economy or toward relief. The United States economy has flatlined, much like Japan’s in the 1990s, for the better part of a decade. By 2016, the economy shows signs of reawakening, but

the middle and lower middle classes have yet to experience much in the way of job growth or pay raises. Unemployment continues

to hover perilously close to double digits ...

In other words, the Pentagon sees these conditions—which differ little from what exists in the U.S. today—producing social upheavals that can be quelled only by means of military force.

What is being upended, behind the scenes and with virtually no media coverage, much less public debate, are constitutional principles dating back centuries that bar the use of the military in civilian law enforcement. In the Declaration of Independence itself, the indictment justifying revolution against King George included the charge that he had “affected to render



“The Rise of the Warrior Cop” — SWAT teams prepares for training exercise. (photo credit: Oregon Department of Transportation)

the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.”

Side by side with the rising domestic power of the military, the supposedly civilian police have been militarized. An article published by the *Wall Street Journal* on August 7 entitled “The Rise of the Warrior Cop” graphically described this process:

Driven by martial rhetoric and the availability of military-style equipment—from bayonets and M-16 rifles to armored personnel carriers—American police forces have often adopted a mind-set previously reserved for the battlefield. The war on drugs and, more recently, post-9/11 antiterrorism efforts have created a new figure on the U.S. scene: the warrior cop—armed to the teeth, ready to deal harshly with targeted wrongdoers, and a growing threat to familiar American liberties.

The article describes the vast proliferation of SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) units to virtually every town in America, fueled by some \$35 billion in grants from the Department of Homeland Security, “with much of the money going to purchase military gear such as armored personnel carriers.”

This armed force was on full display in April when what amounted to a state of siege was imposed on the city of Boston, ostensibly to capture one teenage suspect. The entire population of a major American city was locked in their homes as combat-equipped police, virtually indistinguishable from troops, occupied the streets and conducted warrantless house-to-house searches.

Underlying this unprecedented militarization of U.S. society are two parallel processes. The immense widening of the social chasm separating the billionaires and multi-millionaires who control economic and political life from American working people, the great majority of the population, is fundamentally incompat-

ible with democracy and requires other forms of rule. At the same time, the turn to militarism as the principal instrument of U.S. foreign policy has vastly increased the power of the military within the U.S. state apparatus.

Both America’s ruling oligarchy and the Pentagon command recognize that profound social polarization and deepening economic crisis must give rise to social upheavals. They are preparing accordingly.

The working class must draw the appropriate conclusions and make its own political preparations for the inevitable confrontations to come.

*Van Auken, an activist for the Socialist Equality Party, was a U.S. presidential candidate in 2004. He is a reporter for the World Socialist Web Site [wsws.org](http://wsws.org) where this article first appeared. It is reprinted with permission.*

1939-1945

From the year before  
My birth, to my fifth year,  
Over 50 million people died  
In the second war  
To end all wars.

Against this fact,  
How insignificant are  
My plans and my desires ...

—Joe Michaud  
VFP chapter 161, Iowa City



## Birth of the National Security State

(continued from page 1)

transformation. Second, a system of laws and regulations must be created that enable the state to act with impunity and also to protect the government from challenges to its authority. Third, technology must be harnessed to enable the state to surreptitiously monitor and control the activities of its citizens. All of these elements have fallen into place over the past decade.

A recent example of abuse of authority by the government demonstrates how several of the key elements can come together. On September 24th, the Obama Administration declared that it would ask a federal court to block a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union in opposition to the government's contention that it has the authority to assassinate American citizens overseas if they are suspected of involvement with a terrorist

***State secrets is only one weapon in the arsenal employed by the government to create a framework of regulation that permits the government to act with impunity.***

group. The White House has invoked the state secrets privilege, contending that vital national interests would be betrayed if the case were to proceed and further that the president has the authority to target anyone for death in time of war. The state secrets privilege is the ultimate weapon to avoid exposure of government wrongdoing. It has been used frequently by the Obama administration in spite of Obama-the-candidate's pledge that he would run an open and accountable government.

The ACLU case focused on the one U.S. citizen known to be on the administration's assassination list, Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. Now, by all accounts al-Awlaki is an unsavory character, involved with at least one extremist group in Yemen, but the evidence that he is an actual terrorist or that he has been closely involved with plotting terrorist attacks has not been made public. At this point, he appears to have been condemned to death without any due process and without any opportunity to defend himself. The Obama Administration abuse of the state secrets privilege in this case is little more than justifying the practice of extrajudicial murder at the whim of a government bureaucrat. It also assumes that the whole world is a battlefield without any declaration of war by congress. If all of that is so, al-Awlaki can be killed and so can any other American for any reason or no reason.

State secrets is only one weapon in the arsenal employed by the government to create a framework of regulation that permits the government to act with impunity. The Military Commission Act, which candidate Obama vowed to let expire, was renewed in 2009 with virtually no changes. Under the MCA, someone can be imprisoned indefinitely on suspicion that he or she has provided material support to terrorism. Material support is not defined and can be interpreted to mean nearly anything. If accused, right to a trial by peers does not apply as the detainee is subject to a military tribunal and habeas corpus is null and void. And how does the government determine if someone is a "terrorism supporter?" Through evidence derived from Patriot Act authorized National Security Letters, which the FBI can obtain without any judicial process whatsoever to look

into the private lives of each and every citizen. Nearly 25,000 National Security Letters were issued in 2008 alone. When someone receives a letter demanding that information be provided to the authorities it is a felony to reveal to the subject



U.S. citizen Imam Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen October 2008. He was assassinated by the U.S. government three years later. (photo by Muhammad ud-Deen)

of the investigation that he or she is being looked at.

The second key element in the National Security State is the media depiction of a threat that makes the public fearful and willing to sacrifice rights in exchange for security. This effort is aided and abetted by the government, which is the principal cheerleader for the fear mongering. In the al-Awlaki case the media obediently

depicts the man as a terrorist, never challenging the established narrative so it makes it easier for the public to accept that he should be killed for reasons of public safety. Another recent initiative of the same sort is the narrative that there are numerous American Muslims who have been radicalized and might carry out terrorist acts. One might reasonably note that as there are possibly ten million Muslims in the U.S. if that were true there would be hundreds of incidents occurring annually, possibly one or two a day. Where are they? Yet the government suggests that there is an "emerging" threat and the media buys into it hook line and sinker. The public is again scared into supporting the National Security State.

Finally, there is the technical ability to look into the private lives of each and every citizen, which is increasing exponentially as the technology is refined. The federal government is currently seeking legislation to enable it to monitor internet, blackberries, and social networking sites. The centers of most American citizens are criss-crossed by surveillance cameras, while "traffic control" cameras record automobile information, and cell phone and internet providers maintain complete records on calls and emails for up to a year. These are records that the government can access through the National Security Letters, without any judicial review. Cell phone system monitors are able to locate anyone with a phone turned on within a distance of three feet and whenever a call is made the location is recorded. This means if you attend an anti-war rally your participation might wind up in a security file. Much of this and other information is collected into data bases, together with public record material like driving license information, credit reports, and details of criminal and civil litigation. How much of the information is actually retained is anyone's guess, but it is safe to assume that it is all kept for some time and that government computers can retrieve it at will.

Having lived in Europe, I know that most of these intrusive technologies first appeared on that continent, where people accept a high level of state control, only to be picked up subsequently in the U.S. The British government is currently introducing legislation proposing that all wage and salary earners have their paychecks



Hundreds of people at the U.S. Consulate in Hong in June 2013 protesting in support of Edward Snowden. Poster reads, "Shame on the U.S. government. Respect human rights. Support Snowden." (photo by See-ming Lee)

sent directly to the tax agencies for processing. The government's stated intention is to make sure that taxes are being collected, but Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs service computers would also be alert to possible money laundering and terrorist connections, raising the fear level to justify the action. After processing, the British government would then pass whatever money remains on to the person who actually earned it. Scary, but it is perhaps something that will also be proposed in the U.S. by a Joe Lieberman, John McCain, or Lindsey Graham, all of whom have used fear of terrorism to justify curtailment of civil liberties and intrusion into areas once regarded as private. Or even by Barack Obama, who appears to believe that a benign big government provides a solution to whatever ails you and is already moving towards monitoring all financial transactions.

The only answer to the National Security State is a demand on the part of U.S. citizens to return to constitutionalism and a rule of law. The government should not be empowered to kill citizens extrajudicially, start wars of choice, detain suspects indefinitely and without charges, use state secrets claims to avoid scrutiny, and obtain private information without a warrant. It is difficult to imagine a return to normalcy under the best of circumstances, but congress is complicit in the process and will do nothing. Genuine change will only come about when we the people insist on it.

*Philip M. Girdali is a former CIA counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer who served 19 years overseas in Turkey, Italy, Germany, and Spain. He was Chief of Base in Barcelona from 1989 to 1992, was designated as senior Agency officer for support at the Olympic Games, and served as official liaison to the Spanish Security and Intelligence services. He has been designated by the General Accountability Office as an expert on the impact of illegal immigration on terrorism. This article is reprinted with his permission.*

SKYREAPER

Bird of prey  
Soars high above  
Middle Eastern  
South Asian villages.

They hunt not  
Inside flying flocks,  
But alone.  
They seek not  
Other birds,  
But landbound prey.  
Carefully, furtively, suddenly  
Swoop down on

Cars, women, imams\*, children.

Lightning-quick  
Surgically-precise  
Attacks.

No victims  
Alive.

Bird of prey  
Stalker from the high ground

Shakira, victim of drone attacks from Pakistan Afghanistan border. The box below shows a decade of statistics—for Pakistan only. Shakira puts a face on these cold numbers.



Year	Number of Attacks	Casualties			
		Militants	Civilians	Unknown	Total
2004	1	2	3	2	7
2005	3	5	6	4	15
2006	2	1	93	0	94
2007	4	0	51	12	63
2008	36	2	223	47	298
2009	54	3	387	92	549
2010	122	3	788	45	849
2011	73	19	520	35	517
2012	48	3	268	33	306
2013	17	3	107	0	111
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>2446</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>2,809</b>

“The use of drones has dramatically increased the geographic reach of war zones to countries with which the U. S. is not formally at war. How many young people around the world are growing up in fear because of United States military policy that monitors them with the constant buzzing of drones overhead? In some remote places, all that the population knows about the United States is our drones.”

—Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers, *Truthout*

CHILDREN VICTIMS OF DRONE ATTACKS IN YEMEN

- Afrah Ali Mohammed Nasser | 9 | female
- Zayda Ali Mohammed Nasser | 7 | female
- Hoda Ali Mohammed Nasser | 5 | female
- Sheikha Ali Mohammed Nasser | 4 | female
- Ibrahim Abdullah Mokbel Salem Louqye | 13 | male
- Asmaa Abdullah Mokbel Salem Louqye | 9 | male
- Salma Abdullah Mokbel Salem Louqye | 4 | female
- Fatima Abdullah Mokbel Salem Louqye | 3 | female
- Khadije Ali Mokbel Louqye | 1 | female
- Hanaa Ali Mokbel Louqye | 6 | female
- Mohammed Ali Mokbel Salem Louqye | 4 | male
- Jawass Mokbel Salem Louqye | 15 | female
- Maryam Hussein Abdullah Awad | 2 | female
- Shafiq Hussein Abdullah Awad | 1 | female
- Sheikha Nasser Mahdi Ahmad Bouh | 3 | female
- Maha Mohammed Saleh Mohammed | 12 | male
- Soumaya Mohammed Saleh Mohammed | 9 | female
- Shafika Mohammed Saleh Mohammed | 4 | female
- Shafiq Mohammed Saleh Mohammed | 2 | male
- Mabrook Mouqbal Al Qadari | 13 | male
- Daolah Nasser 10 years | 10 | female
- AbedalGhani Mohammed Mabkhout | 12 | male
- Abdel- Rahman Anwar al Awlaki | 16 | male
- Abdel-Rahman al-Awlaki | 17 | male
- Nasser Salim | 19 | male

Stainless steel  
High-tech  
Laser-guided  
Village-bombing

Reaper in the sky.  
Seen over

Yemen, Libya, Pakistan.

There's no running from  
What's expected least:  
Western political desire  
At work:

Stainless steel  
High-tech

Death from above.

Dee Allen 9.8.13



\*A Muslim leader of the line of Ali held by the Shiite sect to be divinely appointed, sinless, infallible successors of Muhammad. Or simply a prayer leader of a mosque.



“Dad, how do soldiers killing each other solve the world’s problems?”

— Bill Watterson, Calvin and Hobbes:  
Sunday Pages 1985-1995

There is enough treachery, hatred, violence, absurdity in the average human being to supply any given army on any given day.

—Charles Bukowski

Image by Alex Cherry

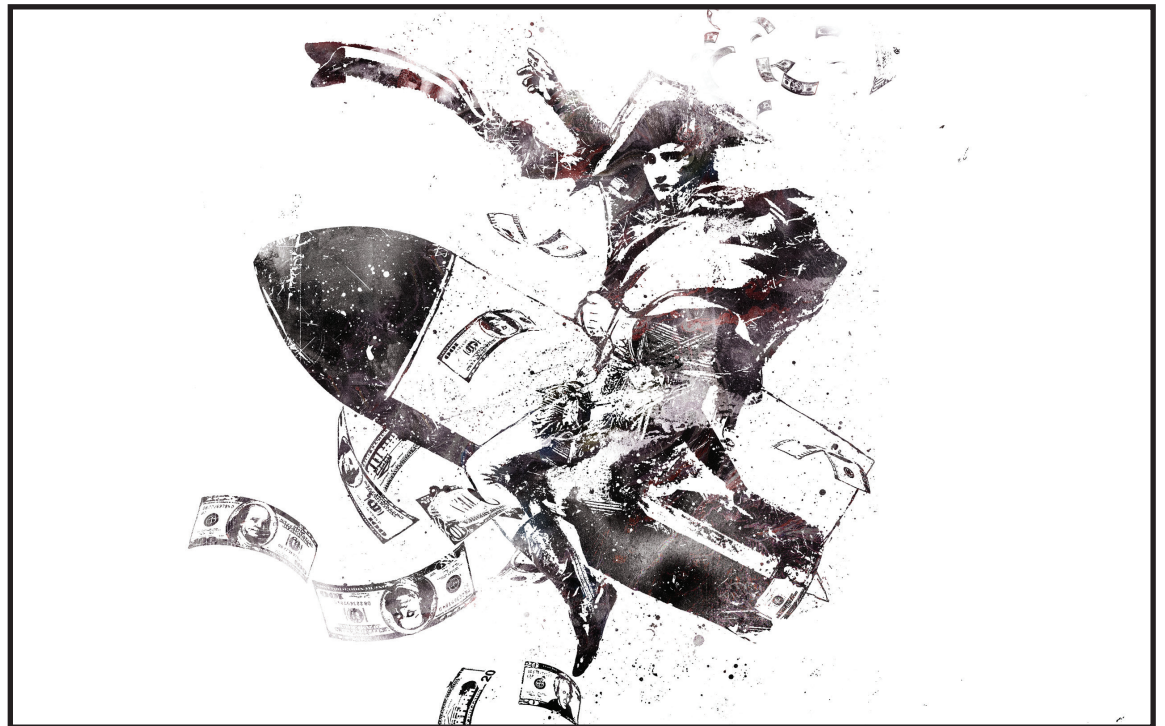


ILLUSTRATION RAFAEL EDWARDS / MUNDO SIN GUERRAS

**Department of Defense pointed to USDA data from 2011 that found 5,000 food stamp recipients listed their employment status as “active duty military.”**

**The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.**

—Douglas MacArthur

“My intention is to communicate my sense of the total absurdity of war, of how it shrinks humanity in all of us, and that there are no winners whatsoever. I feel that it is absolutely urgent to raise consciousness on this issue to the point where the sole idea of military aggression anywhere causes immediate rejection everywhere, and not only in political circles within the factions involved directly in a conflict.”

—Rafael Edwards

# Locking Out the Voices of Dissent

by Chris Hedges

The security and surveillance state, after crushing the Occupy movement and eradicating its encampments, has mounted a relentless and largely clandestine campaign to deny public space to any group or movement that might spawn another popular uprising. The legal system has been grotesquely deformed in most cities to, in essence, shut public space to protesters, eradicating our right to free speech and peaceful assembly.

The goal of the corporate state is to criminalize democratic, popular dissent before there is another popular eruption. The vast state surveillance system, detailed in Edward Snowden's revelations to the British newspaper the *Guardian*, at the same time ensures that no action or protest can occur without the advanced knowledge of our internal security apparatus. This foreknowledge has allowed the internal security systems to proactively block activists from public spaces as well as carry out pre-emptive harassment, interrogation, intimidation, detention and arrests before protests can begin. There is a word for this type of political system—tyranny.



Banner: "Nightmares of War Don't End at 10 PM"

If the state is ultimately successful in preventing us from mobilizing in public spaces, then dissent will mutate from nonviolent mass protests to clandestine and perhaps violent acts of resistance. Some demonstrators have already been branded "domestic terrorists" under the law. The rear-guard effort by a handful of activists to protect our rights to be heard and peaceably assemble is perhaps the most crucial, though unseen, struggle we currently are engaged in with the corporate state. It is a struggle to salvage what is left of our civil society and our right to nonviolent resistance against corporate tyranny. This is why the New York City trial in early July of members of Veterans for Peace, along with other activists, took on an importance that belied the simple trespassing charges against them.



Army veteran Tarak Kauff (center) reads names of soldiers killed in Vietnam while flowers are placed at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza in New York City on October 7, 2012. At left is WWII veteran Jay Wenk, ringing a gong to mark the names. Both were arrested shortly after this photograph was taken.

The activists were arrested October 7, 2012, while they were placing flowers in 11 vases and reading the names of the dead inscribed on the wall in New York's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza after the official closing time, 10 p.m. The defiance of the plaza's official closing time—which appears to be enforced against political activists only—was spawned by a May 1, 2012, protest by Occupy Wall Street activists. The Occupy activists had attempted to hold a meeting in the plaza and been driven out by police. A number of Veterans for Peace activists, most of them veterans of the Vietnam War, formed a line in front of the advancing police that May night and refused to move. They were arrested.

Many of these veterans came back to the plaza on a rainy, windy night in October to protest on the 11th anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan and again assert their right to carry out nonviolent protests in public spaces. They included Jay Wenk, an 86-year-old combat veteran of World War II who served with Gen. George Patton's Third Army in Europe. When he was arrested, Wenk was beating a gong in the downpour as the names of the dead were read.

During the October protest, 25 people were seized by police for refusing to leave the park after 10 p.m. Twelve went to trial. Manhattan Criminal Court Judge Robert Mandelbaum found the dozen activists guilty. The judge, however, quickly threw out his own verdict, calling the case a "unique circumstance." "Justice," he said, "cries out for a dismissal." His dismissal shuts down the possibility of an appeal.

"The legislative system, the judicial system, the whole national security state that's invading all of our privacy are taking away our

right to dissent," Dr. Margaret Flowers, one of the defendants, told me on a lunch break during the trial. "But everything that's happening is happening legally. It's a slippery slope. People will look at this case and they're

going to say, 'So what? They were in a park. There was a rule. It was closing. The police arrested them. That makes sense to me!' And they don't put it in the bigger context. That's how all of this is happening. It's all being justified. The whole system is being flipped on its head. The judicial and law enforcement system should be protecting our rights. We have the right to dissent. It's in the Bill of Rights. The question is, can we halt that slide for a second, maybe even reverse it a little bit?"

The executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government have been taken over by corporations and used to protect and promote the criminal activity of Wall Street, the destruction of the ecosystem by the fossil fuel industry, the looting of the

U.S. Treasury by the banking industry, and the corporate seizure of all major centers of power.

The primacy of corporate profit trumps our right to a living wage, affordable and adequate health care, the regulation of industry and environmental controls, protection from corporate fraud and abuse, the right to a good and affordable public education, the ability to form labor unions, and having a government that serves the basic needs of ordinary citizens. Our voices, our rights and our aspirations are no longer of concern to the state. And if we try to assert them, the state now has mechanisms in place to shut us down.

Tarak Kauff, a 71-year-old veteran of the Army's 101st Airborne and former professional boxer, was one of the organizers of the October 7 protest. He has been on a hunger strike for more than a month to express solidarity with the hunger strikers at Guantanamo Bay and in the Pelican Bay prison in California. He was gaunt. His skin was ashen and his cheeks sunken. He consumes 300 liquid calories a day and has lost 24 pounds. He was arrested in May and again in October.

"I saw clearly that the purpose of the arrest was not merely enforcing the 10 p.m. curfew," he said of the May



Vietnam veteran Mike Hastie being arrested at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza.

arrests, “but the purpose was very specific in restricting the right of assembly. We decided that October 7th would be a perfect day to do it. It was 11 years of war in Afghanistan. So when we came to the Vietnam Veterans Plaza that night we had four purposes. One was to call for an end to the war, the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The second was to call for an end to all U.S. wars of empire. The third was to remember and lament those who had fallen and been wounded in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, including the civilians, including the 5 million civilians in Vietnam. The fourth was to affirm our right to assemble. If we lose the right to address these issues and to organize in public places, we have absolutely nothing.”

“I’m fasting because it’s a sacrifice,” he said when I asked about his hunger strike. “I want to encourage other people in our movement of the necessity of sacrifice. If we want to establish anything, if we want to re-establish or ever establish any kind of democratic system, it’s not going to happen without sacrifice, some kind of sacrifice. And we have a choir. I want to see that choir inspired to start sacrificing more, to take risks. We have to be willing to put our bodies on the line in some way, shape, or form, nonviolently.”

According to several of the activists, some of the police officers said that they too were military veterans and disliked making the arrests but had been told by their superiors to take the demonstrators into custody to prevent another Occupy encampment.

“We can’t let you stay,” Kauff said he was told by a police captain. “It sets a bad example for the Occupy movement.”

“After the process of being arrested began, a police lieutenant told me the Occupy Wall Street people really screwed this up for you guys,” Sam Adams, who served in the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam, said in his courtroom testimony. “You can thank them for this.”

The trial was a tiny window into how rattled the state was by Occupy, unfortunately now in disarray. The security organs know that as conditions worsen for the majority of Americans, as austerity cuts and



Chris Hedges speaks at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza October 7, 2012

chronic unemployment and underemployment drive tens of millions of families into desperation, as climate change continues to produce extreme and dangerous weather, there remains the threat of another popular backlash. The problem lies not, of course, with the Occupy movement, but with the reconfiguration of the government into a handmaiden of corporations that seek to squeeze profits out of the dying carcass of empire.

The corporate state’s quest to control all power includes using the military to carry out domestic policing, which is why I sued the president over Section 1021 of the National Defense Authorization Act. It is imperative to defend, as the activists did in New York City, what freedoms and rights we have left. If we remain passive, if we permit the state to continue to use the law to take away our right of political expression, we will have no legal protection of resistance when we will need it most.

*Chris Hedges is an award-winning journalist, activist, and author of a dozen books. As a foreign correspondent, he has covered wars and reported from more than 50 countries. His latest book is Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt. This article is reprinted with his permission.*

All photos by Ellen Davidson.

**Thank you, readers!**

## WCT is Five

This issue completes our fifth year of publishing a print quarterly whose mission is to raise awareness among the general public of the true costs of war and of the fact that all wars are crimes in themselves.

As we begin our sixth year, we’d like to thank our readers, our donors, and our contributors of content. You make the paper possible.

We are entirely funded by your donations. Our suggested donation amounts just cover costs of printing, postage, and supplies. Generous donations in excess of costs allow us to expand our reach.

We send complimentary copies, bundles, or subscriptions of the *War Crimes Times* to libraries, GI coffeehouses, prison inmates (including Bradley Manning), senators, and congressmen, and to folks who have the energy to distribute

the paper but not the means to provide financial support. (One homeless vet asked for a free bundle to help him “get back on his feet”; now he has a home and he orders, and pays for, multiple bundles).

We also send complimentary copies to our contributing authors, poets, cartoonists, and artists who include notable journalists, legal experts, academics, and activists as well as veterans speaking from experience.

Our reach also extends beyond the U.S. Copies of the *WCT* have been sent to Afghanistan, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Africa, Sweden, the UK, and Vietnam.

We’re quite sure that after five years and tens of thousands of issues, we have raised some awareness. We’re also quite sure that we have more to do.

Thanks again for your readership and your support!

***During WWI, the British government tightly controlled the war news. On hearing a report from the front, Prime Minister David Lloyd George said, “If people really knew, the war would be stopped tomorrow. But of course they don’t know, and can’t know.”***

***The War Crimes Times wants the people to know.***

Standing on the edge of the earth  
turns out it truly is flat  
bombs murdering children en masse  
and we still can’t tell you what the oil is worth  
days spent in the sun  
ingest dust to spit out blood  
hold freedom for ransom with a gun  
tell there are enough tears in the sand to make mud  
poison gas kills no more and no less than the bullet  
the death of an innocent is still immoral  
all the while breaking the days of a good spirit  
and treating the world as if it were immortal  
but all around she is dying  
the trees and the oceans fall victim to our ways  
and still those who return hear the children crying  
as their parents are being dragged away  
so I say fuck another war of imperialism  
I renounce the government that takes actions against the will of the people  
cowards hiding behind desks with only the strengths of their pens  
signing away our freedoms until this nation too will crumble  
to the coward and chief your hypocrisy is beyond understanding  
killing more and more as a policy of aggression  
all while condemning Snowden and Manning  
Do me a favor and fucking read the Constitution!!!

— Chas Jaquier

# Burying memories

by Mark Runge

*The following is based on a blog post that I wrote while staying in Israel and working on a family farm.*

Day 17: Posted: 24 Jun 2013

Thinking about Blues (the farm dog here) got me thinking about life—or death, really. Did you know that when dogs know they are dying they want to leave the pack and die alone? I read this somewhere; I think it was in

animals, like Blues, have complex emotional lives. I think I'm like a dog in that way, the death thing. And I think that is reflected in the way I deal with death—which is isolation. I've never been a group griever. If you were close to me, then you



Blues

Perhaps it was because I've been where he was, but I made it home. He never did; as he said, he was too broken for war and too wrecked for peace. He said it much more eloquently, though. I dare you to read his letter [see sidebar] and not be heartbroken.

Pass this on along with your plan to help those marginalized others—those

for themselves because they have killed themselves—twenty-two veterans a day commit suicide.

I belong to an organization called Veterans For Peace. I will not pretend to be at peace or to be evolved enough to know what peace really is, although I am searching. But the organization, like me, does seek justice for veterans and victims of war.

Sometimes I go days in a row where I do not stop thinking about my wartime experiences or those with whom I served. Many of my nights are disturbed by other veterans who were so for peace that they have killed themselves. So I dream about Somers, Adams, and Smith because they are veterans and victims of war. And I

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*Many of my nights are disturbed by other veterans who were so for peace that they have killed themselves.*

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*When Elephants Weep*, but it was so long ago that I cannot remember. It's a great book, though, which talks about how

would know what I'm feeling so back off and let me feel it. I wonder if this is because I never learned to grieve death.

Nobody I knew—or really cared about—died when I was young. Then while I was in the army, we lost two guys in my unit immediately after we came back from Iraq. Adams put a .44 caliber in his mouth in the parking lot of our barracks. I remember that it was cold when we found his body because his car was still running, and I could see the exhaust puffing out of the car's tailpipe into the cool morning air. We couldn't shut the car off until the MPs investigated.

Miller used a .410 shotgun. He did it when he went home, the asshole. Why would he make his family suffer that? So to deal with the loss of two friends, I used the tool that the army helped me to use well: booze. With some of the guys in my unit I got too drunk. But nobody cried. I think the army should have taught us to cry. We were so sad because nobody died in Iraq only to have two of us die right after we returned. But we ended up losing a bunch of guys after that, for sure.

The night sky in the Israeli desert was amazing when the moon was full because it seemed to be on fire! That's hyperbole, of course, because there is no oxygen in space. No oxygen, no fire. But I was choked up for a while thinking about Blues and the death of my friends. I was still choked up a few days later, but not about the moon or the lack of oxygen or even Blues or my friends. Around that time I read a suicide letter from a veteran. I never should have read it because after doing so I was weepy for days.

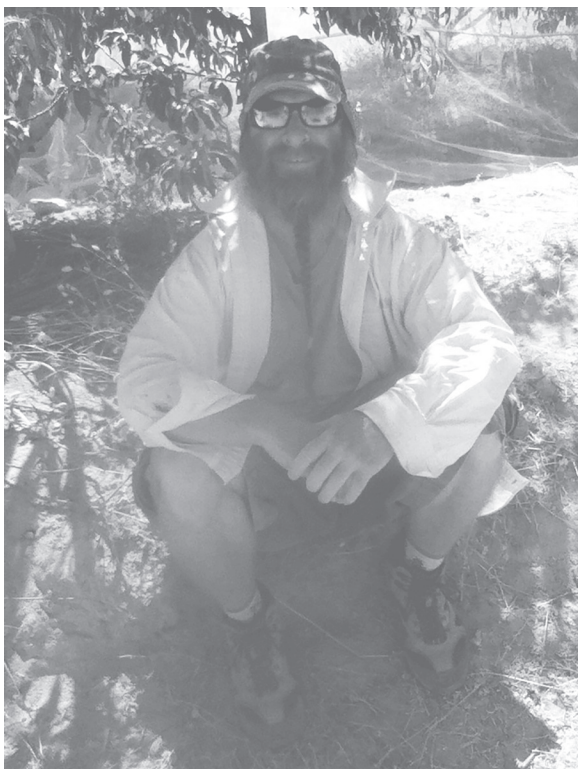
veterans whose voices cannot be heard or those who cannot find a voice. And it is true, veterans' voices are rarely heard, whether because those voices are silenced by the veterans' own apathy, lost in the cacophony created by government bureaucracy, or confused through the loudly but often misspoken patriotic rhetoric of well-meaning Americans. Spread the word for the veterans for peace who cannot speak

dream about the rotten bodies I've come to miss that lived in Iraq. I cannot imagine the bodies are still there, but I cannot imagine them any other place. We should have buried the guys we killed. I think I would feel much better today if we did.

There was a time when we were mopping up around an Iraqi convoy that was decimated. We were collecting any guns



Mark above as a soldier in Iraq in 1991; below as a farm hand in Israel in 2013.



## Not suicide, but a mercy killing

*Daniel Somers was a 30-year-old veteran who ran more than 400 combat missions as a machine gunner in the turret of a Humvee during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He suffered from PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and several other war-related conditions. On June 10, 2013, Daniel wrote a letter to his family before taking his life. The full text of the letter is readily available online. Here are some excerpts:*

I am sorry that it has come to this.

The fact is, for as long as I can remember my motivation for getting up every day has been so that you would not have to bury me. As things have continued to get worse, it has become clear that this alone is not a sufficient reason to carry on. The fact is, I am not getting better, I am not going to get better, and I will most certainly deteriorate further as time goes on...

My body has become nothing but a cage, a source of pain and constant problems. The illness I have has caused me pain that not even the strongest medicines could dull, and there is no cure. All day, every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending in my body. It is nothing short of torture. My mind is a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety, even with all of the medications the doctors dare give....

The simple truth is this: During my first deployment, I was made to participate in things, the enormity of which is hard to describe. War crimes, crimes against humanity....

And for what? Bush's religious lunacy? Cheney's ever growing fortune and that of his corporate friends? Is this what we destroy lives for?...

This is what brought me to my actual final mission. Not suicide, but a mercy killing. I know how to kill, and I know how to do it so that there is no pain whatsoever. It was quick, and I did not suffer. And above all, now I am free. I feel no more pain. I have no more nightmares or flashbacks or hallucinations. I am no longer constantly depressed or afraid or worried.

I am free.

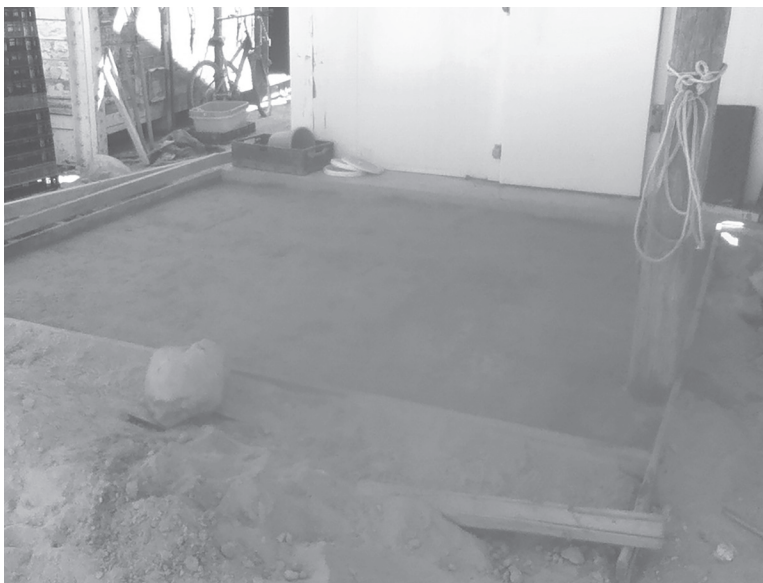
I ask that you be happy for me for that. It is perhaps the best break I could have hoped for. Please accept this and be glad for me.

Daniel Somers

or ammo that were missed by others, and we were collecting souvenirs. I was “done with being in Iraq” by then, so I was just hanging out with some guys who finished scavenging. (A great irony is that I was done with being there then, but am not done with being there now.)

So we were hanging out, there were about four of us; I don’t recall who it was except for one guy that we all knew was nuts. If he is not in prison somewhere now he is a serial killer on the loose. But how could we know that then? We were kids. So Mister Doctor Nutso takes his bayonet and starts performing “brain surgery” on an Iraqi. The skull was already broken, so most of the work was done. The others of us who were not “operating” just shook our heads and said he was an idiot or some such, even though he claimed to be a brain surgeon. Looking back now I wonder why we didn’t stop him because his act wasn’t right. But then murdering a whole convoy of people wasn’t right either.

When we were going through Basic Training the Drill Sergeants drilled into our heads certain things, just like Mister Doctor



Tamped earth—burial ground for old memories.

Nutso did to that Iraqi. There is not one day that has gone by—in my entire life since Basic Training!—that I haven’t repeated the mantra “Kill the head; the body dies!” Of course the Drill Sergeants’ part was “Kill the head!” and we just had to yell “The body dies!” I wish they would have made us learn something like “If your buddy sticks his knife in a dead guy’s skull stop him.”

I don’t weep for me, necessarily. I weep for those that I’ve lost, even those that I could not have known. I weep for Daniel Somers; I weep for Specialists Adams and Smith, all who are now at peace; and I’m weeping for the Iraqi who was operated on by Mister Doctor Nutso because the surgery didn’t work.

So for a time in the Israeli desert I was weepy and whiny; but this did not last. I can sometimes give voice to the secrets that I once dared not share with others, especially the ones I love—the secrets I mean. You cannot know them all yet, dear family, friends, and strangers, because I’m not done with them yet.

So what did I do with all of that negative energy there in the desert, you ask? I buried it.

While serving the family in Israel I had to get a form ready for a cement slab we were going to pour. Avi, the father, wanted to add a much-needed area to prepare the fruit for delivery. It was truly needed because one day while there we had to get a big order together, and we stood in ants—until we moved.

So I had to level out the ground and tamp the earth hard in preparation for pouring cement. I kept thinking about the absurdities of my part in the army and Iraq, and I just hammered them into the earth. I probably did more tamping than necessary, but I sure did feel a bunch better because I just pretended that I buried some of the guys I left in Iraq.

*Mark Runge is a Gulf War veteran, an artist and art teacher, and the graphics editor for the War Crimes Times. He also helps disabled veterans get back to work—see [www.dtheroes.org](http://www.dtheroes.org).*

## News from SOA Watch

### SHUT DOWN THE School of the Americas! November 22 -24, 2013

submitted by Hendrik Voss, SOAW national organizer

In November, we will carry our protest to where the killers are still being trained: Fort Benning, Georgia—the home of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly the School of the Americas). Torture survivors and social movement activists from Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia—from across the Americas—will stand against the School of the Americas, oppressive U.S. foreign policy, and militarization in the hemisphere.

Come and join us!

Over the past two decades, the November vigil has grown from a handful of people into one of the most dynamic multi-generational annual gatherings for peace. It includes concerts, theater performances, a veterans-led march, nonviolent direct action, film screenings, trainings, workshops and caucuses. It’s where the movement for peace and justice comes together as a community to mourn, resist, strategize, debate, learn, celebrate, and heal.

Veterans, students, nuns, migrants, unionists, people of faith, torture survivors, families, artists from across the Americas will converge at the gates of the School of the Americas to reaffirm life and creativity in the face of Empire.

Thousands have been educated and mobilized at this event; new layers of activists are joining the movement, including numerous youth and students from multinational, working-class communities.

Featured speakers include Edith López Ovalle, who directs H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) in Mexico; Lorena Cabnal, a Xinka woman from Guatemala, who is a member of the Mesoamerican Women in Resistance, and the co-founder of the Association of Indigenous Women of Santa María Xalapán; Hector Aristizábal, a Colombian artist, actor, and human rights activist, who survived

torture at the hand of the School of the Americas-trained Colombian military; and Camila Leiva, whose great uncle was assassinated by Pinochet’s goons in Washington, DC, and who is now working with SOA Watch in Santiago to organize an Americas-wide Youth Encuentro.

The work has not gotten easier—we need everyone’s energy, creativity and participation. The coup in Honduras and the continuing repression against the pro-democracy resistance, the expansion of U.S. military bases in Colombia and Panama, and the militarization of the U.S./Mexico border are grim examples of what we are up against. We must come together to reaffirm our belief in justice and peace, and our commitment to ending militarization and injustice.

We see hope as movements throughout the hemisphere are standing up for dignity and self-determination. When John Kerry, in his Senate confirmation hearings for Secretary of State, spoke about Latin America as “our backyard,” he was very much out of tune with the new reality of sovereignty and dignity that has emerged from the South. The times of deference towards the bullying of the United States are over. Latin America is standing up and rejecting U.S. hegemony over its people and its resources.

For decades, the U.S. approach has been to train, control, and rely on repressive Latin American militaries to maintain the status quo of U.S. domination and U.S. access to “free” markets. But Venezuela (2004), Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia (2006), Ecuador and Nicaragua (2012) have denounced the SOA and withdrawn their troops.

The Syria crisis revealed that the American people are decisively rejecting the “military solutions” approach of the Pentagon-driven U.S. foreign policy. Let’s build on that!

We are organizing together with our partners in the Americas for justice and accountability. Make your travel plans now and join us at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia! **Learn more at SOAW.org**

## The Chilean 9/11 – Justice for Victor Jara

September 11, 2013, marked the 40th anniversary of the U.S.-backed military coup in Chile, in which General Augusto Pinochet ousted the democratically elected president, Salvador Allende. The coup began a 17-year repressive dictatorship during which thousands of people were murdered, disappeared, and tortured by Chilean security forces. High-ranking Chilean military officers, trained at the School of the Americas (now WHINSEC), perpetrated these crimes, and some have now been charged.

In December 2012, Chilean Judge Miguel Vazquez Plaza charged former military officers Hugo Sanchez and Pedro Barrientos as responsible for the murder of Victor Jara, a popular folksinger/songwriter/activist. The judge also indicted former military officers Roberto Souper, Raúl Jofré, Edwin Dimter, Nelson Hasse, Luis Bethke and Jorge Gumucio as accomplices. Barrientos, Jofre, Dimter and Gumucio are graduates of the School of the Americas. An extradition request for Barrientos, who currently lives in Florida, has been issued by the Chilean justice system.

Victor Jara, who studied indigenous folk music and traditions, was the voice of his country’s dispossessed. The internationally admired songwriter was killed on September 16, 1973, in the Estadio Chile (Chile Stadium—renamed Estadio Victor Jara in 2003) in Santiago. His body, dumped in the street, was found riddled with 44 bullets and signs of torture.

As a symbol of our solidarity with the Chilean people and a way of seeking justice for all victims of the Pinochet dictatorship, please support the campaign, “Justice for Victor Jara.” Demand that Pedro Barrientos be extradited to Chile for trial at **SOAW.org/victor**.



Victor Jara (photo credit: Ruso.cl)

# Mothering and the Military: How Do We Raise Our Children?

by Sharon Doubiago

I went in search of a book for him. I went through the Children section and Fairy Tales, through Parenting and Mothering, through Psychology, Alternative Education, Women's Studies and Feminism. Then Philosophy, Mythology, Politics, New Age, and War. Nothing even remotely close to what I was looking for.

I wanted a tale of a boy/man hero against war. A Conscientious Objector. A warrior for peace. A tale of a boy with the morality, integrity, intelligence, courage, physical and psychic/spiritual strength to resist our culture of war. I wanted a children's tale fitting to the culture of peace, art, love, activism and ecofeminism I've rooted my life in, and one a growing boy like my grandson could find meaning and inspiration in, could model himself on.

I understood the feminist protest against macho heroes, but I was knowing, again, as I had with my son, a negative side of this protest. To be an anti-war male is a heroic stance. We need such representations, especially for our children, to counter the military's glorified image of the war-mongering righteous killer for God and Country, and its stereotype of the unpatriotic, cowardly resister of war.

The manager was summoned. She seemed startled as if the thought had never occurred to her, but she understood what I was looking for, and why.

"Such a book does not exist," she said.

I remember the sinking feeling for humanity, for all life, for the future, for Gaia. Why is there no such book? Why hasn't the counterculture or any of those History of Consciousness Ph.d-ers, particularly those who are parents, not written and published such?

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***The main killers of history, of course, are teenage boys who've just left their mothers, soldiers who must prove to their fathers and themselves that they aren't Mama's Boys.***

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The sacrosanct heart of Western Culture is individualism, always proclaimed as our superiority over the primitive world ignorantly rooted in collectivist values. "Let your children go" is the Commandment, particularly to mothers. The edict, especially if the child is male, begins in pregnancy. The good mother constantly prepares to let her child go on the cultural certainty that this is good. In my own writing on mothers and children, I only slowly came to grasp this unquestioned, unexamined certainty as a core issue, an enormous barrier to finding solutions to our problems, especially war. The failure of *true* individualism in this country is tragically, massively deep: so many of our problems, especially our sons', stem from the culture's invalidating their relationship to their mothers, which becomes, ultimately, the invalidation of the deepest self, and all other selves.

In maternal love and instinct we let our children go in support of their struggle for independence, in our understanding that the child must individuate to find the self. (For the male: to find his manhood.) On the scholar/cultural level also, the fundamental "complex" of the human psyche is the child turning from the mother to the father to find individuation (i.e., Freud's Oedipus and Electra Complexes). The very foundation of our psyches,

our first act of will, is this turning from the feminine to the masculine which becomes the structure of our personalities, our societies, our patriarchal religions.

At the heart of the Commandment is perhaps our greatest taboo: the mother-son relationship—the root of misogyny, violence, the military, war, and our headlong suicidal rush into the destruction of All. Many brilliant explosive and culture-changing feminist books of the 70s-90s explored gender/war themes but the mother-son relationship remained a taboo to the feminists too.

Until we begin exploring this relationship, with hearts and minds congruent, until women begin consciously to undertake what it means to raise males (and females who would become soldiers, or mate with them), until we begin to assert our mothering over the doctrines of the military, the Armies will always win our children, and humanity will continue to move ever closer to annihilation.

The stereotype of the cowardly antiwar pacifist male is Robert Bly's soft male in *Iron John*, the international best seller during the first Gulf War, reported then to be history's bestselling book after the King James Bible and the works of Shakespeare. The main thesis of this shallow but

profoundly seductive book is the importance of mother-son severance in the old European fairy tales (when men were men of iron, etc.). I still maintain, as I did in my *Ms Magazine* essay back then, that *Iron John* as best-seller at that Gulf War moment was no coincidence. We read it to restore our imperialist, warmongering programming which had been overcome by our horror of Vietnam. *Iron John* was our Desert Storm bible. Its ridicule of the wimpy boy unable to cut the apron strings became the significant reactionary backlash blow to the evolving ecofeminist culture.

Something like *Iron John* happened before to devastating effects on our fathers' capacity to be "soft." Just after World War II, Edward Strecker, a psychiatrist who served as adviser to the Secretary of the Navy, published *Their Mother's Sons*, charging "Mom" with so crippling her son that "the very breath of democracy" was nearly stilled. Strecker is credited with re-popularizing the epithet "Mama's Boy." (The main killers of history, of course, are teenage boys who've just left their mothers, soldiers who must prove to their fathers and themselves that they aren't Mama's Boys.)

For all the work done regarding the catastrophe of Vietnam, there is still very little account, much less ac-



Mike Hastie's photo of boys holding realistic plastic rifles on a flatbed truck during a Veterans Day Parade in Albany, Oregon, in 1992 – a year after America invaded Iraq.

claim, of the draft dodgers. One hundred thousand went abroad, according to Wikipedia. Who were they? What gave them the insight and courage not to go to war? How were they raised? Where's the big Hollywood movie, the books for children? In the two books under Google: Vietnam Draft Dodgers, one, *All American Boys*, by Frank Kusch, was published *August 2001!* And is priced on Amazon at \$100+! The other, *Confronting the War Machine*, by Michael Foley, 2003, seems to make a big ethical issue of the difference between Conscientious Objectors and dodgers and avoiders. Hey, teach children to resist war, period.

"I SUE MY GOVERNMENT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE!" was the poster I carried when we started our next war against Muslims, in retaliation of 9-11, blowing again the work of a generation against violence. How do we raise a child in love (of self, others, and earth), in ethics and morality, and not damage and endanger it? How do we protect the child's psychic health? It's been clear for a long time that our survival is endangered by our obsolete patterns of relationship to self and others, by our ancient religions and belief systems. How do we raise a child not to be a soldier, a killer for the cause? How do we survive the armies of God?

How do we raise a person to think through and over the instinct to obey—beginning, yes, with the parents? Individualism is the heart of our culture but there is also the opposite human trait: to blindly follow orders, to join the killer gang/army so contrary (and opposed) to individualism. This blind allegiance stems from having survived the first psychic trauma, the separation from the mother. In desperation the child bonds to the culture without question, so as not to undergo the shock of such abandonment again.<sup>1</sup>

Grasping that "let your child go" is cultural at least as much as psychological is not easy. We are as psychologically and culturally blind as African mothers who cut the clitorises from their young daughters, as blind as most of our mothers were in betraying us for and to our fathers. (Our fathers, the sons of our grandmothers.)

"It takes a lot," Meridel Le Sueur said, "to make a human being a racist, a sexist, a killer." How do we affirm in our children that they and all life are



sacred? How do we raise children against the brain-washed revenge ethic?

“When I look at the earth’s people, after 64 years, there is not one person I wish to see suffer, no matter what they have done to me or to anyone else.”<sup>2</sup> How do we raise children to remain in touch with this natal psychic state? “War is as objectionable as cannibalism and slavery,” Alice Walker goes on, “as my teacher Howard Zinn taught me.” How do we get to this truth as we have with cannibalism and slavery? How do we teach, not as religion but as fundamental truth, the Nazarene’s edict: Love thy enemy? The edict that in the Twentieth Century helped inspire the major non-violent political movements—India’s emancipation from England, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, the significant cultural impacts of the anti-war protests of the Vietnam era.

How were children raised in the ancient, war-free, matriarchal/partnership societies?

I will never believe it takes evil to change, but major, positive cultural shifts did rise out of the ashes of Vietnam. The military is inimical to mothering, that is, to family values. To grasp this would be the major consciousness shift out of our present madness.

It is the necessary shift we must make to survive. Let’s start with new books for our children.

*Sharon Doubiago has described herself as countercultural mother, an anti-war activist, and a Joycean scholar. She has published more than two dozen books of poetry and prose and over a hundred essays. Learn more about Sharon at sharondoubiago.com.*

#### Notes

1. Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child*, Bantam Books, 1980, p. 72-73.

2. “White People Have A Racial History Too.” Alice Walker, posted April 2, 2008, re Obama. <http://alternet.org/election/08/80898>

“The lowest standards of ethics of which a right-thinking man can possibly conceive is taught to the common soldier whose trade is to shoot his fellow men. In youth he may have learned the command, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ but the ruler takes the boy just as he enters manhood and teaches him that his highest duty is to shoot a bullet through his neighbor’s heart — and this, unmoved by passion or feeling or hatred, and without the least regard to right or wrong, but simply because his ruler gives the word.”

—Clarence Darrow, *Resist Not Evil*

## November 11th – Call it Armistice Day Again

by Philip Reiss

Today most Americans have no understanding of the significance of the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. Today, November 11th is called Veterans Day. Most people associate veterans with war, not peace. Back in 1954 when Congress renamed the day, changing it from Armistice Day as a day of peace to Veterans Day, it wanted to slide the public’s attention away from focusing on the desirability of peace and obscure the celebrations of it.

By implication, the new emphasis was on war, with a specific focus on those who participated in war.

In these times if you attend celebrations on that day, the desirability of peace is totally ignored as those who participated in war are lauded. It’s quite blatant that achieving and maintaining peace doesn’t gain any acknowledgement on that date which ended the carnage of World War I.

While honoring veterans, we have somehow overlooked what those engaged in battle desired most—the end of the war they were participating in! Without acknowledging the value of peace over war as we esteem veterans, we are in effect allowing machinations by politicians with hidden agendas to drag us into wars.

Those who profit from war, especially those who never served, such as Dick Cheney, would not want the true meaning of Armistice Day to again be celebrated across our nation. It’s up to us to work for the restoration of that day, November 11th, to again be celebrated with the message that peace is always desirable. We’ll have to challenge the shallow platitudes passing as patriotic certainty from local politicians trying to cull votes from those attending such dubious November 11th ceremonies where the word peace is never emphasized.

*Philip Reiss is a life member of Veteran For Peace in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. He taught African-American History from 1970 to 1999 at S.U.N.Y. Community College. His book, Blue Eyes On African-American History: A Learning Adventure, is available from Archway Publishing.*

### 11/11 Then

The United States Congress passed a resolution on June 4, 1926:

Whereas the 11th of November 1918, marked the cessation of the most destructive, sanguinary, and far reaching war in human annals and the resumption by the people of the United States of peaceful relations with other nations, which we hope may never again be severed, and

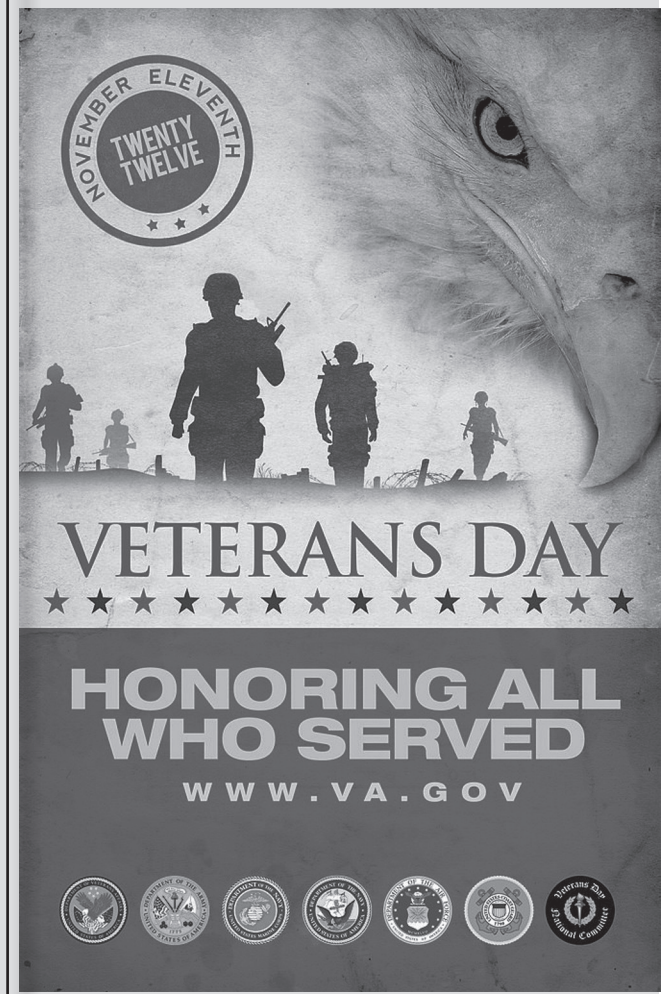
Whereas it is fitting that the recurring anniversary of *this date should be commemorated with thanksgiving and prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace through good will and mutual understanding between nations*; [emphasis added] and

Whereas the legislatures of twenty-seven of our States have already declared November 11 to be a legal holiday: Therefore be it Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), that the President of the United States is requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the officials to display the flag of the United States on all Government buildings on November 11 and inviting the people of the United States to observe the day in schools and churches, or other suitable places, with appropriate ceremonies of friendly relations with all other peoples.

\*\*\*

An Act (52 Stat. 351; 5 U. S. Code, Sec. 87a) approved May 13, 1938, made the 11th of November in each year a legal holiday—*a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace* and to be thereafter celebrated and known as “Armistice Day.” [emphasis added]

### 11/11 Now



**“Armistice Day has become Veterans Day. Armistice Day was sacred. Veterans Day is not. So I will throw Veterans Day over my shoulder. Armistice Day I will keep. I don’t want to throw away any sacred things.”**

**—Kurt Vonnegut, WWII veteran and survivor of the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden**

Fixing history to invigorate the military and endorse U.S. global ambitions

# Commemorating the American war in Vietnam

by Howard Machtinger

On May 25, 2012, President Obama announced a sixty-five million dollar, 13-year long commemoration of the war in Vietnam and proclaimed: “As we observe the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, we reflect with solemn reverence upon the valor of a generation that served with honor. We pay tribute to the more than 3 million servicemen and women who left their families to serve bravely, a world away... They pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans. Through more than a decade of combat ...these proud Americans upheld the highest traditions of our Armed Forces.”

Commemorations choose which events to remember and honor (and thereby define honor) and enshrine those events in our communal memory.

For my generation, the Vietnam War constituted overlapping tests of patriotism, “manhood,” and morality. The widespread public opposition made the war a moral issue for Americans. It was not, as pundits liked to say, just a cost-benefits miscalculation; it was *morally wrong*. Martin Luther King, in his 1967 “Beyond Vietnam” speech called for “profound change” in U.S. policy recalling the words of an American official overseas that “our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution.”

Even within the military, opposition was rampant. In 1971, Col. Robert D. Heinl wrote in the *Armed Forces Journal*: “by every conceivable indicator our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited when not near-mutinous.” There were over half a million reported incidents of desertion.

The civilian antiwar movement is better known but portrayed as primarily white

and middle class.

However, antiwar activists of color—from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King, from the Brown Berets and Chicano Moratorium to Corky Gonzalez and Ruben Salazar—took courageous and effective stands against the war. According to most surveys, working class respondents were more antiwar than the middle class.

Taking inspiration from the civil rights movement, an unprecedented opposition of remarkable proportions developed not just on campuses, but in the streets and around family dinner tables. It may be hard to imagine such widespread opposition given the success of our government today in removing war from public view, partly due to the absence of the draft and the privatization and robot-ization of the military, but also the policy of our political leaders. War has been normalized; as one winds down another gets rolling.

A recent Gallup poll found that 51% of Americans ages 18 to 29 believe that it was not a mistake to send U.S. forces to Vietnam. Only 43% of this group thought that U.S. involvement was a mistake. This is the highest level of pro-war sentiment of any age group surveyed. In the entire sample, 34% supported the war while 57% opposed it, which is actually the highest level of support for American involvement in Vietnam since 1970.

To me this is an argument for revisiting the war and mining its significance.

***“They pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans. Through more than a decade of combat ...these proud Americans upheld the highest traditions of our Armed Forces.”***

—President Barack Obama, May 25, 2012

***“Our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited when not near-mutinous.”***

—Col. Robert D. Heinl, 1971

In school I had learned that the U.S. had never lost a war. The U.S. took for granted that it could do what an “outmoded” European power—France—could not, subdue Vietnam. Imperial arrogance did not take much notice of the Vietnamese “enemy,” so when I first encountered representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the “enemy”) in a meeting at the Montreal Expo/World’s Fair in 1967, I was blown away by their confidence in ultimate victory. It hadn’t occurred to me that the U.S. could lose this war.

But lose they did; and ever since, the U.S. military has droned on about how it won every battle (not true), but lost the war due to civilian interference. But all wars are politically driven and therefore subject to public scrutiny. Wars are not all-out street fights until no one is left standing.

For the U.S. in Vietnam, the political aims were to gain a foothold on the mainland of Asia (a long cherished goal of American power brokers), roll back the advance of Communism (the “domino theory”), and advance the dream of global hegemony by moving beyond control of our Latin American neighbors.

In fact, the Vietnam War was based on a political fiction: the Gulf of Tonkin incident; and to maintain that the military could have

triumphed had civilians not interfered is yet another fiction.

How unconstrained was the military? At its peak, the U.S. had 540,000 troops in a country slightly larger than Florida; from 1964 to August 15, 1973, the U.S. Air Force dropped 6,162,000 tons of bombs and other ordnance on Indochina, far exceeding the totals for World War II and the Korean War; from 1961 until 1971, the U.S. military dropped more than 19,000,000 gallons of toxic chemicals—defoliants and herbicides, including the notorious Agent Orange, produced by Monsanto and Dow Chemical—on approximately 4.8 million Vietnamese in South Vietnam (Operation Ranch Hand).

So how could they have been less constrained? Invade the North? The U.S. was incapable of controlling South Vietnam even with an allied government and army, let alone conquer an independent North Vietnam unified against foreign aggression. Use nuclear weapons? (Nixon seriously considered this.) Such an escalation would have been universally condemned and might have provoked a war with the Soviet Union and/or China.

In the end, in 1973, the U.S. withdrew and the defeat caused a prolonged crisis of confidence in the U.S. military and strengthened resistance to future wars for the next two decades.

While it is crucial to memorialize this resistance, the legacy of the war for U.S. veterans is also important to note. There is, first of all, the impact on a soldier’s mental health including what veteran John Grant has termed the “moral damage” of fighting an unjust war. To date, estimates of veteran suicides range from 9,000 to 150,000; the latter almost triple the number of U.S. deaths during the actual conflict.



Left: “End Racial Oppression”—New York City Peace March to End the War in Vietnam. Above: “Harlem Peace March”—one of the contingents of the citywide march and protest. (Photos by Builder Levy, April 27, 1967)

Opposition to the war created a long-lasting, committed antiwar movement in the face of attempts to marginalize it as unpatriotic, disloyal, unmanly, and naïve, if not pro-Communist. It also made the morality of the war an issue and affected “ordinary” politics by posing the incompatibility of empire abroad and democracy at home. To fight the war and thereby protect and expand the empire, the U.S. government found it necessary to lie to and manipulate its own people.

Finally, in tandem with the civil rights, Black liberation, and women’s movements, the anti-war movement fostered an intellectual revolution which undermined Euro-centrism and traditional hierarchies while honoring the previously marginalized, and to some extent succeeded in humanizing the Vietnamese enemy



“We need a counter-commemoration of the American war in Vietnam.”

not merely as victims, but as capable opponents who demonstrated bravery, resilience, and intelligence.

It is important to talk about the effect on Americans, but it is also worth remembering that the Vietnam War took place in Vietnam, not in the U.S., though it would be hard to tell that from the American postwar reaction—academic, political, or cultural. The narrative is of American rather than Vietnamese trauma.

So let’s re-focus on Vietnam. As many as 3 million Vietnamese were killed, including 2 million civilians; hundreds of thousands were seriously injured and disabled; millions were internally displaced; and cropland and forests were destroyed. Forty years later children are still being born with horrendous birth defects; forests are still in need of restoration; families are still traumatized by the death, destruction, and dislocation of war.

Nick Turse in his 2013 book, *Kill Anything That Moves*, is the latest to document the impact of the war on the civilian population, which he calls “the real American war in Vietnam.” U.S. troops were unable to distinguish civilians from fighters, so the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, eroding throughout 20th century warfare, virtually disappeared. And yet, the Vietnamese somehow endured, validating their view that their political superiority could overcome U.S. firepower and technical superiority. The core contradiction of U.S. strategy was exposed: the war demonstrated the limits of military power. To win, the U.S. had to establish a legitimate South Vietnamese government, but as the war effort floundered and the U.S. took over the reins of war, the South Vietnamese government revealed itself as illegitimate and corrupt. The American claim that it was bringing democracy was thus exposed as self-contradictory and doomed to failure.

So that is my sense of what might be worth commemorating.

The U.S. government’s purpose is different: to finally put the “Vietnam Syndrome” to rest by reinvigorating the military and endorsing U.S. global ambitions—now battered after two more frustrating land wars in Asia.

The fantasy of techno-war, first nurtured in Vietnam with 20,000 sensors along the Ho Chi Minh trail and the first primitive drones, is being revived with new generations of smart drones, a triple canopy of surveillance devices to orbit the earth, and cyber-warfare. There are U.S. military bases in well over a hundred countries throughout the world and President Obama declares the U.S. “doesn’t play for second place.”

How to convince people that we need a human not a techno fix. The Vietnam War should remind us of what Martin Luther King called “an inescapable network of mutuality” in which the fates of Vietnamese and Americans, among others, are inextricably linked. The disregard of the environment embodied in the technological onslaught on Vietnam (“ecocide”) is echoed and amplified by human-induced climate change. The choice is clear: We recognize our common humanity or continue the rituals of power that end in mutual destruction.

Unending war is not only a tremendous strain on our economy, it promotes a dangerous delusion of power, as if techno-bullying is a way forward.

We need a counter-commemoration of the American war in Vietnam in which the human cost of war is remembered and the human capacity to resist oppression is honored. Imperial America is stuck in a past that never existed; our mandate is to find a way forward, beginning with an honest accounting of the U.S.’s wrongful war in Vietnam.

Our commemoration needs to be a warning: No More Vietnams; No More Imperial War!

*Howard Machtinger has been involved in social justice politics since the 1960s when he was a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). For the last 40 years, he has been particularly engaged with the anti-racist and anti-war movements. In the last decade he has spent considerable time working in and writing about Vietnam.*

*Action: Endorse a more accurate commemoration at [ncveteransforpeace.org/memorial](http://ncveteransforpeace.org/memorial).*

My Lai Massacre site, March 22, 1994. (Photograph by Mike Hastie)



## The Ditch at My Lai Has Become a Metaphor

In 1994, I and three other Vietnam veterans made a decision to return to Vietnam. We were in country for 21 days, traveling from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi.

Midway through our trip, we decided to make the difficult journey into My Lai.

On March 16, 1968, U.S. soldiers murdered 504 innocent Vietnamese civilians.

Or, I should say, the United States Government murdered 504 innocent Vietnamese civilians. Rather than go into a long emotionally drenching experience that affected all of us, let’s just say, the one word that keeps coming up for me, is the word, Shame.

While we were there, a bus arrived at the site, carrying over 40 Vietnamese people.

I had great difficulty looking at their faces.

That’s because my shame turned me into self-hatred. That’s because My Lai became a metaphor for the entire Vietnam War.

Everything involving that war was a lie.

The entire Vietnam War was a War Crime.

Going to My Lai was like going to Wounded Knee.

It was going into a mindset of genocide.

One Indian village after another.

One Vietnamese village after another.

One Middle Eastern village after another.

It is happening...

The United States Government has moved My Lai and Wounded Knee to the Middle East.

The U.S. Government has become a buzzard flying over the Middle East.

The American Drone has become the metaphor for that buzzard.

Like chewing on a chicken bone, that is the Pentagon at work.

My photograph taken at My Lai, is a metaphor for that military madness.

It is a photograph of the ditch where Lt. Calley, the scapegoat of the massacre, stood with some of his men, and murdered over 150 Vietnamese civilians at point-blank range.

There were children of all ages in that ditch.

And, when it was over, the ditch became another Wounded Knee.

It has never stopped.

And now,

Syria is about to become another in a long list of ditches that America has left yet another calling card.

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), should stand for: “Western Manifest Destiny.” Killing Indians all over again.

The only good Indian is a dead Indian.

If it’s a dead Vietnamese, it’s a dead Viet Cong.

Kill A Gook For Calley.

America, you have become a monster.

“The Madness of Militarism,” as

Martin Luther King Jr. once said.

The Pentagon has become a vulture.

With surveillance eyes to take over the world.

The ditch,

the My Lai ditch,

A metaphor for the United States Empire.

—Mike Hastie

Army Medic Vietnam

September 8, 2013

**DUST TO DUST**

Stolen life, shattered trust.  
Politics deliberated through lethal means-----  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

“Work, cash, global travel is what you’ll find  
If you sign your name onto this document’s line”-----  
Stolen life, shattered trust.

Trained to raise the rifle, kill on command  
Wherever the hated adversary stands-----  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Sent abroad, with soldiers by the score  
House-to-house firefights, pawns for this government’s war-----  
Stolen life, shattered trust.

Walking point, nerves tremble, about to blast  
Confront & destroy the hated Other at last-----  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

As loved ones stand close & the preacher recites  
Passage for passage, your exit rites:  
“Stolen life, shattered trust.  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

*Dee Allen 6.4.09 [ For Roman. ]*

It isn't enough to talk about peace.  
One must believe in it.  
And it isn't enough to believe in it.  
One must work at it.

—Eleanor Roosevelt



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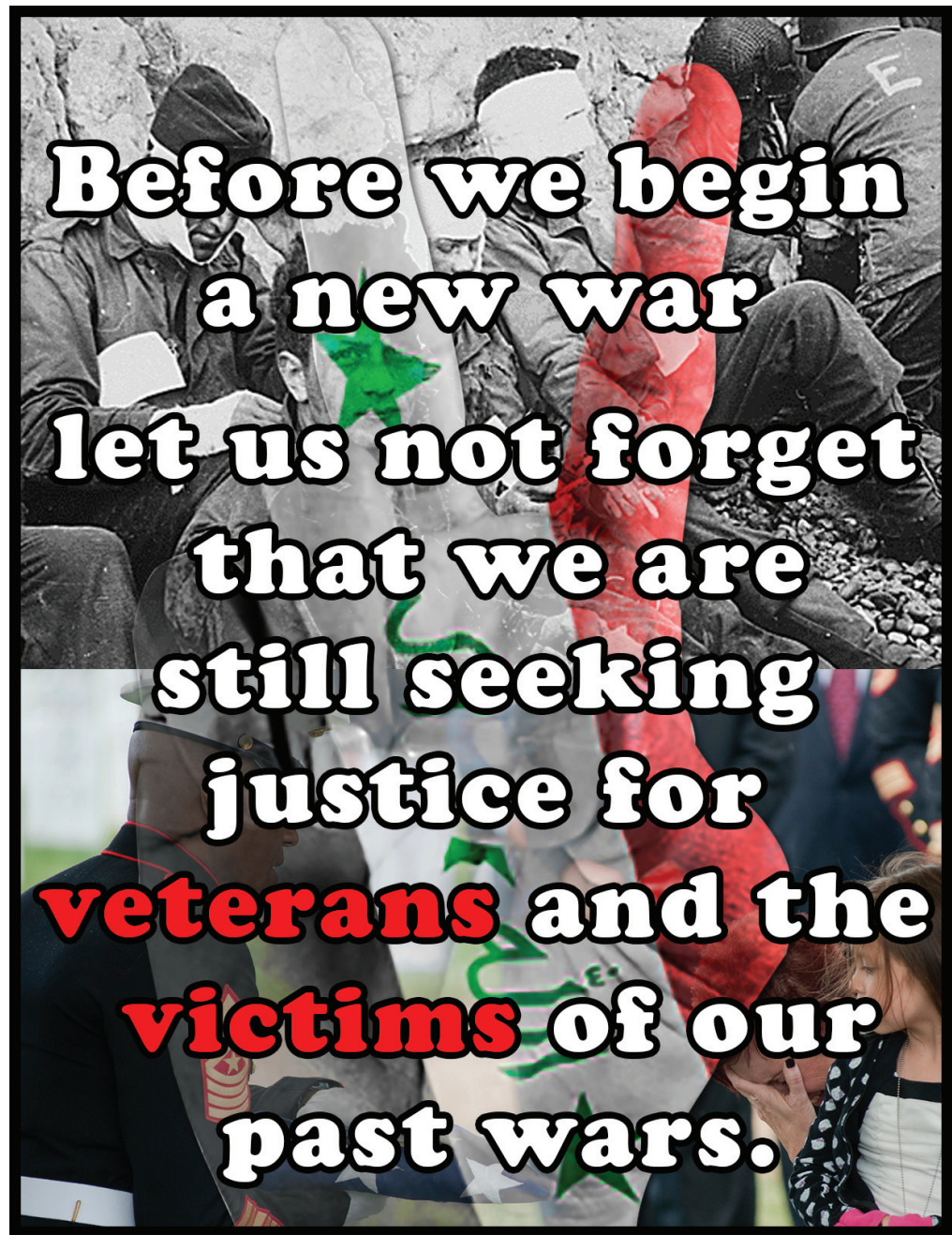
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