

# Peace in Our Times



A Veterans For Peace publication exposing the root causes and enormous costs of war

## Trump Bringing Us to Brink of War with North Korea



USS Ronald Reagan in formation with ships from Navy Strike Group Five and South Korea's Navy during Invincible Spirit drills off the Korean Peninsula. Photo: U.S. Navy

By Christine Ahn

Tensions have been running high between the United States and North Korea since Donald Trump entered the White House. But the two countries haven't been this close to war since 1994, when the administration of Bill Clinton weighed a first strike on North Korea.

The spark that ignited the already incendiary relations between Washington and Pyongyang was President Donald Trump's U.N. speech on September 19, when he called the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un "Rocket Man" and threatened to "totally destroy North Korea," a sovereign nation of more than 25 million people. In a revival of Harry S. Truman's McCarthyism and George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil," Trump cast North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela as rogue regimes that Washington is prepared to confront. He noted that Congress just handed him \$700 billion, making the U.S. military "the strongest it has ever been."

Over the weekend, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that the United States has a few open channels of communication with North Korea, making a nod toward potential diplomacy. But Trump quickly undermined his own Secretary of State when he tweeted that Tillerson was "wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man." The *USS George*

*Washington*, a nuclear aircraft carrier, barreled toward North Korea, and strategic assets have been moved from U.S. bases in Guam and Okinawa to South Korea.

As the situation spirals rapidly out of control, three important points should be kept in mind. First, Trump, by engaging

in dangerous brinksmanship, is willing to endanger millions of innocent lives in North Korea, South Korea, and Japan—and possibly in Guam, Hawaii, and the continental United States. Second, diplomacy with North Korea has succeeded in the past, but it requires actually engaging with North Korea, not further isolating it

by imposing more sanctions and forcing other nations to cut ties. Third, Americans must realize that we are mired in this conflict because of the large-scale U.S. destruction of North Korea during the 1950–53 Korean War.

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## America's Vietnam Amnesia

By Thomas A. Bass

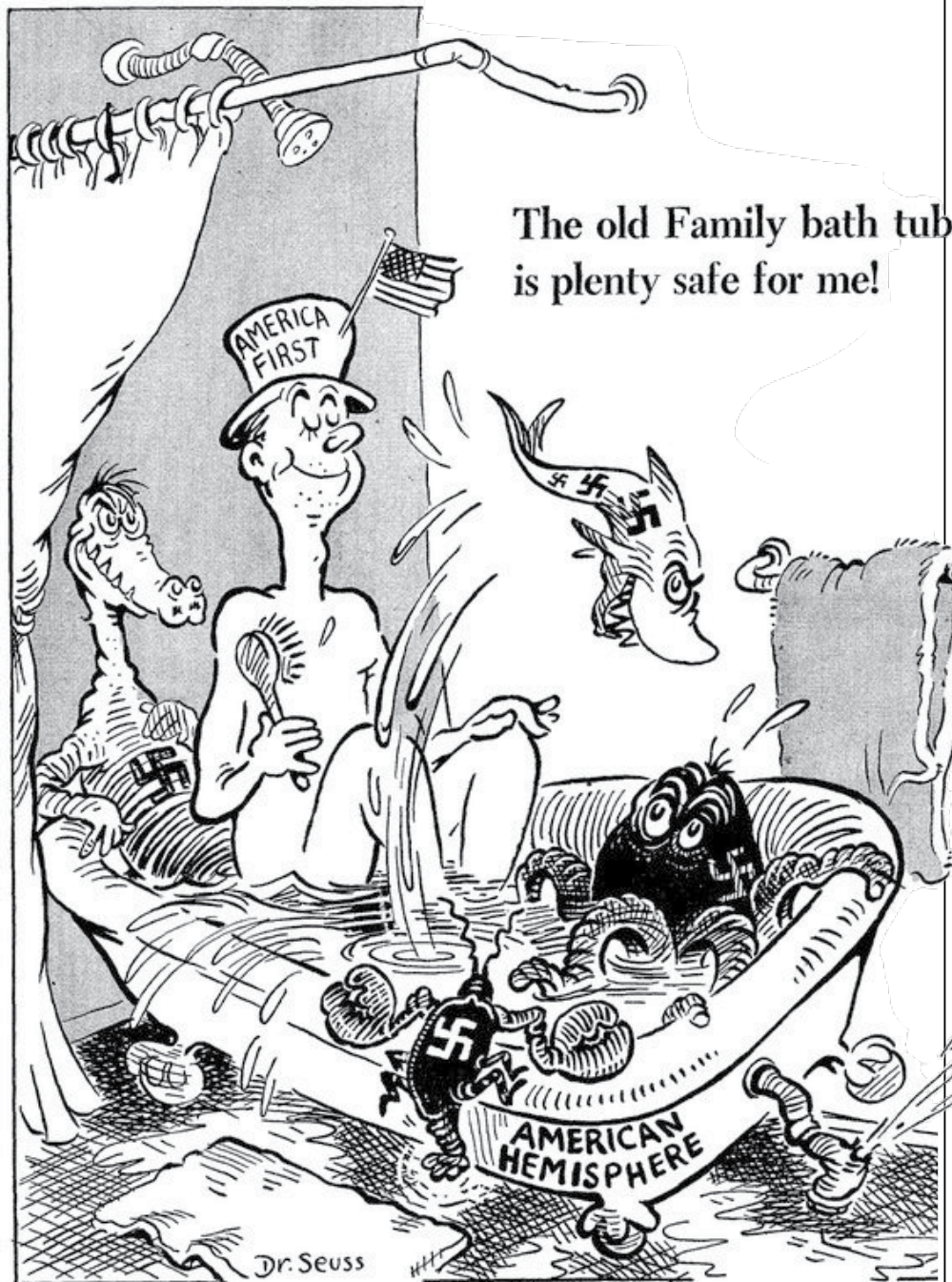
Everything wrong with the new 10-part PBS documentary on the Vietnam War is apparent in the first five minutes. A voice from nowhere intones about a war "begun in good faith" that somehow ran off the rails and killed millions of people. We see a firefight and a dead soldier in a body bag being winched into a helicopter, as the rotor goes thump, thump, thump, like a scene from *Apocalypse Now*. Then we cut to a funeral on Main Street and a coffin covered in Stars and Stripes, which multiply, as the camera zooms out, into dozens and then hundreds of flags, waving like a hex against warmongers who might be inclined to think that this film is insufficiently patriotic.

Everything right with the documentary is apparent in the *continued on page 3 ...*



Vietnam 1967: U.S. Marines evacuate a wounded comrade during Operation Pecos, a search-and-destroy mission.

## Letters



### American Fascism

“American Fascism, 1944 and Today” by Henry Scott Wallace (*Peace in Our Times*, Summer 2017), about his Progressive grandfather, Vice President Henry Wallace, reminds me that I’ve been saying for a very long time that I fought fascism in Europe during WWII, and I’m still fighting it here at home. When I was a boy, in the thirties, fascism here was more blatant; it’s since become sophisticated, especially over the European versions. I claim that the fascist term is applicable to the present “President” as well as to our whole so-called democratic system.

Franklin Roosevelt, Henry Wallace’s boss, sent a message to Congress in 1938, titled “On Curbing Monopolies.” The second sentence reads, and I quote, “The first

truth is that the liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is Fascism—ownership of Government by an individual, by a group, or by any other controlling power.” This startling and predictive message goes on, with a rundown of the examples we understand today as the “1 percent” vs. the rest of us; Roosevelt’s percentages are almost the same as those we’re familiar with. This document is easily found on your computers; read the whole thing, and get a rare history lesson.

Jay Wenk  
WWII combat infantry survivor  
Woodstock, N.Y.

## A Note from the Editors

### The Weight of Memory

So this is how it ends. Where the beginning meets the end. The center of Maya Lin’s remarkable monument to the war—The Wall—begins with the first American death in Vietnam, marches down 10 feet and then, listing the daily death toll, panel after panel, descends eastward into the ground, only continue the litany on the western end, rising back up, panel after panel, to 10 feet and then dropping down to meet the beginning, where it records the name of the last American to die in that war. Death marches on, looping back onto itself. And this is to capture only the 58,300 American names of those killed; if The Wall were to include the names of the

Vietnamese killed, it would stretch out for another nine miles. Visitors can reach out and touch a name, but all they take away is their own reflections. There but by the grace of some unknown force go I, thinks the veteran; other visitors walking down that path are also ambushed, met by more than they ever could have imagined. The 10th episode of Ken Burns’ and Lynn Novick’s *The Vietnam War* begins with Tim O’Brien reading from his book, *The Things They Carried*, and ends with O’Brien reading from the same passage. His exquisite melding of the literal and the figurative captures the crushing banality of this war and its deadly universality. The soldiers on both sides, on all sides throughout history, have carried, will carry, the same things into war—their past lives and their last breaths, along with the trivial baggage of their daily life. The only thing they are missing is their futures.

Meanwhile, the living stumble on—POWs return home, politicians squabble over what they think is important, working stiff get up and go to work, children move on to learn, and then unlearn, the basic truth of life on this planet—it all must come to an end. Should we, those who have survived this war, both the veteran and his or her loved ones (there are eight women’s names on The Wall), “Let It Be,” as the Beatles implore us to do? “This is Saigon signing off” is the last directive issued from CIA headquarters in Vietnam. Henry Kissinger tells us to “move on,” as if we were loiterers gathering around, clogging up the flow of his

version of history.

Or should we bear this horrible weight to our own graves? To what end? Who, after all, gets to hold the mirror of these years up to our faces? Who writes *The Iliad* again? How, possibly, could anyone get it all right? Despite the attempt to glorify this war, it ends in disgrace for the United States and utter disaster for the Vietnamese. Their land and their lives have been wasted on a level that boggles the mind. And as the crushing truth of this moment in history disappears into the mists around Dak To, we hear of a “Bridge Over Troubled Waters” and the futile attempts of Burns and Novick and company to build it for us. It is not to be. But that does not mean we should give up. Their attempt has failed to complete its mission of healing, but it has succeeded on many other levels. It has opened many doors that we should not back away from if we want to insure that all those young men and women whose names are on The Wall have not died in vain. We owe that to our children and grandchildren.

To that end, Veterans For Peace has mounted a campaign to bring more voices to the table. Our Full Disclosure project includes an opportunity for anyone who was directly impacted by this war to write a letter to The Wall. We promise to deliver that letter to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Memorial Day. Over the past three years we have delivered 371 letters. At 10:30 am on each Memorial Day, we lay our letters, your letters, at the foot of The Wall in envelopes inscribed with “Please Read Me” across the top. And people read the letters before the National Parks Service collects them and archives them for future generations to read. And they weep. And hug. And carry out of that memorial a richer, deeper sense of all that has been lost.

In some form or fashion each letter seems to say to those who died so young, “I am sorry. I am sorry that I did not do more to save your lives.” And we, the survivors, emerge from the experience of delivering these letters, from having written some of them, with a redoubled commitment to abolish war from this earth. You can join us by sending your letter to [rawlings@maine.edu](mailto:rawlings@maine.edu) before May 15, 2018.

—Doug Rawlings



### Peace in Our Times

*Peace in Our Times* is published quarterly by Veterans For Peace. Bundles of 80 are \$35, and individual subscriptions are \$15/year. To donate, subscribe, or order bundles, visit [peaceinourtimes.org](http://peaceinourtimes.org) or send a check to Veterans For Peace, 1404 North Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63102. Letters, poems, articles, and images may be submitted to [takauff@gmail.com](mailto:takauff@gmail.com).

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# Vietnam Amnesia

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next few minutes, as the film rolls back (literally running several scenes backward) into a trove of archival footage and music from the times and introduces the voices—many of them Vietnamese—that will narrate this history. The film relies heavily on writers and poets, including Americans Tim O'Brien and Karl Marlantes and Vietnamese Le Minh Khue, and Bao Ninh, whose *Sorrow of War* ranks as one of the great novels about Vietnam or any war.

The evenhandedness, the flag-draped history, bittersweet narrative, redemptive homecomings, and the urge toward “healing” rather than truth are cinematic topoi that we have come to expect from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick through their films about the Civil War, Prohibition, baseball, jazz, and other themes in U.S. history. Burns has been mining this territory for 40 years, ever since he made his first film about the Brooklyn Bridge in 1981, and Novick has been at his side since 1990, when he hired her as an archivist to secure photo permissions for *The Civil War* and she proved the indispensable collaborator.

In their interviews, Burns does most of the talking, while the Yale-educated, former Smithsonian researcher hangs back. Novick receives joint billing in the credits to their films, but most people refer to them as Ken Burns productions. (After all, he is the one with an “effect” named after him: a film-editing technique, now standardized as a “Ken Burns” button, which enables one to pan over still photographs.) One wonders what tensions exist between Novick and Burns: the patient archivist and the sentimental dramatist.

The dichotomy between history and drama shapes all 10 parts of the PBS series, which begins with the French colonization of Vietnam in 1858 and ends with the fall of Saigon in 1975. As the film cuts from patient Novickian exposition to Burnsian close-ups, it sometimes feels as if it were edited by two people making two different movies. We can be watching archival footage from the 1940s of Ho Chi Minh welcoming the U.S. intelligence of-



*Ngo Dinh Diem inspects South Vietnamese troops.*

ficers who came to resupply him in his mountain redoubt, when suddenly the film shifts from black and white to color and we are watching a former American soldier talk about his Viet Cong-induced fear of the dark, which makes him sleep with a night light, like his kids. Even be-

harder than fighting the Viet Cong.

By Episode Two, “Riding the Tiger” (1961–1963), we are heading deep into Burns territory. The war has been framed as a civil war, with the United States defending a freely elected democratic government in the south against Commu-

is not mentioned in the film, nor is Lansdale identified in a photo of him seated next to Diem.) A cable had been drafted instructing the U.S. ambassador to get rid of Diem. (A similar cable, sent a decade later, would greenlight Diem’s assassination.) The evening before the cable went out, Diem launched a fierce attack on the Binh Xuyen crime syndicate, led by river pirate Bay Vien, who had 2,500 troops under his command. When the battle was over, a square mile of Saigon had been leveled and 20,000 people left homeless.

The French financed their colonial empire in Asia through the opium trade (another fact left out of the film). They skimmed the profits from Bay Vien’s river pirates, who were also licensed to run the national police and Saigon’s brothels and gambling dens. Diem’s attack on the Binh Xuyen was essentially an attack on the French. It was an announcement by the CIA that the French were finished in Southeast Asia. The United States had financed their colonial war, paying up to 80 percent of the cost, but after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, it was time for the losers to get out of town.

Once the river pirates were defeated and other opposition groups such as the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai neutralized with CIA bribes, Diem and Lansdale began making a “free” Vietnam. By Oct. 23, 1955, Diem was claiming his electoral victory. Three days later he announced the creation of the Republic of Vietnam, better known as South Vietnam. He cancelled the elections intended to unify northern and southern Vietnam—elections that President Eisenhower and everyone else knew would have been won by Ho Chi Minh—and began building the autocratic police state that survived for 20 years, before collapsing into the dust of the last helicopter lifting off from the U.S. Embassy.

Lansdale was a former advertising *continued on next page ...*

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*Southern Vietnam was never an independent country. Defeated French forces regrouped in southern Vietnam after 1954, which is when U.S. Air Force colonel and CIA agent Edward Lansdale began working to elevate this former colony to nationhood.*

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fore we get to Ho Chi Minh and his defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, we are watching a U.S. Marine describe his homecoming to a divided America in 1972, a homecoming that he says was

nists invading from the north. American boys are fighting a godless enemy that Burns shows as a red tide creeping across maps of Southeast Asia and the rest of the world.

The historical footage in Episode One, “Déjà Vu” (1858–1961), which disputes this view of the war, is either ignored or misunderstood. Southern Vietnam was never an independent country. From 1862 to 1949, it was the French colony of Cochinchina, one of the five territorial divisions in French Indochina (the others being Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia and Laos). Defeated French forces regrouped in southern Vietnam after 1954, which is when U.S. Air Force colonel and CIA agent Edward Lansdale began working to elevate this former colony to nationhood. The United States installed Ngo Dinh Diem as South Vietnam’s autocratic ruler, aided him in wiping out his enemies, and engineered an election that Diem stole, with 98.2 percent of the popular vote.

The key moment in Lansdale’s creation was the monthlong Battle of the Sects, which began in April 1955. (The battle



*Supplies are parachuted in for the beleaguered French garrison in Dien Bien Phu; the Vietnamese occupied the high ground.*

# Vietnam Amnesia

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man. He had worked on the Levi Strauss account when it started selling blue jeans nationally. He knew how to sell blue jeans. He knew how to sell a war. Anyone knowledgeable about the history of Vietnam and its prolonged struggle against French colonialism could see what was happening. “The problem was trying to cover something every day as news when in fact the real key was that it was all derivative of the French Indo-China war, which is history,” said former *New York Times* reporter David Halberstam. “So you really should have had a third paragraph in each story which should have said, ‘All of this is shit and none of this means anything because we are in the same footsteps as the French and we are prisoners of their experience.’”

Even the language of the Second Indochina War was borrowed from the French, who spoke of “light at the end of the tunnel” and the jaunissement (yellowing) of their army, which the United States later called Vietnamization. France dropped gelatinised petroleum, napalm, on Vietnam in *la sale guerre*, the “dirty war,” which the United States made even dirtier with Agent Orange and other chemical weapons.

If these facts were known to government officials and journalists, they were known to everyone after Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers in 1971. Forty volumes of top secret documents exposed the lies of every U.S. administration from Truman and Eisenhower on to Kennedy and Johnson. The Pentagon Papers describe how the American public was deceived into supporting France’s effort to recolonize Vietnam. They recount Lansdale’s covert operations and U.S. culpability for scuttling the elections meant to reunify Vietnam. They describe a war for independence that the United States never stood a chance of winning, even with half a million troops on the ground. The enterprise was actually directed at containing China and playing a global game of chicken against Russia. “We must note that South Vietnam (unlike any of the other countries in South-

east Asia) was essentially the creation of the United States,” wrote Leslie Gelb, who directed the project, in his Pentagon Papers summary. “Vietnam was a piece on a chessboard, not a country,” Gelb tells Burns and Novick.

More than 80 people were interviewed by the filmmakers over the 10 years they gathered material for *The Vietnam War*, but one glaring exception is Daniel Ellsberg. Ellsberg, a former Marine Corps platoon leader, was a gung-ho warrior when he worked for Lansdale in Vietnam from 1965 to 1967. But as the war dragged on, and Ellsberg feared that Nixon would try to end the stalemate with nuclear weapons (the French had already asked Eisenhower to drop the bomb on Vietnam), he flipped to the other side.

Ellsberg today is a fierce critic of U.S. nuclear policy and military adventures from Vietnam to Iraq. His absence from the film, except in archival footage, confirms its conservative credentials. Funded by Bank of America, David Koch, and other corporate sponsors, the documentary relies extensively on former generals, CIA agents, and government officials, who are not identified by rank or title, but merely by their names and anodyne descriptions such as “adviser” or “special forces.” A partial list includes:

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*The war divided families ... but anticolonialist fighters arrayed against colonialist sympathizers do not constitute a civil war.*

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- Lewis Sorley, a third-generation West Point graduate who believes the United States won the war in 1971 and then threw away its victory by “betraying” its allies in the south (even though they had been supplied with \$6 billion of U.S. weapons before they collapsed to the advancing North Vietnamese in 1975).

- Rufus Phillips, one of Lansdale’s “black artists” who worked for many years in psychological operations and counterinsurgency.

- Donald Gregg, organizer of the Iran-contra arms-for-hostages scandal and CIA adviser to the Phoenix program and



Daniel Ellsberg (right) in Vietnam.

other assassination teams.

- John Negroponce, former director of national intelligence and ambassador to international hotspots targeted for covert operations.

- Sam Wilson, the U.S. Army general and Lansdale protégé who coined the term “counterinsurgency.”

- Stuart Herrington, a U.S. Army counterintelligence officer known for his “extensive interrogation experience,” stretching from Vietnam to Abu Ghraib.

- Robert Rheault, who was the model for Colonel Kurtz, the renegade warrior

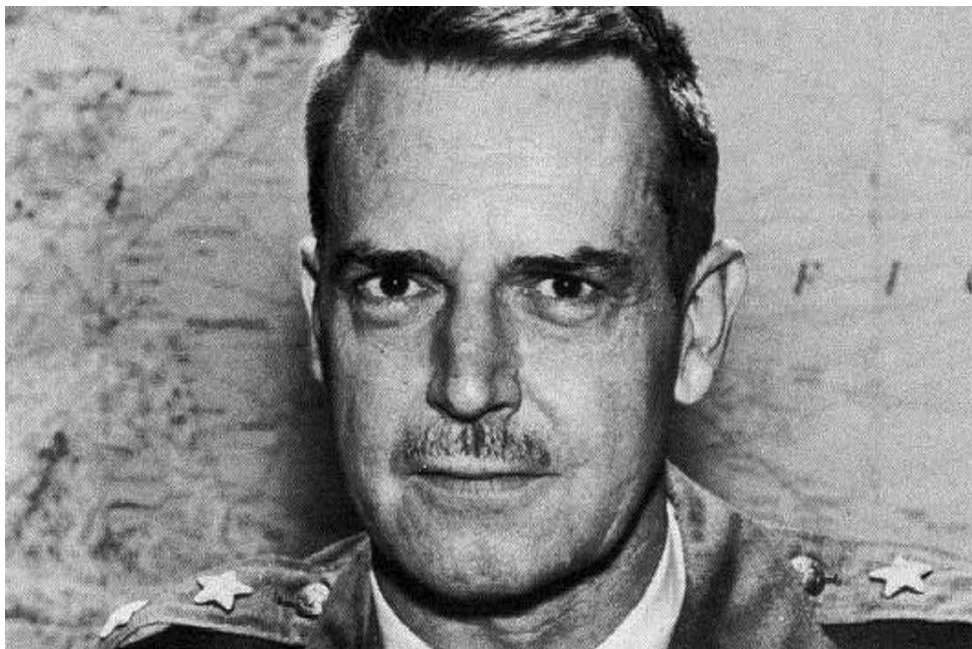
in the 1960s, Mai Elliott has lived far longer in the United States than in Vietnam.

Elliott, herself a former RAND employee, is the daughter of a former high government official in the French colonial administration. After the French defeat in the First Indochina War, her family moved from Hanoi to Saigon, except for Elliott’s sister, who joined the Viet Minh in the north. This allows Elliott to insist—as she does repeatedly in her public appearances—that Vietnam’s was a “civil war.” The war divided families like hers, but anticolonialist fighters arrayed against colonialist sympathizers do not constitute a civil war. No one refers to the First Indochina War as a civil war. It was an anticolonial struggle that shaded into a repeat performance, except that by this time Lansdale and Diem had created the facsimile of a nation state. Americans loath to help France re-establish its colonial empire in Asia could feel good about defending the white hats in a civil war. Elliott, an eloquent and earnest victim of this war, embodies the distressed damsel whom U.S. soldiers were trying to save from Communist aggression.

Once Lansdale is erased from the history of the Vietnam War, we settle into watching 18 hours of carnage, interspersed with talking-head testimonials that reappear, first as sound bites, then as longer snippets and finally as full-blown interviews. These are surrounded by historical footage that rolls from the First Indochina War into the Second and then focuses on battles at Ap Bac and Khe Sanh, the Tet Offensive, bombing campaigns over North Vietnam, the release of U.S. POWs, and the last helicopter lifting off from the roof of the U.S. Embassy (which was actually the roof of a CIA safe house at 22 Ly Tu Trong Street). By the end of the film—which is absorbing and contentious, like the war itself—more than 58,000 U.S. troops, a quarter of a million South Vietnamese troops, a million Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops, and 2 million civilians (mainly in the south), not to mention tens of thousands more in Laos and Cambodia, will have died.

The Vietnam footage is set in the context of events back in the United States during the six presidencies that sustained this chaos (beginning with Harry Truman at the end of World War II). The camera rolls through the assassinations of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Mar-

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Edward Lansdale

# Vietnam Amnesia

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tin Luther King, the police riots at the Chicago Democratic convention in 1968, and various antiwar protests, including the one in which four students were shot dead at Kent State University. The film includes taped conversations of Nixon and Kissinger hatching their schemes. (“Blow the safe and get it,” Nixon says of incriminating evidence at the Brookings Institute.) It shows Walter Cronkite losing faith in the Vietnam venture and the Watergate burglary and Nixon’s resignation and the struggle over building Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial (the “gash of shame” that has turned into a poignant *lieu de mémoire*).

For many, the film will remind us of

for useless mountaintops and rice paddies that were seized while the enemy carried off their dead, regrouped, and attacked again somewhere else.

With journalists reporting defeat and the Pentagon trumpeting victory, the “credibility gap,” which by now had grown into a chasm, began to appear, along with attacks on the press for being disloyal and for somehow “losing” the war. Complaints about “fake news” and journalists as “enemies of the people” are more social sequelae that can be traced back to the Vietnam War. When Morley Safer documented Marines torching thatched-roofed houses in the village of Cam Ne in 1965, Safer’s name was blackened by accusations that he had supplied the Marines with their Zippo lighters. Disinformation, psychological war, covert operations, news leaks, spin, and offi-

ries have been made about the Vietnam War, by Canadians, French, and other Europeans. American journalists Stanley Karnow and Drew Pearson have grappled with presenting the war in TV documentaries. But the tenacity with which the United States has forgotten the lessons of Vietnam, burying them under misplaced patriotism and willful disregard for history, bump it out of contention for making a great movie about this war.

Why, for example, are the film’s interviews shot exclusively as close-ups? If the camera had pulled back, we would have seen that former Senator Max Cleland has no legs—he lost them to “friendly fire” at Khe Sanh. And what if Bao Ninh and Tim O’Brien had been allowed to meet each other? Their reminiscing would have brought the meaningless mayhem of the war into the present. And instead of its

running naked down the road with napalm burning her flesh; Eddie Adams’s photo of Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a VC sapper in the head; and Hugh Van Es’s photo of refugees climbing a rickety ladder into the last CIA helicopter flying out of Saigon.

Burns’s binocular vision in some ways works better in the book than the movie. The book has room to go into detail. It provides more history while at the same time presenting poignant reflections by Bao Ninh, female war correspondent Jurate Kazickas, and others. Edward Lansdale and the Battle of the Sects appear in the book, but not the film, along with details about the 1955 State Department cable that directed that Ngo Dinh Diem be overthrown—before the United States reversed course and bought into the creation of Diem’s South Vietnam. Also here in chilling detail are Nixon and Kissinger’s conversations about prolonging the war in order to win elections and save face.

The book has the added benefit of including five essays commissioned by leading scholars and writers. Among these is a piece by Fredrik Logevall speculating on what might have happened if Kennedy had not been assassinated; a piece by Todd Gitlin on the antiwar movement; and a reflection by Viet Thanh Nguyen on life as a refugee, who, in his case, went from working in his parents’ grocery store in San Jose to winning the 2016 Pulitzer Prize.

In 1967, eight years before the war’s end, Lyndon Johnson is announcing “dramatic progress,” with “the grip of the VC on the people being broken.” We see mounds of dead Viet Cong heaved into mass graves. General Westmoreland assures the President that the war is reaching “the crossover point,” when more enemy soldiers are being killed than recruited. Jimmy Hendrix is singing “Are You Experienced,” and a vet is describing how “racism really won” in “intimate fighting” that taught him how to “waste gooks” and “kill dinks.”

By 1969, Operation Speedy Express in the Mekong Delta is reporting kill ratios of 45:1, with 10,889 Viet Cong fighters killed, but only 748 weapons recovered. Kevin Buckley and Alexander Shimkin of *Newsweek* estimate that half the people killed are civilians. By the time the kill ratios have climbed to 134:1, the U.S. military is massacring civilians at My Lai and elsewhere. Edward Lansdale, by then a general, said about this final stage of the war he had set in motion (quoting from Robert Taber’s *War of the Flea*): “There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbors resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert. Where these means cannot, for whatever reason, be used, the war is lost.”

*Thomas Bass is the author of Censorship in Vietnam: Brave New World, The Spy Who Loved Us, The Predictors, Vietnam: The War Comes Home, Re-inventing the Future, Camping with the Prince and Other Tales of Science in Africa, and The Eudaemonic Pie.*



Last helicopter out of Saigon, April 29, 1975. Photograph: Hubert (Hugh) Van Es Bettman

what we already know. For others, it will be an introduction to 20 years of American arrogance and overreach. People might be surprised to learn of Nixon’s treason in sabotaging Lyndon Johnson’s peace negotiations in 1968, in order to boost his own election chances. This is not the only time in this documentary that back-channel international treachery resonates with current events. Viewers might also be surprised to learn that the battle of Ap Bac in 1963, a major defeat for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and its U.S. advisers, was declared a victory, because the enemy, after killing eighty ARVN soldiers and three U.S. advisers, melted back into the countryside. Only in the thick-headed logic of the U.S. military could securing a bombed-out rice paddy be called a victory, but time and again, year after year, the United States would “win” every battle it fought

cial lies are yet more living legacies from Vietnam.

The film’s best narrative gambit is its reliance on writers and poets, the two key figures being Bao Ninh (whose real name is Hoang Au Phuong), the former infantryman who returned home after six years of fighting his way down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to write *The Sorrow of War*, and former Marine Tim O’Brien, who came back from his war to write *The Things They Carried* and *Going After Cacciato*. The film ends with O’Brien reading about soldiers carrying memories from Vietnam, and then the credits roll, giving us Mai Elliott’s full name and other people’s identities.

This is when I began playing the footage again, rolling through Episode One, surprised not by how much had been remembered, but by how much had been left out or forgotten. Many good documenta-

search for “closure” and healing reconciliation, what if the film had reminded us that U.S. special forces are currently operating in 137 of the planet’s 194 countries, or 70 percent of the world?

Like most Burns and Novick productions, this one comes with a companion volume, *The Vietnam War: An Intimate History*, which is being released at the same time as the PBS series. Written by Burns and his longtime amanuensis, Geoffrey C. Ward, the book—an oversized volume weighing nearly two kilograms—wears the same bifocals as the film. It shifts from historical exegesis to autobiographical reflection, and features many of the photographs that made Vietnam the apex of war photography. The famous shots include Malcolm Brown’s burning monk; Larry Burrows’s photo of a wounded Marine reaching out to his dying captain; Nick Ut’s photo of Kim Phuc

# America's War: 'Begun in Good Faith'?

By George Burchett

I watched all 10 episodes of the much talked about *The Vietnam War* series (PBS, September 2017) at home in Ha Noi.

The narrative of the series, directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, opens with this declaration: "America's involvement in Viet Nam began in secrecy. It ended 30 years later, in failure, witnessed by the entire world. It was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War miscalculations."

And, in the September–October 2017 issue of *The National Interest*, Robert D. Kaplan, a member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, writes: "The people I know who supported the Iraq War genuinely intended the human-rights situation in Iraq to be improved by the removal of Saddam Hussein, not made worse through war and chaos. ..."

Let's now slightly adjust Burns' and Novick's opening statement and apply it to the yet-to-be-produced *The Iraq War* series. It would read as follows: "America's involvement in Iraq began in secrecy. It ended 30 years later, in failure, witnessed by the entire world. It was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and post-Cold War miscalculations."

Sounds just right, doesn't it? But, do you buy it? I don't. Because most sane people know that the invasion of Iraq was based on lies and manipulations and is generally considered an unmitigated disaster. Chuck Hagel, Obama's secretary of Defense from 2013 to 2015, called it "the most dangerous foreign-policy blunder in this country since Viet Nam."

So why should we accept Burns' and Novick's premise that the Viet Nam War was the result of "miscalculations" and "misunderstandings"? And then watch for 18 hours how these "blunders" made "in good faith by decent people" ended up costing the lives of millions of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao men, women, and children, devastated their countries,

Which takes us to Ba Dinh Square in Ha Noi, where on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. ..."

"Nevertheless, for more than 80 years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice. In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

"They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Centre and the South of Viet Nam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united. ..."

"In the autumn of 1940, when the Jap-



Still from Wilfred Burchett's film *Vietnam North* (1966) used in *The Vietnam War*.

anese Fascists violated Indochina's territory to establish new bases in their fight against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them. ...

"The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the

Nine years later, in May 1954, French colonial rule over Indochina came to an end at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. An International Conference was convened in Geneva to end the war in Korea and restore peace in Indochina. After scoring a historical victory against French colonialism, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was forced to accept temporary partition along the 17th Parallel. Elections were to be held in 1956 to re-unite the country through the ballot box. The United States refused to accept the Geneva Agreements and replaced the French puppet, Emperor Bao Dai, with their own man, Ngo Dinh Diem. The elections never took place, because, as Eisenhower acknowledged, "Ho Chi Minh would have won 80 percent of the vote." Instead, Viet Nam remained divided and at war for another two decades.

Burns and Novick frame the war as a civil war between the "communist" North and the "nationalist" South. That was the

argument used by successive U.S. administrations and their allies to justify their "involvement" in Viet Nam.

To most patriotic Vietnamese, it was a war fought over many decades for the independence and unity of their country. As Ho Chi Minh said, "Nothing is more precious than independence and liberty."

The two narratives are irreconcilable. You either accept one or the other.

Allow me to quote this passage from Wilfred Burchett's 1968 book *Vietnam Will Win!*: "There had been 60,000 people in the six villages of Cu Chi when the 2nd Brigade of the U.S. 25th Infantry Division set up its headquarters there on January 19, 1966, after a 10-day 'search and destroy' offensive in the district. In the month that followed the Americans claimed they fired 180,000 shells into Cu Chi District, continuing at about the same tempo throughout that year. There were daily plane attacks against any sign of life: a bush moving with the wind, a chicken running out of a hedge or a buffalo wallowing in a pond. While I was there high-velocity guns were fired at all hours of the night, sending streams of shells pouring into the fields in every direction from the brigade headquarters.

"I spoke with one gaunt, naked cultivator. He was not embarrassed and he did

not need to be. The grey mud caked over his body removed any impression of nudity. He was a statue in living clay, part of the soil come to life in human form.

"My people have always been here," he said. "My father, my father's father and his father as long as we can count back. Their bones lie here, even if the Yankee devils have torn up the tombstones with their bombs and shells and tanks. I will live and fight here and if I die from Yankee shells or bombs, at least my bones will remain on the same bit of soil as those of my ancestors. ..."

"We from Cu Chi," he concluded, "will eat grass and roots, the earth itself if need be, but we will never leave this soil of our ancestors. We will fight, and our sons and grandsons will fight until the invader takes himself off."

"These are the people America threatened to bomb 'back into the Stone Age.' They proved again and again, to successive invaders, that they can never be defeated."

Eighteen hours of gore and glory, shock and awe, emotional, visual and sonic overload haven't changed my mind about the war. The American war of aggression against the people of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos—whatever the motives and reasons for it—was a monstrous crime against humanity. All three countries are still paying the terrible price of American "intervention."

In a letter to their main corporate sponsor, Bank of America, Burns and Novick write:

"Thanks to Bank of America's generous support for the film and the outreach materials that will accompany it, we believe that the series will inspire our country to begin to talk and think about the Viet Nam War and the questions it raises, in an entirely new way."

So, after watching carefully all 10 episodes of *The Vietnam War*, I am honestly trying to figure out what that "entirely new way" may be. Then again, I am not American.

What it makes me think about is the litany of lies and manipulations that led to the war, and its endless escalation. And how the same logic leads to the next war and the next, and the one after ... which may well be the final one, the war to end all wars and all life on our planet.

The series concludes with John Lennon's "Let It Be." I prefer his "Imagine." "Imagine all the people living life in peace ..." We should all collectively say: Yes We Can! And act upon it. Urgently. And sing with John Lennon: All we are saying is give peace a chance.

*George Burchett is an artist who lives in Ha Noi.*



Ho Chi Minh reads the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence at Ba Dinh Square on Sept. 2, 1945.

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*'We from Cu Chi,' he concluded, 'will eat grass and roots, the earth itself if need be, but we will never leave this soil of our ancestors. We will fight ... until the invader takes himself off.'*

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poisoned their land, left scars that will perhaps never heal. And in the process, killed 58,220 Americans.

In Viet Nam, the war is called the American War. It was imposed on the people of Viet Nam by the United States to project America's post-World War II imperial power. No lofty ideals were involved. It ended on April 29, 1975, when the last U.S. helicopter took off from the roof of the U.S. Embassy in Ha Noi.

According to the film's narration, the war began "in secrecy" 30 years earlier.

chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for dozens of centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic."

In 1945, the United States, along with Great Britain, made the "fateful" decision to support France in her efforts to reclaim her former colonies of Indochina and reimpose colonial rule. Thus began America's 30-year "involvement" in Viet Nam.

By Chris Hedges

The American empire is coming to an end. The U.S. economy is being drained by wars in the Middle East and vast military expansion around the globe. It is burdened by growing deficits, along with the devastating effects of deindustrialization and global trade agreements. Our democracy has been captured and destroyed by corporations that steadily demand more tax cuts, more deregulation and impunity from prosecution for massive acts of financial fraud, all the while looting trillions from the U.S. treasury in the form of bailouts. The nation has lost the power and respect needed to induce allies in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa to do its bidding. Add to this the mounting destruction caused by climate change and you have a recipe for an emerging dystopia. Overseeing this descent at the highest levels of the federal and state governments is a motley collection of imbeciles, con artists, thieves, opportunists and war-mongering generals. And to be clear, I am speaking about Democrats, too.

The empire will limp along, steadily losing influence until the dollar is dropped as the world's reserve currency, plunging the United States into a crippling depression and instantly forcing a massive contraction of its military machine.

Short of a sudden and widespread popular revolt, which does not seem likely, the death spiral appears unstoppable, meaning the United States as we know it will no longer exist within a decade or, at most, two. The global vacuum we leave behind will be filled by China, already establishing itself as an economic and military juggernaut, or perhaps there will be a multipolar world carved up among Russia, China, India, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa, and a few other states. Or maybe the void will be filled, as the historian Alfred W. McCoy writes in his book *In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of U.S. Global Power*, by “a coalition of transnational corporations, multilateral military forces like NATO, and an international financial leadership self-selected at Davos and Bilderberg” that will “forge a supranational nexus to supersede any nation or empire.”

Under every measurement, from financial growth and infrastructure investment to advanced technology, including supercomputers, space weaponry, and cyberwarfare, we are being rapidly overtaken by the Chinese. “In April 2015 the U.S. Department of Agriculture suggested that the American economy would grow by nearly 50 percent over the next 15 years, while China's would triple and come close to surpassing America's in 2030,” McCoy noted. China became the world's second largest economy in 2010, the same year it became the world's leading manufacturing nation, pushing aside a United States that had dominated the world's manufacturing for a century. The Department of Defense issued a sober report titled “At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-Primacy World.” It found that the U.S. military “no longer enjoys an unassailable position versus state competitors,” and “it no longer can ... automatically generate consistent and sustained

# The End of Empire



*Empires in decay embrace an almost willful suicide. Blinded by their hubris and unable to face the reality of their diminishing power, they retreat into a fantasy world where hard and unpleasant facts no longer intrude. They replace diplomacy, multilateralism and politics with unilateral threats and the blunt instrument of war.*

local military superiority at range.” McCoy predicts the collapse will come by 2030.

Empires in decay embrace an almost willful suicide. Blinded by their hubris and unable to face the reality of their diminishing power, they retreat into a fantasy world where hard and unpleasant facts no longer intrude. They replace diplomacy, multilateralism and politics with unilateral threats and the blunt instrument of war.

This collective self-delusion saw the United States make the greatest strategic blunder in its history, one that sounded the death knell of the empire—the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The architects of the war in the George W. Bush White House, and the array of useful idiots in the press and academia who were cheerleaders for it, knew very little about the countries being invaded, were stunningly naive about

the effects of industrial warfare, and were blindsided by the ferocious blowback. They stated, and probably believed, that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, although they had no valid evidence to support this claim. They insisted that democracy would be implanted in Baghdad and spread across the Middle East. They assured the public that U.S. troops would be greeted by grateful Iraqis and Afghans as liberators. They promised that oil revenues would cover the cost of reconstruction. They insisted that the bold and quick military strike—“shock and awe”—would restore American hegemony in the region and dominance in the world. It did the opposite. As Zbigniew Brzezinski noted, this “unilateral war of choice against Iraq precipitated a widespread delegitimation of U.S. foreign policy.”

Historians of empire call these military fiascos, a feature of all late empires, ex-

amples of “micro-militarism.” The Athenians engaged in micro-militarism when during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) they invaded Sicily, suffering the loss of 200 ships and thousands of soldiers and triggering revolts throughout the empire. Britain did so in 1956 when it attacked Egypt in a dispute over the nationalization of the Suez Canal and then quickly had to withdraw in humiliation, empowering a string of Arab nationalist leaders such as Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and dooming British rule over the nation's few remaining colonies. Neither of these empires recovered.

“While rising empires are often judicious, even rational, in their application of armed force for conquest and control of overseas dominions, fading empires are inclined to ill-considered displays of power, dreaming of bold military masterstrokes that would somehow recoup lost prestige and power,” McCoy writes. “Often irrational even from an imperial point of view, these micromilitary operations can yield hemorrhaging expenditures or humiliating defeats that only accelerate the process already under way.”

Empires need more than force to dominate other nations. They need a mystique. This mystique—a mask for imperial plunder, repression, and exploitation—seduces some native elites, who become willing to do the bidding of the imperial power or at least remain passive. And it provides a patina of civility and even nobility to justify to those at home the costs in blood and money needed to maintain empire. The parliamentary system of government that Britain replicated in appearance in the colonies, and the introduction of British sports such as polo, cricket, and horse racing, along with elaborately uniformed viceroys and the pageantry of royalty, were buttressed by what the colonialists said was the invincibility of their navy and army. England was able to hold its empire together from 1815 to 1914 before being forced into a steady retreat. America's high-blown rhetoric about democracy, liberty, and equality, along with basketball, baseball, and Hollywood, as well as our own deification of the military, entranced and cowed much of the globe in the wake of World War II. Behind the scenes, of course, the CIA used its bag of dirty tricks to orchestrate coups, fix elections, and carry out assassinations, black propaganda campaigns, bribery, blackmail, intimidation, and torture. But none of this works anymore.

The loss of the mystique is crippling. It makes it hard to find pliant surrogates to administer the empire, as we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. The photographs of physical abuse and sexual humiliation imposed on Arab prisoners at Abu Ghraib inflamed the Muslim world and fed al-Qaida and later Islamic State with new recruits. The assassination of Osama bin Laden and a host of other jihadist leaders, including the U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, openly mocked the concept of the rule of law. The hundreds of thousands of dead and millions of refugees fleeing our debacles in the Middle East, along with the near-constant threat from militarized aerial drones, exposed us as state terror-

*continued on page 16...*



# Trump Brushes Environment Aside in Pursuit of Big Border Wall

By Ben Arnoldy

The Trump administration signaled on Aug. 1 that it will push forward with its border wall project regardless of environmental laws. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a waiver that exempts construction efforts near San Diego from environmental and other regulations. To understand the impact of this decision on the environment and coming legal challenges to the wall, Ben Arnoldy spoke with environmental lawyer Dinah Bear. Ms. Bear is an independent attorney and consultant in Tucson, Ariz., who spent more than 25 years working for the White House at the Council on Environmental Quality.

**Ben Arnoldy:** What are some of the environmental impacts of constructing President Trump's border wall?

**Dinah Bear:** We don't know about the design of any future wall, but we have had a little over 10 years of experience with the border wall in Arizona where I live, as well as in southern California and parts of Texas.

We know that the walls block wildlife. We have photographs of mountain lions pacing, trying to get to the other side to their cubs. We have photographs of javelinas that are trying to get through the wall. We even know that there are some very rare bird species that have trouble getting over the wall because they don't fly that high and they don't like to fly in cleared areas.

Another very serious impact that the border wall has already had is flooding. We particularly experience this in Arizona, where unfortunately when the current wall was built—without any compliance with the usual environmental laws—the contractors apparently thought it doesn't rain. We have had massive flooding from the border wall, and in certain sections, the wall has actually fallen down because of the floods.

There was about \$8 million of economic damage in Nogales, Sonora, because of the floods, and some people lost their lives. The border patrol is actually in the



**Border walls such as the one in Nacos, Ariz., have already affected the environment, disrupting the natural migration of animals and causing flooding.**

process of replacing parts of the wall because they understand that it wasn't built correctly in the first place—in large part, I think, because of absence of compliance with environmental laws.

**BA:** The DHS said it waived environmental regulations to expedite work on barriers along the border. What is the scope of this waiver?

**DB:** This waiver is confined to an area that stretches

Congressional Research Service analyzed the situation and said that this authority to waive all laws for the border was the broadest waiver of law in American history.

**BA:** What legal avenues are there for Earthjustice and others to challenge these waivers?

**DB:** Unfortunately, one of the features of the Real ID Act was to limit judicial review. So any challenges to the use of the waiver first have to be brought within 60 days.

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*We know that the walls block wildlife.*

*We have photographs of mountain lions pacing, trying to get to the other side to their cubs. ... We even know that there are some very rare bird species that have trouble getting over the wall because they don't fly that high and they don't like to fly in cleared areas.*

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from the Pacific Ocean for approximately 15 miles to the east. What we've seen in the past—and it looks like we are going to see something similar now—is a series of waivers that go section by section. And we expect the next one to be in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, probably next month, where there are apparently plans to wall off the crown jewel of America's wildlife refuge system.

**BA:** The DHS cites a Bush-era law for its authority to issue these waivers. What authority does that law grant?

**DB:** It was Congress, not President George W. Bush, that asked for this [kind of] waiver. In fact, I will say that there was conversation within the administration—which I was in—about the fact that this wasn't really needed. But it was absolutely demanded by certain members of Congress and it was included in the 2005 Real ID Act. It was unfortunately passed with no end date. It provides the secretary of Homeland Security with the authority to waive all laws—and I do mean all laws, not just environmental laws—for the expeditious construction of border walls, barriers and roads in areas of high illegal entry.

Without the waiver, the administration would have had to provide environmental analysis, involve the public, and consult with expert agencies about the impacts on the environment as well as on historic and cultural sites.

**BA:** Has there been any other project in American history that has been built under this type of waiver of law?

**DB:** Absolutely not. Shortly after this was passed, the

The only claim that can be heard by a court is a violation of the Constitution of the United States. Then there is no right to appeal a decision from a federal district court. So it is a very narrow pathway to be able to challenge the use of the waiver. I think these waivers will be challenged.

**BA:** What role can ordinary Americans play in pushing back on the wall?

**DB:** In my view, the American public is the single most potent instrument we have against this. If Americans realized that this wall was not only ineffective, that real security experts have never advocated for this kind of border barrier, and that it is going to do a lot of harm to the country—and they conveyed [this message] to members of Congress—things would change.

I would also like Americans to realize that they are losing their opportunities to have input into the government by waivers of laws like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). And this idea of waiving all laws for big projects can rapidly spread to other kinds of actions. Somebody in Wyoming or Kansas might not feel very affected by these waivers, but this is clearly something that could be duplicated for other kinds of projects and affect people in their backyards. We have laws—and compliance with laws—as a hallmark of what it means to be an American.

*Ben Arnoldy heads Earthjustice's editorial team. [earthjustice.org](http://earthjustice.org)*

## Pirates

*boarded our ship,  
threw passengers and sailors into  
the frigid, foaming sea of 'Fuck You, Jack,'  
set our sails for the dry desert of penance,  
ruined other vessels that crossed our wake.*

*The pirates' crew are smiling fools,  
thrilled with their captain's whims,  
always ready to load the guns,  
exulting in his refusal to oil troubled waters.*

*We had forgotten.*

*This has happened before.*

*Was it Apollo's curse of Cassandra?*

*Was there a secret land of brigands that  
sends its members into the world on occasion?*

*Could it be the sign of something within ourselves?*

—Jay Wenk



# The Miramar Air Show: Just Don't Go, Says Veterans For Peace

By Dave Patterson

San Diego Veterans For Peace is now in our second year of working to influence the public away from attending the Miramar Air Show. We view American militarism as a clear and present danger to our society and the world, and the most visible symbol of militarism in San Diego is the annual Miramar Air Show. Every day we read of budget cuts to virtually every aspect of government expenditure except for military spending that keeps on going up. Spending of our tax dollars should be a choice of the citizenry and not left solely to the political-military-industrial complex. However, we believe that the public is being influenced to accept continuous increases in military spending in part, by the display of military power exhibited at the Miramar Air Show.

Costs surrounding military air shows just keep on piling up. As an example, this past year the Air Force crashed a Thunderbird F-16 at a cost of \$18.8 million. Luckily no one died, but when the next accident happens, those of us living near the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar may not be so lucky. To date, 10 percent of the pilots who train and fly for the Blue Angels have been in fatal accidents. This is an unacceptable cost for the military and for their families. The V-22 Osprey that regularly performs at the Miramar Air Show is fast becoming known for its frequent crashes. As of this writing there have been 39 V-22 fatalities with three more assumed dead off the Australian coast. Every time there is an accident, the military dictates some changes that they say lessen the risk

factor, but the accidents keep happening. We hope that an accident doesn't occur here in San Diego, and we suggest the people consider ahead of time how they might deal emotionally with the death of an aircrew, the injury or death of people on the ground, and the destruction of an F-18 aircraft that cost \$50 million. It is not rational to assume all this risk solely for entertainment purposes. If an accident happens, are we to be callous and walk away, telling ourselves that the military people killed were volunteers, so no big deal? Recently a Navy Seal, trained at incredible expense, was killed entertaining a crowd in New Jersey when his parachute failed to open properly. Do we accept this? Clearly, sending our military to risk their lives to protect us is one thing, to please a crowd is insanity.

We also need to ask the question, "Is the air show solely for entertainment?" The Miramar Air Show website boasts that 500,000 people attend the air show every year, but they don't tell us which military contractors participate by renting luxury chalets right up front. In those chalets, the government contractors can, according to the air show webpage, "entertain and network with clients." The manufacturers and contractors make obscene profits from selling the government war goods and then use some of those profits to enjoy shaded seats with fabulous food and beverages. Meanwhile the military people participating in the air show risk their lives to entertain. That risk is clear to anyone who understands military operations. Rappelling from hovering helicopters, simulating ground assaults, and flying low while simulating

strafing runs are hazards that we cannot afford, except for training and combat. These activities should not be used for entertaining military contractors making deals.

There is a third and disturbing aspect of the Miramar Air Show that worries us deeply. Our children are being brainwashed because the Miramar Air Show glorifies war. It makes war look cool, fun, and interesting. What we see is a deliberate push by the military to convince our young children to buy into wars that our politicians will dream up in the future. Our children are being dazzled with weapons and air displays. The powerful

effect on our children can clearly be seen in a YouTube documentary by Chris Smiley, "Disneyland of War, short documentary." Ironically this video, about the Miramar Air Show, should not be watched by children! We ask the readers to watch it and ask yourself, is this what we intended for our children?

While all the noise and firepower can be exhilarating, the members of San Diego Veterans For Peace believe that there is no reason to risk our people and equipment for a weekend entertainment activity. Let's get serious and let the people that run this air show know that we disapprove, by refusing to attend. The Miramar Air Show, just don't go!

For more information, contact: Dave Patterson, NoMAS coordinator and past President, San Diego Veterans For Peace, 760-207-9139; [www.sdvfp.org](http://www.sdvfp.org)

*Dave Patterson is a member of Veterans For Peace Chapter 91, San Diego.*



VFP's Stan Levin goes under cover at the Miramar Air Show.

*When I was a child in the Bronx in the 1940s, whenever a plan for the future was proposed, it would be followed by the phrase, "after the war."*

*My parents would say, "after the war," Jack, my father, would quit Ritz radio and start his own business.*

*My mother would say: "after the war," we will move into a house in Queens.*

*I would meet my long absent grandparents who returned to Russia, I longed to meet them after the war.*

*My aunt who slept in my bed, while her sailor husband was away said she would have a baby after the war.*

*After the war, we would give up our ration cards, we could have meat every night for dinner, not have to roll up balls of silver, for the war effort, not have to hide under our desks in school when the sirens sounded.*

*After the war, the neighborhood bullies will stop beating the Jewish kids and*

*The Italians and the Jews could be friends again,*

*After the war the summer of '45, I was 10.*

*We had a big block party on Garden Street in the Bronx. The street was closed, there were spotlights, streamers, tables full of food. There was a band, and we all swung danced in the street. The Italians and Jews celebrated together.*

## 'After the War'

*After the war, the men in our apartment building came back from the Europe and the Pacific. My uncle brought back grass skirts from the Marshall Islands, and large pear-shaped speckled shells, which I still have.*

*But, my aunt did not get pregnant.*

*After the war, the cold war began and my grandparents could not come back from Russia. They were considered too red to re-enter.*

*After the war, the letters we got from them were full of holes, like cutouts.*

*After the war, we could not travel to Russia to see them.*

*After the war, my mother said we could not tell anyone about our grandparents in Russia. After the war the McCarthy committee came to my City College campus hunting for communists. I learned to keep my mouth shut.*

*After the war, some Jewish kids on my block were still being beaten.*

*After the war, in school, we still hid under our desks, now we feared the bomb. After the war, deep underground shelters were prepared in building, subways. Russia was the new enemy.*

*After the war, my father did not change jobs. Instead he learned to fix TVs.*

*After the war, we had the first TV on the block, a small, square black and white box.*

*We saw the images of survivors from the liberation from the camps, the bombed out cities of Europe.*

*Never again,*

*But after the war, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda happened*

*After the war, the U.N. was built. Our high school class visited the first glass building on the East River. We were told that now nations could meet, get along to make peace.*

*After the war, the Berlin wall was built.*

*After the war, I grew up, left the Bronx I lived in London and the ruins of the bombed-out buildings from the blitz were still there.*

*After the war, there was the Vietnam war. In Boston, my house was the headquarters for the draft resisters. I joined the antiwar faculty and marched with millions to the Pentagon.*

*After the war, on 9/11, I watched from my window in lower Manhattan as a plane crashed into the twin towers.*

—Iris Fodor

By Matthew Hoh

Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl's guilty plea begins the end of this phase of an embarrassing, sad, and morally absurd saga of American history. Sgt. Bergdahl, who was dismissed from the Coast Guard because of mental illness, was recruited into the Army despite such issues, and then sent to the frontlines of Afghanistan where he walked away from his base and was captured, kept as a prisoner, and tortured by the Taliban for nearly five years. He has been offered almost no compassion, sympathy, or forgiveness by large swaths of the American public, political classes, veterans, and the media.

The shameful blood-crazed calls for vengeance against Sgt. Bergdahl, screamed across Fox News, talk radio, and Twitter, by millions of rightwing Americans have begun again with Bergdahl's guilty plea. Despite an army investigation finding no Americans were killed as a result of his departure from his unit; despite the Pentagon admitting it was known that Sgt. Bergdahl was in Pakistan within a few days of his capture, thus negating the validity of the rightwing talking points about continuous search missions for Bergdahl that jeopardized American lives; despite the general who led the investigation of Bergdahl's disappearance stating that Bergdahl should not be punished and the colonel who led the Army's version of a grand jury trial recommending the same; despite the U.S. military's top prisoner of war expert testifying that Bergdahl endured more torture at the hands of the Taliban than any U.S. prisoner of war since the Vietnam War, undoubtedly due to his multiple escape attempts and unwillingness to cooperate with his kidnappers; and despite repeated calls by President Trump for Sgt. Bergdahl to be executed, as well as calls by Sen. John McCain for retaliation against the military if Sgt. Bergdahl is not sent to jail, both blatant forms of wrongful and illegal command influence prohibited by military law, Sgt. Bergdahl entered a guilty plea and put himself at the mercy of a U.S. Army judge. Although he was not sentenced to any prison time, he received a dishonorable discharge, reduction in rank to Pvt. E 1, and a \$10,000 fine.

In time, Bergdahl may become just a footnote to America's wars in the Muslim world, wars that have killed well over a million people since 2001, but his individual story relays the fundamental truth of these wars against Sunnis and Shias, and Arabs, Africans and Pashtuns (nearly all the people we have killed, maimed, and made homeless have been Muslim and dark skinned): that there is no logic to our violence. There is only the unending and insatiable requirement for more war and more destruction. And there is no forgiveness in this loudly and righteously proclaimed Christian nation, only the scapegoating of a young man and his family for the failures of immoral and unwinnable wars on the murderous altar of the twin godheads of American exceptionalism and white supremacy. Sgt. Bergdahl's story does not just inform us of the madness of our wars overseas, but

## Bowe Bergdahl: Traitor to American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy



*“There is no forgiveness in this loudly and righteously proclaimed Christian nation, only the scapegoating of a young man and his family for the failures of immoral and unwinnable wars.”*

highlights our wars here at home; for our wars abroad come from the same root causes as our wars at home.

It was Sgt. Bergdahl's parents standing outside the White House with President Obama that began the rage against him and his family. This was the treason that so angered and upset the white conservative audiences of Megyn Kelly and Rush Limbaugh. Bergdahl's white parents standing at the White House with that black president and thanking him for freeing their son began the scorn, the vitriol, and the outrage against Sgt. Bergdahl, his mother and his father. The audacity of Jani and Bob Bergdahl—themselves released from the captivity of the unimaginable nightmare of the imprisonment and torture of their son for five years by the Taliban—in standing with Barack Hussein Obama and giving him thanks was a betrayal to the usurped, rightful, and white structures that underlie so many white Americans' understanding of United States history and society.

The grand mythology of U.S. militarism, a key pillar of both American exceptionalism and white supremacy, does not

allow for figures such as Sgt. Bergdahl. The greatest military in the history of the world is a required statement of faith for all American politicians and public persons, even though the U.S. military has not achieved victory in war in over 70 years, so an explanation of collusion and cooperation with anti-American and anti-white forces is necessary to provide the causation of such an undermining. Of course, once Bob and Jani Bergdahl stood with President Obama, the racially fueled reactionary political anger appeared in Facebook posts and Twitter rants and the lies needed to sustain that anger and turn it into a useful political tool arrived: Sgt. Bergdahl attempted to join the Taliban, Sgt. Bergdahl gave information to the enemy, Sgt. Bergdahl got Americans killed, Sgt. Bergdahl had anti-American beliefs, Sgt. Bergdahl's father is a Muslim. These are all claims that were untrue and disproved over time, but such a straightening of facts is almost always inconsequential to those whose identity is an abominable mix of race, rightwing politics, and nationalism. People like those who believe Jesus is okay with them carrying hand-

guns into church, insist that Santa Claus can only be white and that the Confederate flag is a symbol of a proud heritage, have little time or consideration for the particulars of anything that triggers the base tribalism that dominates and informs their lives.

The fundamental aspects of Bergdahl's disappearance were well known and documented years prior to the White House announcement of his release. Veterans organizations called for his rescue and return at rallies and Republican senators enacted legislation to help release him. “Bring Him Home” and “No Man Left Behind” were echoed repeatedly by Republican politicians and pundits, and even Ronald Reagan's most famed acolyte and Fox News hero, Oliver North, wore a Bowe Bergdahl POW bracelet. However, to be white and to stand tearfully and gratefully alongside that black president is unconscionable and unforgivable to many “true Americans” and so the parents' sins became the son's and Sgt. Bergdahl's treason was a dog whistle to those who believe anti-whiteness and anti-Americanism are inseparable.

For the man who used race so overtly and effectively to become President of the United States, calling during his campaign for a “traitor” like Sgt. Bergdahl to face the firing squad or be thrown out of a plane without a parachute was a rudimentary requirement in order to Make America Great Again. Even Gen. James Mattis, who hung outside his office a horseshoe that had belonged to Sgt. Bergdahl and had been given to the general by the sergeant's father, understands the political importance of Bergdahl's treason. Gen. Mattis, who previously had supported the soldier and given great comfort to the family, now, as secretary of Defense is silent. I believe Secretary Mattis to have higher ambitions than simply running the Pentagon, and a careerist as savvy and cunning as James Mattis would not imperil that white base of support.

Now that Sgt. Bergdahl's legal fate has been decided, he and his family can begin rebuilding lives that were shattered by the unending war in Afghanistan and then shattered again by the race-fueled partisan politics of the unending war against people of color in the United States. The suffering of Bowe Bergdahl, a young man who never should have been inducted into the Army to begin with, is testament to the viciousness, callousness, and hate that dominate American actions both at home and abroad. We deserve no forgiveness for what has been done, and may still be done, to him and his family.

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# Reclaim Armistice Day and Honor the Real Heroes

By Arnold 'Skip' Oliver

How in heck did Armistice Day become Veterans Day? Established by Congress in 1926 to “perpetuate peace through good will and mutual understanding between nations, (and later) a day dedicated to the cause of world peace,” Armistice Day was widely recognized for almost 30 years. As part of that, many churches rang their bells on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month—the hour in 1918 that the guns fell silent on the Western Front, by which time 16 million had died in the

horror of World War I.

To be blunt about it, in 1954 Armistice Day was hijacked by a militaristic U.S. Congress and renamed Veterans Day. Today few Americans understand the original purpose of Armistice Day, or even remember it. The message of peace seeking has been all but erased. Worst of all, Veterans Day has devolved into a hyper-nationalistic quasi-religious celebration of war and the putatively valiant warriors who wage it. We no longer have a national day to recognize or reflect upon international peace.

And the identification of warriors as heroes is pretty shaky too. If you are a veteran, and honest about it, you will admit that most of what goes on during wartime is decidedly unheroic, and actual heroes in war are very few and far between.

I have to tell you that when I was in Vietnam, I was no hero, and I did not witness a single act of heroism during the year I spent there, first as a U.S. Army private and then as a sergeant. Yes, there was heroism in the Vietnam War. On both sides of the conflict there were notable acts of self-sacrifice and bravery. Troops in my unit wondered how the North Vietnamese troops could persevere for years in the face of daunting U.S. firepower. U.S. medical corpsmen performed incredible acts of valor rescuing the wounded under fire.

But I also witnessed a considerable amount of bad behavior, some of it my own. There were widespread incidents of disrespect and abuse of Vietnamese civilians, and a large number of truly awful war crimes. Further, all units had, and still have, their share of criminals, con artists, and thugs. Most unheroic of all were the U.S. military and civilian leaders who planned, orchestrated, and profited greatly from that utterly avoidable war.

The cold truth is that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Vietnam had nothing to do with protecting American peace and

freedom. On the contrary, the Vietnam War was fought to forestall Vietnamese independence, not defend it; and it bitterly divided the American people.

Unfortunately, Vietnam wasn't an isolated example of an unjust conflict. Many American wars—including the 1846 Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War in 1898, and the Iraq War (this list is by no means exhaustive)—were waged under false pretexts against countries that didn't threaten the United States. It's hard to see how, if a war is unjust, it can be heroic to wage it.

But if the vast majority of wars are not fought for noble reasons, and few soldiers are heroic, have there been any actual heroes out there defending peace and freedom? And if so, who are they? Well, there are many, from Jesus down to the present. I'd put Gandhi, Tolstoy, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the list, along with many Quakers and Mennonites. And don't forget General Smedley Butler, who wrote that “War is a Racket.”

In Vietnam, Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson stopped the My Lai massacre from being even worse.

Another candidate is former U.S. Army specialist Josh Stieber, who sent this message to the people of Iraq: “Our heavy hearts still hold hope that we can restore inside our country the acknowledgment of your humanity, that we were taught to deny.” We were honored to be able to host Josh in our home as he walked across the United States on a mission of peace while giving away the money he had earned in the military as partial atonement for his role in a thoroughly unjust war.

And how about Chelsea Manning who spent seven years behind bars for exposing more truths about the Iraq War? The real heroes are those who resist war and militarism, often at great personal cost. And now the Harvard fellows include apologists and organizers of torture, but not a whistle blower for peace. Go Figure.

Because militarism has been around for such a long time, at least since Gilgamesh came up with his protection racket in Sumeria going on 5,000 years ago, people argue that it will always be with us.

But many also thought that slavery and the subjugation of women would last forever, and they're being proven wrong. We understand that while militarism will not disappear overnight, disappear it must if we are to avoid economic as well as moral bankruptcy—not to mention the extinction of our species.

As Civil War General W.T. Sherman said at West Point, “I confess without shame that I am tired and sick of war.” We're with you, bro.

This year on November 11, Veterans For Peace will bring back the original Armistice Day traditions. Join them and let those bells ring out.

Arnold “Skip” Oliver writes for *PeaceVoice* and is professor emeritus of political science at Heidelberg University in Tiffin, Ohio. A Vietnam veteran, he belongs to Veterans For Peace, and can be reached at [soliver@heidelberg.edu](mailto:soliver@heidelberg.edu).



## When Did We as a Culture Lose Our Right Minds?

By S. Brian Willson

When did we as a culture lose our “right minds”? I think it important to examine the historical context of our narcissistic and imperial cultural mindset. This is not to say there are not wonderful people with compassionate values, but as a collective culture and nation-state we are a diabolical, dangerous, even fatal force on the planet.

Extraordinarily gruesome Eurocentric values such as those exhibited by some of my own familial ancestors were introduced into the New World in the 1500s. Ever since my Viet Nam experiences I have been curious to discover where and when my cultural Eurocentric values of being “out of our minds” originated? How did I lose my right mind? Perhaps humans have long before exhibited such brutality, but I at least wanted to learn about my cultural origins.

Sigmund Freud declared that in psychic life, nothing of what has been formed in the past ever disappears. Everything that has occurred is preserved one way or another and, in fact, reappears under either favorable or unfavorable circumstances. We either integrate lessons, or we pretend they are irrelevant and ignore them.

### Vicious Search for Wealth

Bartolomé de las Casas, a Spanish priest who arrived in Hispaniola in 1502 and became known as the “Apostle of the Indians,” was shocked to witness the un-

speakable punishments being inflicted on the peaceful indigenous inhabitants. In “A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies,” as cited by Barry Lopez in *The Rediscovery of North America*, de las Casas spelled out the Spaniards' behavior: vicious search for wealth with “dreadful ... unlimited close-fisted avarice” and their commitment of “such inhumanities and barbarisms ... as no age can parallel” in “a continuous recreational slaughter ... cruelty never before seen, nor heard of, nor read of.” He identified routine murder, rape, theft, kidnapping, vandalism, child molestation, acts of cruelty, torture, humiliation, dismemberment, and beheading. The indigenous, he said, possessed no vocabulary to even describe such bestiality.

By 1542, 50 years after Columbus' ar-

rival, the original indigenous population of the Taino (Arawak), estimated at 8 million, had been decimated to a mere 200. Causes of death for these millions included mutilations (e.g., arms cut off) for not producing (virtually nonexistent) gold quotas, being hunted down and eaten by dogs, being shot with muskets, gouged by swords, and hanged or burned to death, as well as contracting European-borne diseases. Within another decade or two, the Taino were genetically extinct. This genocide foretold an ominous future for the world.

S. Brian Willson is a Vietnam veteran, trained lawyer, long-time peace activist, and a veteran for peace. He is author of the memoir, *Blood On the Tracks*, and the subject of a documentary film, *Paying the Price for Peace*, directed by Bo Boudart.



# What It's Really Like to Live with D

The U.S. Air Force's drone program tracks down terrorists and protects troops.

But life in its shadow has left a generation of Afghan civilians physically maimed, mourning lost family members, and fearful of future attacks.

On the other side of the world, in America, former drone operators are speaking out about the dark side of this technology too.

Australian PhD student Alex Edney-Browne has been collecting stories of trauma from both perspectives. In an exclusive for Science Friction, these are their words.

**Aarif, 36, from Khost province, lost her husband, son, father-in-law, and three nephews in a drone attack in 2015. She is now a single mother to her 2-year-old daughter.**

"Before I heard the bomb, I was busy with the animals: separating the baby goats after their mothers had breast-fed them," Aarif says.

them.

"We have a very heavy load of sadness. A sad life has been given to us. Many women are now young widows and their young children are left for us to take care of.

"I have trouble getting to sleep and I also wake up during the night from fear. I can't forget what I saw. It comes to me in the night like a dream. I get these nightmares a lot."

**Shanaky, 25, from Wardak province, was blinded in both eyes by a drone attack in 2015. His family spent their life savings to restore sight in one of his eyes.**

"The day before the attack, I heard a drone circling overhead," Shanaky says.

"The next day, I was doing irrigation work in our apple orchard, and I was attacked. I just saw a flame, and I lost consciousness. I saw fire in front of me and heard the explosion, but that is all I remember.



*An Afghan man and woman stand in a mountainous landscape as shadows of drones fall on their faces.*

economically.

"But when this happened the whole family became very sad. And all the money they had, they spent it on me for my medical costs."

**Abdul, 45, from Wardak**

was killed.

"We are mountain people. We go to the mountain to collect wood for fuel, for fires. We need it for our cooking and to make bread. We also take our animals to the mountain. Our lives are connected to the mountain. Fear has replaced enjoyment: we go to the mountain with fear, we go quickly.

"... I don't like that Americans can see into my house, my home. It is not joyful. It is not good. Especially for Pashtuns: Pashtuns don't like people seeing into our house from above.

"In Pashtun culture, the respectful thing to do is to knock on someone's door.

"It is not good to have someone see your family members ... to watch women and children. It is dishonorable and disrespectful. The women in the village are very disappointed. They don't like it."

**Brandon Bryant is a former U.S. Air Force drone sensor operator from Missoula, Mont. He battles with nightmares,**

**depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) resulting from his work in the drone program.**

"You know how to make life cheap? Teach someone to kill someone else with the push of a button," Brandon says.

"I felt like a pervert a lot of the time. I am sitting in this cold, dark bunker, an air-conditioned steel box, in the middle of the Nevada or New Mexico desert, watching people live their lives out, while I'm behind a computer screen like the f\*\*king Matrix. I had no life of my own.

"The culture was so vastly different to anything I had experienced. You'd watch people go to the marketplace and to cafes, and eat food. In Afghanistan they'd sleep on their houses because it was too hot to sleep inside. I've seen weddings, funerals and all sorts of things.

"... You couldn't see detail. You couldn't see a person's face. You are typically looking at shadows, or puppets.

"The disconnect doesn't come



*Left: An illustration of a woman holding a child and a photo of a deceased relative. Right: Flames pour from a burning car.*



"I was keeping an eye out for my family, as I knew they would soon arrive back home for lunch.

"The explosion was heavy. The land was shaking. My house was shaking. I ran outside to see what had happened.

"I saw from a distance the burnt-out cars, and tried to get closer but there were Afghan army there who wouldn't let me. But I could tell quickly that it was my family, because they were due to arrive home very soon and never did.

"I ran closer and saw smoke and fire, the car was burning, and there were pieces of bodies. My husband, my son, and three brother-in-law's sons and my father-in-law were killed. All of

"My memory became very weak. Before I was attacked, I was in the top of my class—in the first or second position. After the attack, I lost all my chances of kadr [the top position], as studying was very difficult for me.

"... Before the attack, I could do any kind of work. I can't anymore. I could drive, but now I can't. I can't work well on the computer anymore. If I go to the bazaar to work, the dust scratches at my right eye and makes it water.

"My family had a big hope, because I am the oldest son in the family, that after graduation I would have a good job and would be able to support them

**province, lost his brother to a drone attack in 2014. He lives with the torment of drones frequently hovering over his mountain village.**

"I think of my brother a lot because he was close to me. And then it goes to flashback. Sometimes I have nightmares also, especially when I hear the drone is around," Abdul says.

"They are about the day my brother died, but also more about the drone sound. The fear is because when we hear the drone, we think it will strike again, like it struck and killed my brother.

"My brother was taking the animals to the mountain we usually go to. At around 3:00 p.m. the drone hit my brother, who



*Left: A woman sits between two men drinking tea. Right: A child points at*

# Drone Warfare

between me and the people on the ground. The disconnect comes between me and myself. My job was sickening. I had no life of my own. I didn't feel human myself.

"I've watched coalition soldiers die. I've watched enemy combatants die. I've watched innocent people die. They all die the same, the innocent as well as the guilty.

"We are just a bunch of voyeuristic nerds utilising technology to rain destruction on people who are living in their own country, trying to live out their lives as best as they can.

"I remember everything, that's the problem. That's why I have

and drone surveillance. For her PhD research, she wanted to find out how drones are affecting Afghan lives and livelihoods.

"Drones are characterized by governments and the military as an accurate weapon that effectively locates and kills terrorists and limits damage to civilians," Alex says.

"Rarely does the Western public hear from the civilians that drones are allegedly protecting. The Afghans I spoke to had lost family members, were personally injured in drone attacks, or lived under drone surveillance.

"... Young men told me about how they used to play cricket in



Left: Two people watch a drone in the sky. Centre: Flames. Right: A man holds an apple in front of a grove of burnt trees.

fore the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 shared fond memories of Western tourists coming to their villages. Before war began, Afghanistan was on

heard of people who equate all Muslims with terrorists. I tell him that Islamophobia is increasing in the West and partly explains the rise of leaders like Donald Trump.

"Shanaky asks if I could sponsor him for asylum, so that he could have the vision restored in his other eye at a Western medical facility.

"I tell him about the global asylum seeker crisis and Western government attempts to limit the number of asylum seekers they accept. I say I will look into it, but that I am not hopeful.

"It goes unsaid but the subtext is blatant: the West inflicts violence and then refuses help to those who are injured by its actions. I look at my feet for the entire conversation.

"Two months later, and I'm in the United States for the other half of my research: examining the effects of drone warfare on U.S. Air Force drone veterans.

"I am in the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., standing in front of a Predator drone. It is my first time seeing a real life, full-sized drone. It is bigger than I imagined.

"A video of drone kills is playing on loop. Teenagers walk past the display saying 'whoa!' and 'cool!'

"A child, about 12 years old, stops next to me. 'Mom, what's that?' he asks. His mother says: 'It's a drone.'

"She sidles up to the sign and reads for a few seconds, adding: 'They watch and locate terrorists and then they kill them.'

"I consider interrupting. I consider informing them that they also kill civilians and destroy their livelihoods. I decide against it, but am awash with cowardice and shame.

"I feel sick. I feel sad. I sit for 10 minutes in the bathroom of the National Air and Space Museum paralyzed by the contrasts."

## Credits

**Research:** Alex Edney-Browne, University of Melbourne

**Illustrations:** Rachel Ang  
**Producer:** Natasha Mitchell for Science Friction



Left: Man curled up in a box with a keyboard next to him. Right: Man looking at a map of Afghanistan.

nightmares."

Earlier this year, Alex Edney-Browne travelled to Afghanistan to meet and interview people who lived in areas subjected to drone attacks

the evenings and stay outside till late talking with their friends. With drones hovering above, they are now too scared.

"Many told me that cultural practices of hosting neighbors for dinners and staying over at a family member or friend's house if they were mourning a loved one ('gham shareky': sharing in one's sadness) had reduced in case it's mistaken for nefarious activity.

"Farmers who often need to irrigate their lands at night now turn their torches off and return to their houses in the dark when they hear drones.

"Despite the harrowing subject matter, the people I met were relieved to tell their stories. Most had received no explanation or apology, let alone compensation, from U.S. coalition forces after drone attacks.

"Afghans who were alive be-

the 'hippie trail' and regularly visited by Westerners.

"Most people were curious about the West, and had difficult questions for me too.

"A young man—a teacher in his early 20s—asks me if I have



Left: A man holds his head in his hand. Right: A drone's shadow falls on a man leading goats up a mountain.



Left: A drone hanging next to a U.S. flag.

# Banning Nuclear Weapons: The Beginning

By H. Patricia Hynes

Against all odds, 122 countries agreed in July to ban nuclear weapons. At the heart of the U.N. treaty is an explicit ethical goal: to protect peoples of the world from the humanitarian catastrophe that would ensue if nuclear weapons were employed. Once 50 states ratify the treaty, it will enter into international law. The United States, the only country to use nuclear weapons, dropped the first atomic bomb on Aug. 6, 1945, at Hiroshima, and Aug. 9 on Nagasaki.

The United States lobbied hardest against this treaty, contending that these weapons of mass destruction keep us secure. Despite this morbid logic, we learned recently that our government's leaders have a set of fortified sites constructed to save themselves in the event of nuclear catastrophe while the rest of us fend for ourselves. (See Garrett Graff's book, *Raven Rock: The Story of the Government's Secret Plan to Save Itself While the Rest of Us Die*).

But the U.S. leaders who would know best about weapons and national security—generals and weapons scientists—have had a different take on the security and morality of nuclear weapons, from their first use in 1945 through their existence today. American leaders from all branches of the armed forces, among them Generals Eisenhower, Arnold, Marshall

and MacArthur; and Admirals Leahy, Nimitz, and Halsey strongly dissented from the decision to use the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki for both military and moral reasons. Japan was already defeated and in peace negotiations with the Soviet Union; surrender was imminent. Bombing dense human settlements was barbarous and would shock world opinion, and a demonstration bombing away from residential areas (also suggested by many atomic bomb scientists) could be used instead to force immediate surrender.

The top military commanders concurred that the decision to use the atomic bomb was political, not military. The United

States wanted to demonstrate the new atomic weapon that we solely possessed to intimidate the Soviet Union. The opposite happened: An arms race between the United States and Soviet Union ensued. Today seven other countries also possess nuclear weapons (Britain, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea), with the ever-present specter of their use, an accident, or their theft by terrorists. (Two countries, South Africa and Iran, have relinquished their programs and signed the new nuclear weapons ban treaty.)

On February 2, 1998, retired Gen. George Butler, former commander of U.S. Strategic Air Command, spoke to

the National Press Club: “The likely consequences of nuclear weapons have no politically, militarily, or morally acceptable justification. ... The unbounded wantonness of their effects ... transcend time and space, poisoning the earth and deforming its inhabitants for generation after generation. They ... expunge all hope for meaningful survival. They hold in their sway not just the fate of nations but the very meaning of civilization.” He joined 60 other retired generals and admirals calling for nuclear weapons abolition.

At their 40th anniversary reunion in Los Alamos, N.M., 70 of 110 physicists who had worked on the atomic bomb signed a statement in support of nuclear disarmament.

*continued on page 16 ...*



2015 march for nuclear disarmament in New York City. Photo: Ellen Davidson

# Two Women Talking About the War

By Lady Borton

Mine was a lowly job. Working in wartime Quang Ngai, I held the lofty title of Assistant Director for the American Friends Service Committee's Viet Nam program, but in truth, I was merely a glorified errand-runner. While my Western medical colleagues fit war-wounded Vietnamese with artificial limbs, I made runs to the American base to pick up mail, fetched supplies, and transported patients, stopping along dusty village paths to chat, listen, and watch. In this way, I saw crucial details that American military leaders, GIs, and journalists failed to grasp.

I became aware of hidden roles Vietnamese women played in the war.

Strange to say, as a woman and a foreigner, I never felt afraid in a land at war. Unarmed, I knew I posed no threat. But I also knew to be watchful. One day in 1970, not long after I'd taken the first American journalist to the site of the My Lai Massacre, I went to fetch a patient, Nguyen Van Kim, who lived near the My Lai Road. Ten years old, he had stepped on a mine while tending water buffalo and lost the lower part of one leg.

I drove the truck as far I could and, parking it, started walking down a dirt track suitable only for ox carts. As an

American woman walking alone, I was like the circus come to town. Two boys spotted me. “Ba My! Ba My!—American woman! American woman!” they taunted, racing after me. Other children followed, shouting obscenities.

I turned, hunkered down on the dirt, and engaged the kids in chitchat. As we talked, a woman my age approached and stopped beside us; the boys became silent, watchful. The woman was barefoot, her hair pulled back into the traditional nape knot. On her shoulder, she carried a bamboo yoke with two baskets of rau muong, leafy vegetables grown in irrigation sluices.

“How old are you?” she asked, her tone neutral. Her baskets hung level with my eyes. They seemed to bend her yoke more than the load of vegetables warranted. I wondered what she'd hidden under the rau muong. Rice? Medicine? Ammunition?

“I'm 28, Older Sister,” I answered in Vietnamese. I rose and bowed. I knew we'd begun a risky game of “Twenty Questions.”

I'd always figured I was protected from Viet Cong arrest by two qualities: First, I considered no Vietnamese my enemy, and second, I spoke Vietnamese. However, I also figured that if I were questioned by the Viet Cong, I'd have a limited number of answers to plead my case. Here, I'd already used one reply, with no points gained.

“How many children do you have?” the woman asked.

“None,” I answered. “I'm not married.

How could I have children?!”

The woman giggled. One point gained, I thought, but two answers used.

“Which army base do you work at?” Her tone changed now, from noncommittal to ominous. She set down her baskets, freeing her hands.

My last chance, I thought. “I have no connection with the military,” I said. “I work for a peace organization. We help war-wounded on all sides.” I described Quaker Service work in Quang Ngai, our assistance to North Viet Nam, and to areas of South Viet Nam controlled by the Viet Cong, or Provisional Revolutionary Government, as it was officially known.

The woman straightened. “We are grateful to you Americans,” she announced, “for saving us from the cruelly vicious, wicked, imperialist Viet Cong.”

I relaxed: I'd won my reprieve. I assumed then, as I always did whenever I heard such overblown gratitude that the speaker sympathized with the VC. This wasn't a taxing deduction, for 95 percent of the Vietnamese in Quang Ngai province supported the revolutionaries. Our conversation soon eased into talk about our families, the nutritional value of rau muong, and the U.S. peace movement. For a few moments, where we each had intended to travel that afternoon, what we'd intended to do, did not matter. We were simply two women talking, despite the war.

Later that afternoon, I swung by the American Army compound to pick up the mail, entering the base as the Vietnamese cleaning women left it. I'd of-

*continued on next page ...*



# Seven Feminist Laws Iceland Has That the World Needs

*Every country should have these laws.*

By a lot of measures, Iceland is the best place to be a woman. Iceland starts gender equality lessons in preschool. The country has not just one, but three, laws protecting women at work. Sick of media treating women as sex objects? That doesn't fly in Iceland, where a law bans gender discriminatory advertising. Plus, the country was the first to ban strip clubs for feminist reasons.

Overall, the Nordic country has a near perfect score on the gender-equality scale. For eight years, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranked Iceland No. 1 on its list of countries actively closing gaps in gender equality. In 2009, Iceland became the first country to completely close the gender gap in education and health. And in 2016, Iceland was 87 percent of the way to closing the gender gap in all sectors.

Clearly, Iceland is leading the way, so what are the policies and standards in place that the rest of the world is looking up to?

Here are seven laws and standard practices that support women's rights, and penalize gender discrimination.

## 1. Women's Equality Is Literally Protected by Law.

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men is the reason gender equality is a hallmark of Icelandic culture. The law, established in 2000, was revamped in 2008 with the overarching goal of reaching equal rights in all areas of society. This law includes information on gender equality for government and businesses to use.

Within the law there are nine defined areas of gender discrimination. It identifies differences between indirect and direct gender discrimination, acknowledges gaps in wages, and recognizes that gender-based violence is detrimental to society.

The law draws out a roadmap to achieving gender equality, even including language on changing negative gender stereotypes. Within the law are 35 articles outlining specific policies on everything

from outlawing gender discrimination in schoolbooks and the workplace to buying goods and services.

## 2. 'Equal Pay For Equal Work' Is Mandatory, Almost.

When Icelanders found out it would be another 122 years before they closed the gender pay gap at the current rate, that was unacceptable. Lawmakers took action, announcing on International Women's Day that Iceland would require companies to prove they pay employees equal rates for equal work, or pay a fine.

Parliament is expected to pass a bill making Iceland the first country to outlaw make gender wage discrimination. The government expects the law to come into effect by 2020.

Currently women make between 14 and 18 percent less than men.

"We want to break down the last of the gender barriers in the workplace," said Thorsteinn Viglundsson, Iceland's social affairs and equality minister. "History has shown that if you want progress, you

*The ministry of  
gender equality, as in  
Harry Potter, is magic.  
But unlike the fictional  
novel, this ministry  
is real.*

need to enforce it."

## 3. Corporate Boards Must Include at Least 40 Percent Women.

After the shocking corruption and financial collapse in 2009, the government made an effort to include more women in seats of power to reduce corruption. They also prosecuted those responsible for the financial crisis, unlike in the United States.

Article 15 of the Act on Equal Status

Women formed the core of the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong spy, liaison, and distribution networks. Basket by yoked basket, women slipped supplies into locations dangerously close to American bases. Mental picture by mental picture, overheard conversation by overheard conversation, they absorbed information about the enemy and carried it away.

The woman I met on the My Lai Road, the women who cleaned the American military base, and thousands of other women served the cause of revolution as valiantly as their male counterparts. Yet even today, more than 20 years after the war's end, their contribution remains largely unrecognized.

*From Still Hiding: A Personal Essay by Lady Borton.*



*Unnur Brá, the Icelandic MP who breastfed her baby in parliament, with the former president of Iceland and other politicians.*

and Equal Rights of Women and Men states that no public company board or government council or committee may have less than 40 percent female representation.

The law also states that any company with more than 25 employees must have a gender equality program in place, which will review goals every three years.

## 4. Best Parental Leave Policy in the World.

Iceland has the best maternity/paternity policy in the world. The official law, created in 2000, is known as the Icelandic Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave. The law itself was amended in 2006 increasing parental leave from six to nine months. The government covers parental leave for birth, adoption, and foster care for all employees in Iceland, even those who are self-employed, and pays new parents 80 percent of their earned salary. Parents split the time of leave equally to ensure that children grow up with equal care from both parents, and workplaces are balanced. The policy is truly the gold standard of parental care.

## 5. From Preschool to College, Kids Learn Gender Equality Matters.

After kids grow up with equal time from parents, gender equality lessons don't stop. Article 23 of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men mandates that gender equality must be taught in schools throughout all levels of education.

That means from early education through university, which is free, all sports, classes, and forms of schooling must include and practice gender equality. Iceland has no time for sexist books or assignments either.

The law states: "Educational materials and textbooks shall be designed in such a way as not to discriminate against either sex." So you would never see an assignment, like the school in Utah, which forced girls to go on dates with male classmates, telling girls to "keep it to yourself" if they feel fat.

## 6. Paying For Sex and Strip Clubs Are Illegal. Prostitutes Are Victims.

Paying for sex is illegal in Iceland. It has been for decades. The difference, however, is in 2007 the government amended the law arguing that most people who

turn to soliciting sex have no other option or were coerced by others.

So instead of penalizing victims of poor circumstances who are often forced into prostitution, the law places criminalization on those who pay for sex, and third parties involved.

The country also banned strip clubs in 2009 for feminist reasoning. The revised law states no business may profit from nudity of employees. The law passed with full support in parliament.

"It is not acceptable that women or people in general are a product to be sold," said Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir who proposed the ban on strip clubs.

This applies to public advertising too. No ad may belittle any gender or go against the country's fierce mission to achieve gender equality.

## 7. There Is a Magical 'Ministry of Gender Equality.'

Ironically, the caveat to achieving gender equality for Nordic countries is taking it for granted.

"Our biggest challenge is taking equality for granted. We relax too much. We think everything is done for good. This worries me," said Gro Bruntland, Norway's first female prime minister.

Fortunately, in Iceland, there's a ministry to complacency on gender equality. The ministry of gender equality, as in Harry Potter, is magic. But unlike the fictional novel, this ministry is real.

The country created agency to check and balance progress on advancing equality as part of a revision to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men. The agency includes a three-part council that comprises the Equal Status Council, the Complaints Committee, and a new Centre for Gender Equality.

Together these agencies research, advertise, advocate, and check laws on gender equality. Their goal is to create a legal, cultural, historical, social and psychosocial approach to gender equality.

*Global Citizen and CHIME FOR CHANGE are campaigning to eradicating discriminatory laws that hold girls and women back with #LevelTheLaw. Iceland sets the bar high, but they also prove changing the law works to create equal opportunities.*

## Two Women

*... continued from previous page*

ten chatted with these women and knew that many of them lived near the My Lai Road. The maids flirted unabashedly as the MPs checked their empty baskets for contraband. What fools those MPs are, I thought. Doesn't it occur to the them that the contraband these women carry is information hidden inside their heads? Don't the MPs realize that their flirtatious cleaning maids probably pace off warehouse measurements while they sweep, memorize shipments they unload, and note details of any unusual activity?

In the years since, I've checked out my guesses, and learned that I was right.

## End of Empire

... continued from page 7

ists. We have exercised in the Middle East the U.S. military's penchant for widespread atrocities, indiscriminate violence, lies, and blundering miscalculations, actions that led to our defeat in Vietnam.

The brutality abroad is matched by a growing brutality at home. Militarized police gun down mostly unarmed, poor people of color and fill a system of penitentiaries and jails that hold a staggering 25 percent of the world's prisoners although Americans represent only 5 percent of global population. Many of our cities are in ruins. Our public transportation system is a shambles. Our educational system is in steep decline and being privatized. Opioid addiction, suicide, mass shootings, depression and morbid obesity plague a population that has fallen into profound despair. The deep disillusionment and anger that led to Donald Trump's election—a reaction to the corporate coup d'état and the poverty afflicting at least half of the country—have destroyed the myth of a functioning democracy. Presidential tweets and rhetoric celebrate hate, racism, and bigotry and taunt the weak and the vulnerable. The president in an address before the United Nations threatened to obliterate another nation in an act of genocide. We are worldwide objects of ridicule and hatred. The foreboding for the future is expressed in the rash of dystopian films, motion pictures that no longer perpetuate American



virtue and exceptionalism or the myth of human progress.

“The demise of the United States as the preeminent global power could come far more quickly than anyone imagines,” McCoy writes. “Despite the aura of omnipotence empires often project, most are surprisingly fragile, lacking the inherent strength of even a modest nation-state. Indeed, a glance at their history should remind us that the greatest of them are susceptible to collapse from diverse causes, with fiscal pressures usually a prime factor. For the better part of two centuries, the security and prosperity of the homeland has been the main objective for most stable states, making foreign or imperial adventures an expendable option, usually allocated no more than 5 percent of the domestic budget. Without the financing that arises almost organically inside a sovereign nation, empires are famously

predatory in their relentless hunt for plunder or profit—witness the Atlantic slave trade, Belgium's rubber lust in the Congo, British India's opium commerce, the Third Reich's rape of Europe, or the Soviet exploitation of Eastern Europe.”

When revenues shrink or collapse, McCoy points out, “empires become brittle.”

“So delicate is their ecology of power that, when things start to go truly wrong, empires regularly unravel with unholy speed: just a year for Portugal, two years for the Soviet Union, eight years for France, 11 years for the Ottomans, 17 for Great Britain, and, in all likelihood, just 27 years for the United States, counting from the crucial year 2003 [when the United States invaded Iraq],” he writes.

Many of the estimated 69 empires that have existed throughout history lacked competent leadership in their decline, having ceded power to monstrosities such

as the Roman emperors Caligula and Nero. In the United States, the reins of authority may be in the grasp of the first in a line of depraved demagogues.

“For the majority of Americans, the 2020s will likely be remembered as a demoralizing decade of rising prices, stagnant wages, and fading international competitiveness,” McCoy writes. The loss of the dollar as the global reserve currency will see the United States unable to pay for its huge deficits by selling Treasury bonds, which will be drastically devalued at that point. There will be a massive rise in the cost of imports. Unemployment will explode. Domestic clashes over what McCoy calls “insubstantial issues” will fuel a dangerous hypernationalism that could morph into an American fascism.

A discredited elite, suspicious and even paranoid in an age of decline, will see enemies everywhere. The array of instruments created for global dominance—wholesale surveillance, the evisceration of civil liberties, sophisticated torture techniques, militarized police, the massive prison system, the thousands of militarized drones and satellites—will be employed in the homeland. The empire will collapse and the nation will consume itself within our lifetimes if we do not wrest power from those who rule the corporate state.

*Chris Hedges, spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. This article was originally Published by Truthdig*

## Nuclear Ban

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A word about Korea, given the nuclear tensions between that country and the United States. In 2013, former President and Korean War veteran Jimmy Carter spoke at Lafayette College about the U.S. policy towards North Korea. He traced the current crisis to the Bush administration's repeal of a 1994 agreement with North Korea that assured North Korea would not develop nuclear weapons in exchange for energy and economic aid.

In the early 1990s, Carter was asked by the North Korean leader Kim II Sung to come to North Korea “because,” he said, “no one in the U.S. government would talk to the North Koreans.” After persuading the adverse Clinton administration to allow it, he met with Kim II Sung, who expressed the desire for a peace treaty with the United States and to have the economic embargo lifted against his country. The result of their talks was a successful diplomatic agreement that ended the Korean nuclear weapons program in exchange for lifting an economic embargo and allowing Americans to search for the remains of Korean War veterans.

The Bush administration dismantled that agreement and included North Korea in the “Axis of Evil” countries, making it an explicit target of regime change. North Korea responded by restarting a nuclear weapons program, weapons test-

ing and chest-beating war rhetoric. The Obama administration (and, in lockstep, the Trump administration) ratcheted up war games with South Korea, including a simulated nuclear attack on North Korea. Thus, a small, poor country wasted by its own militarization and the world's militarized superpower are locked in an asymmetric nuclear standoff.

Carter concluded his address at Lafay-

ette College: “I've been there two or three times since the 1994 agreement, and I can tell you what the North Koreans want is a peace treaty with the United States and they want the 60-year economic embargo lifted against their people, so they can have an equal chance to trade and commerce. It's a very paranoid country. They are honestly convinced that the United States wants to attack them and destroy

their country, to eliminate the Communist regime. They make a lot of mistakes, but if the United States would just talk to the North Koreans ... I believe ... we could have peace, and the United States would be a lot better off in the long run.”

*Pat Hynes, a retired environmental engineer and professor of environmental health, directs the Traprock Center for Peace and Justice.*



**Veterans For Peace marches for nuclear disarmament in New York City in 2015. Photo: Ellen Davidson**



# Dismantling Power

## Zapatista Presidential Candidate's Vision to Transform Mexico from Below

By Benjamin Dangl

The Zapatistas and National Indigenous Congress (CNI) held an assembly in May in which they chose María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, a Nahuatl indigenous healer, as their spokesperson and presidential candidate for the 2018 elections in Mexico.

Patricio's candidacy and radical vision for Mexico challenges conventional politics and marks a new phase for the Zapatista and indigenous struggle in the country. The 57-year-old traditional Nahuatl doctor and mother of three from western Mexico is the first indigenous woman to run for the presidency in Mexico.

Patricio joined the struggles related to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1996, when she was involved in the formation of the CNI, a network of indigenous communities in the country. She began helping out sick members of her community with herbal remedies when she was 20 years old. Her skills as a healer were passed down to her from elders in the community and are based on a close relationship with the local ecosystem.

"Back then, there was a shortage of doctors and medicine and the health department had no answers," Patricio told the *Guardian*. "But we have so many plants and so much knowledge from our elders. My grandmother would give us special teas to cure stress, coughs or diarrhea, and they worked. So I thought: why not give herbal remedies to those who can't afford medicine?" Her work as an herbalist has influenced her political views: "The political class only see the earth and our natural resources as means of making money, not things that benefit the community and need protecting."

As a presidential candidate chosen by the CNI and Zapatistas, she is not interested in winning votes, but in grassroots organizing and resisting the destruction that so many communities in Mexico are facing.

"Our participation is for life," she explained at a press conference in Chiapas. "It's to bring together our communities that have been hit hard for years and years and that, I think, right now need to look for a way to keep on existing." Her goal is for Mexicans to "to join forces to be able to destroy this system that is generally finishing us all off."

### A Different Way of Doing Politics

Patricio's candidacy is based on a model of politics that is far removed from the dominant political parties in the country. Indeed, her position is part of a horizontal, communally organized structure that relies on democratic decision-making and governance from the bottom-up.

Though seeking office, Patricio is less of a candidate and more of a spokesperson for the CNI and Zapatistas. She reflects and represents the democratic indigenous governing council, its consultations with com-

munities, and local indigenous customs. One goal of her candidacy is to expand this network and governing model while rejecting the Mexican political system.

This grassroots political structure was described in a communique released by the Zapatistas and CNI released in October of 2016, titled "May the Earth Tremble at its Core." The statement announced the group's decision to participate in the elections with an indigenous woman candidate, and described the communal organization that forms the basis of their political vision, one carried out "collectively" and "from below and to the left":

"We build rebellion from our small local assemblies that combine to form large communal assemblies, ejidal assemblies, Juntas de Buen Gobierno [Good Government Councils], and coalesce as agreements as peoples that unite us under one identity. In the process of sharing, learning, and constructing ourselves as the National Indigenous Congress, we see and feel our collective pain, discontent, and ancestral roots. In order to defend what we are, our path and learning process have been consolidated by strengthening our collective decision-making spaces, employing national and international juridical law as well as peaceful and civil resistance, and casting aside the political parties that have only brought death, corruption, and the buying off of dignity. We have made alliances with various sectors of civil society, creating our own resources in communication, community police and self-defense forces, assemblies and popular councils, and cooperatives;

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*'The political class only see the earth and our natural resources as means of making money, not things that benefit the community and need protecting.'*

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in the exercise and defense of traditional medicine; in the exercise and defense of traditional and ecological agriculture; in our own rituals and ceremonies to pay respect to Mother Earth and continue walking with and upon her, in the cultivation and defense of native seeds, and in political-cultural activities, forums, and information campaigns.

"This is the power from below that has kept us alive. This is why commemorating resistance and rebellion also means ratifying our decision to continue to live, constructing hope for a future that is only possible upon the ruins of capitalism."

Considering this struggle, the CNI and Zapatistas decided to organize a process of consultation with their communities and choose an independent candidate for the presidency. "We confirm that our struggle is not for power, which we do not seek. Rather, we call on all of the originary



Zapatista presidential candidate María de Jesús Patricio Martínez

peoples and civil society to organize to put a stop to this destruction and strengthen our resistances and rebellions, that is, the defense of the life of every person, family, collective, community, or barrio. We make a call to construct peace and justice by reweaving ourselves from below, from where we are what we are." They concluded, "This is the time of dignified rebellion, the time to construct a new nation by and for everyone, to strengthen power below and to the anti-capitalist left..."

### 'Deepen the Cracks'

After the meeting in May of this year that chose Patricio as the spokesperson and candidate, the Zapatistas and CNI released a communique outlining their vision and strategy.

"We do not seek to administer power; we want to dismantle it from within the cracks from which we know we are able," they stated in the communique, entitled

They denounced the myth of democracy in Mexico and pledged to transform the country from below:

"No demand of our peoples, no determination and exercise of autonomy, no hope made into reality has ever corresponded to the electoral ways and times that the powerful call 'democracy.' Given that, we intend not only to wrest back from them our destiny which they have stolen and spoiled, but also to dismantle the rotten power that is killing our peoples and our Mother Earth. For that task, the only cracks we have found that have liberated consciences and territories, giving comfort and hope, are resistance and rebellion."

Echoing this vision, Patricio spoke at a meeting this year in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, of the centrality of women in Mexico's grassroots movements, "the woman who struggles, who organizes, who is invisible and whose voice is not heard, but who has been present during the long history of struggles that we have had, in Mexico as well as in other countries."

She discussed the various women's struggles across Mexico, in Acteal, Yucatán, Veracruz, Michoacán, and Oaxaca, where women are on the front lines against mining, for the liberation of political prisoners, and in search of disappeared family members.

"In spite of everything," she continued, "women have been participating in the process of reconstruction of our communities in a struggle alongside men, alongside children. Sometimes they have been invisible and have been silenced by those in power."

Patricio placed her role as spokesperson and candidate within this wider women's struggle, explaining that her goal is not to win the presidency, but to win "unity below, the unity between communities and other sectors that are tired of this structure that we have, and want to build a new structure from below."

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"The Time Has Come." They explained that their goal was to "deepen the cracks" that workers and activists have made in the political system and Mexican society, and to dismantle "power from above from the smallest level to the largest. We want to make so many cracks that they become our honest and anti-capitalist government."

"The political class has dedicated itself to turning the State into a corporation that sells off the land of the originary peoples, campesinos, and city dwellers, that sells people as if they were just another commodity to kill and bury like raw material for the drug cartels, that sells people to capitalist businesses that exploit them until they are sick or dead," the statement explained. "In the midst of this revulsion they continue to tell us to vote for them, to believe in the power from above, to let them continue to design and impose our destiny."

# Palestine: 'The Greatest Moral Issue of Our Time'

[Editor's note: This is an abridged version of John Pilger's address to the Palestinian Expo in London in July. Pilger's film *Palestine Is Still the Issue* can be viewed at [johnpilger.com](http://johnpilger.com).]

## By John Pilger

When I first went to Palestine as a young reporter in the 1960s, I stayed on a kibbutz. The people I met were hard-working, spirited and called themselves socialists. I liked them.

One evening at dinner, I asked about the silhouettes of people in the far distance, beyond our perimeter.

"Arabs," they said, "nomads." The words were almost spat out. Israel, they said, meaning Palestine, had been mostly wasteland, and one of the great feats of the Zionist enterprise was to turn the desert green.

They gave as an example their crop of Jaffa oranges, which was exported to the rest of the world. What a triumph against the odds of nature and humanity's neglect.

It was the first lie. Most of the orange groves and vineyards belonged to Palestinians who had been tilling the soil and exporting oranges and grapes to Europe since the 18th century. The former Palestinian town of Jaffa was known by its previous inhabitants

crushed cars and demolished houses, to the Palestinian Cultural Center. Until that morning, Israeli soldiers had camped there.

I was met by the center's director, the novelist Liana Badr, whose original manuscripts lay scattered and torn across the floor. The hard drive containing her fiction and a library of plays and poetry had been taken by Israeli soldiers. Almost everything was smashed and defiled. Not a single book survived with all its pages, not a single master tape from one of the best collections of Palestinian cinema.

The soldiers had urinated and defecated on the floors, on desks, on embroideries and works of art. They had smeared feces on children's paintings and written—in shit—"Born to kill."

Liana Badr had tears in her eyes, but she was unbowed. She said, "We will make it right again."

What enrages those who colonize and occupy, steal and oppress, vandalize and defile is the victims' refusal to comply. And this is the tribute we all should pay the Palestinians. They refuse to comply. They go on. They wait—until they fight again. And they do so even when those governing them collaborate with their oppressors.

In the midst of the 2014 Israeli bombardment of Gaza, the Palestinian journalist Mohammed Omer never stopped reporting. He and his family were

comply with their oppressors: Israel, the United States, Britain, the European Union.

Since 2008, Britain alone has granted licenses for export to Israel of arms and missiles, drones, and sniper rifles, worth \$559 million.

Those who have stood up to this, without weapons, those who have refused to comply, are among Palestinians I have been privileged to know:

My friend, the late Mohammed Jarella, who toiled for the United Nations agency UNRWA, in 1967 showed me a Palestinian refugee camp for the first time. It was a bitter winter's day and schoolchildren shook with the cold. "One day ..." he would say. "One day ..."

Mustafa Barghouti, whose eloquence remains undimmed, who described the tolerance that existed in Palestine among Jews, Muslims, and Christians until, as he told me, "the Zionists wanted a state at the expense of the Palestinians."

Dr. Mona El-Farra, a physician in Gaza, whose passion was raising money for plastic surgery for children disfigured by Israeli bullets and shrapnel. Her hospital was flattened by Israeli bombs in 2014.

Dr. Khalid Dahlan, a psychiatrist, whose clinics for children in Gaza—children sent almost mad by Israeli violence—were oases of civilization.

Fatima and Nasser are a couple whose home stood in a village near Jerusalem designated "Zone A and B," meaning that the land was declared for Jews only. Their parents had lived there; their grandparents had lived there. Today, the bulldozers are laying roads for Jews only, protected by

Brussels and Sydney?

In Syria, a recent liberal cause—a George Clooney cause—is bankrolled handsomely in Britain and the United States, even though the beneficiaries, the so-called rebels, are dominated by jihadist fanatics, the product of the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the destruction of modern Libya.

And yet, the longest occupation and resistance in modern times is not recognized. When the United Nations suddenly stirs and defines Israel as an apartheid state, as it did this year, there is outrage—not against a state whose "core purpose" is racism but against a U.N. commission that dared break the silence.

"Palestine," said Nelson Mandela, "is the greatest moral issue of our time."

Why is this truth suppressed, day after day, month after month, year after year?

On Israel—the apartheid state, guilty of a crime against humanity and of more international lawbreaking than any other—the silence persists among those who know and whose job it is to keep the record straight.

On Israel, so much journalism is intimidated and controlled by a groupthink that demands silence on Palestine while honorable journalism has become dissidence: a metaphoric underground.

A single word—"conflict"—enables this silence. "The Arab-Israeli conflict," intone the robots at their teleprompters. When a veteran BBC reporter, a man who knows the truth, refers to "two narratives," the moral contortion is complete.

There is no conflict, no two narratives, with their moral fulcrum. There is a military occupation enforced by a nuclear-armed power backed by the greatest military power on earth; and there is an epic injustice.

The word "occupation" may be banned, deleted from the dictionary. But the memory of historical truth cannot be banned: of the systemic expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland. "Plan D," the Israelis called it in 1948.

The Israeli historian Benny Morris describes how David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, was asked by one of his generals: "What shall we do with the Arabs?"

The prime minister, wrote Morris, "made a dismissive, energetic gesture with his hand." "Expel them!" he said.

Seventy years later, this crime is suppressed in the intellectual and political culture of the West. Or it is debatable, or merely controversial. Highly paid journalists eagerly accept Israeli government trips, hospitality, and flattery, then are truculent in their protestations of independence. The term, "useful idiots," was coined for them.

In 2011, I was struck by the ease with which one of Britain's most acclaimed novelists, Ian McEwan, a man bathed in the glow of bourgeois enlightenment, accepted the Jerusalem Prize for literature in the apartheid state.

Would McEwan have gone to Sun City in apartheid South Africa? They gave prizes there, too, all expenses paid. McEwan justified his action with weasel words about the independence of "civil society."

Propaganda—of the kind McEwan

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*The Congress of South African Trade Unions sees clear parallels between the struggle against South African apartheid and the fight for Palestinian liberation. Photo: Ellen Davidson*

as "the place of sad oranges."

On the kibbutz, the word "Palestinian" was never used. Why, I asked. The answer was a troubled silence.

All over the colonized world, the true sovereignty of indigenous people is feared by those who can never quite cover the fact, and the crime, that they live on stolen land.

Denying people's humanity is the next step—as the Jewish people know only too well. Defiling people's dignity and culture and pride follows as logically as violence.

In Ramallah, following an invasion of the West Bank by the late Ariel Sharon in 2002, I walked through streets of

stricken; he queued for food and water and carried it through the rubble. When I phoned him, I could hear the bombs outside his door. He refused to comply.

Mohammed's reports, illustrated by his graphic photographs, were a model of professional journalism that shamed the compliant and craven reporting of the so-called mainstream in Britain and the United States. The BBC notion of objectivity—amplifying the myths and lies of authority, a practice of which it is proud—is shamed every day by the likes of Mohamed Omer.

For more than 40 years, I have recorded the refusal of the people of Palestine to

laws for Jews only.

It was past midnight when Fatima went into labor with their second child. The baby was premature, and when they arrived at a checkpoint with the hospital in view, the young Israeli soldier said they needed another document.

Fatima was bleeding badly. The soldier laughed and imitated her moans and told them, "Go home." The baby was born there in a truck. It was blue with cold and soon, without care, died from exposure. The baby's name was Sultan.

For Palestinians, these will be familiar stories. The question is: Why are they not familiar in London and Washington,

# Gaza Power Wars



Gaza's only power plant burns during the 2014 Israeli assault.

## By Mohammad Arafat

Everyone who follows news about Gaza (which sometimes I think are very few) knows how short we are on electricity, a commodity that is so basic most other people around the world take it for granted. These days, we are “blessed” with only about four hours of power a day—forcing every aspect of our life to be calibrated according to when we have electricity.

Gaza has only one power plant of its own, which runs on fuel purchased from Israel, supplemented by the Egyptian electrical grid when available and donations from countries such as Turkey and Qatar. However, the power plant can only run at reduced capacity, since it has been damaged repeatedly in past wars, with repair parts not allowed in due to the Israeli blockade. In addition, each link in the supply chain is at the mercy of politics and manipulation—and the result is a chronic shortage, with Gaza's two million people the victims.

What most people don't know, however, is that if allowed, Gaza could be energy independent: It has its very own gas field, off the coast in the Mediterranean. While surfing the internet, I found a 17-year-old article about the field, reporting that the late Palestinian president, Yasser

Arafat, had given the green light to start gas exploration. “This gas field is a gift from God,” Arafat said in 2000. “In this historic moment, I feel that God is helping us despite the obstacles we have, and this gas field is a gift from him for the people of Palestine and our future generations.”

Discovered 28 years ago, the Gaza Marine Gas Field is located 19–22 miles off the coast, at a depth of 1950 feet.

*[I]f allowed, Gaza could be energy independent: It has its very own gas field, off the coast in the Mediterranean.*

The field's estimated reserves are about one trillion cubic feet. That's not large enough to allow Palestinians to export, but it could allow us to be self-sufficient—providing electricity as well as cooking gas.

Arafat also believed the field would lead to peace be-

tween Palestinians and Israelis “because this will make Palestinians depend on themselves and self-sufficient.” And in fact, the president of the Palestinian Power Authority at the time, Abdul Rahman Hamad, expected that extraction would start in 2003. In preparation, a license for exploration and production was awarded to BG Group, a major British oil and gas company.

Unfortunately, the First Intifada ignited in September 2000, and Israeli forces prevented Palestinian access to the gas field (in contravention of the 20-mile Palestinian zone of control set by the 1993 Oslo Agreements). That blockade continued when Hamas won control of the Gaza Strip. According to Al-Shabaka, Israel initially prevented the development of the field to assure it could buy the gas on commercially favorable terms. It was only later, after Israel discovered its own resources, that it began citing “security concerns” as an excuse for preventing development.

Many Palestinian officials and journalists argue that the gas field was a driving force behind Israel's three wars against Gaza, with one of the goals to prevent Palestinians from having independent energy resources—and thus, taking a key step toward real independence.

A confrontation now is brewing, since one of the first steps of the Palestinian consensus government is to develop a plan to capitalize on this treasure. Developing the field would cost an estimated \$1.4 billion, while saving Palestinians about \$8 billion per year.

“We are finalizing all of the needed procedures to start extracting gas from the field,” says the acting head of the Palestinian Power Authority, Zafer Melhem. Although BG has since been acquired by Shell, which announced its plans to withdraw from the project this year, Palestinian government officials say they are forging new deal with a Greek company.

Zafer says the extracted gas will be used to generate electricity for both Gaza and the West Bank (through a plant in Jenin), and will be available by 2020.

Yet, Israeli authorities hindered installing gas pipes in the station recently, and it needed to only use its own pipes for transferring the gas.

The bottom line: Independence is the dream of every Palestinian. We could achieve that if allowed; we have everything we need. But will we be allowed to breathe on our own, or kept on life support?

*Originally published at wearenotnumbers.org.*

*Mohammad Arafat, 22, is a graduate of the Islamic University of Gaza, where he studied English. He aspires to be “a voice for Palestine, expressing the people's hopes and pains.” Mohammad has self-published his book, Still Living There, which he distributes through Amazon.*

# I've Never Seen Gaza So Devastated

## By Abby Smardon

I've visited the Gaza Strip for each of the past six years, including in 2014 a few months after Israel's devastating military assault. And yet, I've never seen Gaza like I did when I had the privilege of visiting this summer.

I call it a privilege because, due to the blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel (with the support of Egypt), which is part of Israel's now 50-year-old military rule over Palestinians in the occupied territories, internationals allowed in and out of Gaza are few, and Palestinians even fewer. This illegal land, air, and sea blockade, which has just entered its 10th year and amounts to collective punishment, as has been noted by the United Nations and human rights groups, has decimated the economy of Gaza and allowed for the near complete destruction of critical infrastructure. Experts use the term “de-development” to describe this once bustling Mediterranean coastal enclave of two million Palestinians.

Nearly half the population is now unemployed and 80 percent rely on humanitarian assistance from orga-

nizations like UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Nearly one million refugees require UNRWA food assistance now, up from 80,000 people in 2000, before the blockade was in place. At its heart, UNRWA is a human development agency, running the largest and one of the best-performing public school system in the entire Middle East, 10 times the size of Washington, D.C., public schools. But due to decades of Israel's dispossession, occupation, and systematic oppression of Palestinians, UNRWA is forced to prioritize emergency interventions like food assistance and emergency protection. It's an affront to humanity.

Upon arriving in Gaza, which requires a permit from Israel and extensive humanitarian coordination, I immediately saw the crippling effects of the ongoing electricity crisis which has been wreaking havoc since March. Electricity is now only available for 2–4 hours a day, a situation that has been exacerbated by internal Palestinian political divides. This has brought life to a near complete stop for many in Gaza, and has enormous public health

and environmental implications. In 2012, the United Nations determined that if trends continued, Gaza wouldn't be liveable in 2020. Today, the effects of the blockade, recurring violence, and now the electricity crisis have led the United Nations to conclude that Gaza is basically already unlivable.

The first day of my visit, I visited a water pumping station at Al-Shati refugee camp by the coast. There, I witnessed raw sewage pumping directly into the water. The sewage would normally flow to a treatment plant, but without electricity, that's not an option. Instead, it pumps directly into the sea, not far from where people swim and fish. Their fish will be contaminated, just like their water. The sea, which is at the heart of Gazan culture, now poisons them. Despite more than 65 percent of the shoreline being unsafe for humans, people continue to go to the beach because it's the only source of relief left during the sweltering summer.

At an UNRWA health clinic, I met with doctors and nurses who are facing the challenges of the electricity crisis both at work and home. A nurse shared with me that she wakes up at 2 a.m. to do her family's laundry because that's usually when she has electricity. A doc-

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## Gaza Devastation

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tor told me that he only gets 3–4 hours of rest each night because the heat keeps him awake. Regardless of their personal struggles, they both come to the clinic every day committed to providing quality healthcare for their fellow Palestine refugees.

Because the medical equipment runs on a different current than the clinic's back-up generator, x-ray, ultra-

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*[A]t least 30 hospitals, 70 primary health care centers, and a blood bank in Gaza are at severe risk of full or partial closure due to continued power outages.*

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sound, lab testing machines and others aren't able to run at full capacity, and the machines will break down much sooner than they should. The World Health Organization warns that at least 30 hospitals, 70 primary health care centers, and a blood bank in Gaza are at severe risk of full or partial closure due to continued power outages and not enough fuel or spare parts for backup generators. It's a health catastrophe in the making.

Skin rashes from heat and bacterial infections, potentially from direct exposure to sewage, are on the rise. In August, it was reported that a five-year-old boy in Gaza died from a brain disease caused by bacteria in the contaminated sea.

Cases of psychosomatic illnesses and psychological stress continue to increase too, particularly among children.

An UNRWA counselor I met shared the story of an 11-year-old girl who had recently attempted suicide. One man told me they continue to swim and fish despite the dangers because death would be a relief at this point.

With the stress of simply surviving as great as it is, it's not surprising that many have little energy left to have hope for the future. The two million people in Gaza are the victims of cruel politics—collateral damage in a cyn-

ical political game.

Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip deserve humanitarian support, but no amount of assistance will ever substitute for the necessary political action, including that of the United States, to stop the violation of human rights that Palestinians face on a daily basis. Lifting the blockade on Gaza would be a start.

*Originally published on Mondoweiss.*

*Abby Smardon is executive director of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) USA National Committee.*



**Sewage in Gaza. It poisons the sea but Gazans have no choice but to go down to the water.**

## Palestine

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delivered, with its token slap on the wrists for his delighted hosts—is a weapon for the oppressors of Palestine. Like sugar, it insinuates almost everything today.

Understanding and deconstructing state and cultural propaganda is our most critical task. We are being frogmarched into a second cold war, whose eventual aim is to subdue and Balkanize Russia and intimidate China.

When Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin spoke privately for more than two hours at the G-20 meeting in Hamburg, apparently about the need not to go to war with each other, the most vociferous objectors were those who have commandeered liberalism, such as the Zionist political writer of the *Guardian*.

“No wonder Putin was smiling in Hamburg,” wrote Jonathan Freedland. “He knows he has succeeded in his chief objective: he has made America weak again.” Cue the hissing for Evil Vlad.

These propagandists have never known war, but they love the imperial game of war. What Ian McEwan calls “civil society” has become a rich source of related propaganda.

Take a term often used by the guardians of civil society—“human rights.” Like another noble concept, “democracy,” “human rights” has been all but emptied of its meaning and purpose.

Like “peace process” and “road map,” human rights in Palestine have been hijacked by Western governments and the corporate NGOs they fund and which claim a quixotic moral authority.

So when Israel is called upon by governments and NGOs to “respect human rights” in Palestine, nothing happens, because they all know there is nothing to fear; nothing will change.

Mark the silence of the European Union, which accommodates Israel while refusing to maintain its commitments to the people of Gaza—such as keeping the lifeline of the Rafah border crossing open: a measure it agreed to as part of its role in the cessation of fighting

in 2014. A seaport for Gaza—agreed by Brussels in 2014—has been abandoned.

The U.N. commission I have referred to—its full name is the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia—described Israel as, and I quote, “designed for the core purpose” of racial discrimination.

Millions understand this. What the governments in London, Washington, Brussels, and Tel Aviv cannot control is that humanity at street level is changing perhaps as never before.

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*Propaganda ... is a weapon for the oppressors of Palestine. Like sugar, it insinuates almost everything today.*

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People everywhere are stirring and are more aware, in my view, than ever before. Some are already in open revolt. The atrocity of Grenfell Tower in London has brought communities together in a vibrant almost national resistance.

Thanks to a people's campaign, the judiciary is today examining the evidence of a possible prosecution of Tony Blair for war crimes. Even if this fails, it is a crucial development, dismantling yet another barrier between the public and its recognition of the voracious nature of the crimes of state power—the systemic disregard for humanity perpetrated in Iraq, in Grenfell Tower, in Palestine. Those are the dots waiting to be joined.

For most of the 21st century, the fraud of corporate power posing as democracy has depended on the propaganda of distraction: largely on a cult of “me-ism” designed to disorientate our sense of looking out for others, of acting together, of social justice and internationalism.

Class, gender, and race were wrenched apart. The personal became the political and the media the message. The promotion of bourgeois privilege was presented as “progressive” politics. It wasn't. It never is. It is the

promotion of privilege, and power.

Among young people, internationalism has found a vast new audience. Look at the support for Jeremy Corbyn and the reception the G-20 circus in Hamburg received. By understanding the truth and imperatives of internationalism, and rejecting colonialism, we understand the struggle of Palestine.

Mandela put it this way: “We know only too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”

At the heart of the Middle East is the historic injustice in Palestine. Until that is resolved, and Palestinians have their freedom and homeland, and Israelis and Palestinians have equality before the law, there will be no peace in the region, or perhaps anywhere.

What Mandela was saying is that freedom itself is precarious while powerful governments can deny justice to others, terrorize others, imprison and kill others, in our name. Israel certainly understands the threat that one day it might have to be normal.

That is why its ambassador to Britain is Mark Regev, well known to journalists as a professional propagandist, and why the “huge bluff” of charges of anti-Semitism, as Ilan Pappé called it, was allowed to contort the Labour Party and undermine Jeremy Corbyn as leader. The point is, it did not succeed.

Events are moving quickly now. The remarkable Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign (BDS) is succeeding, day by day; cities and towns, trade unions and student bodies are endorsing it. The British government's attempt to restrict local councils from enforcing BDS has failed in the courts.

These are not straws in the wind. When the Palestinians rise again, as they will, they may not succeed at first—but they will eventually if we understand that they are us, and we are them.

*John Pilger is an Australian journalist and documentary filmmaker based in the United Kingdom. He has written for The Guardian, The Independent, The New York Times, and The Los Angeles Times, among other publications.*

# Kill-Chain

By Denny Riley

Since Thomas Friedman backed our invasion of Iraq he is not a pundit I'd expect anyone to turn to for an opinion, but it happens. The U.S. Air Force recently let Friedman into an area where highly classified work was under way.

He wrote a column about it called "Many Shades of the U.S. at War."

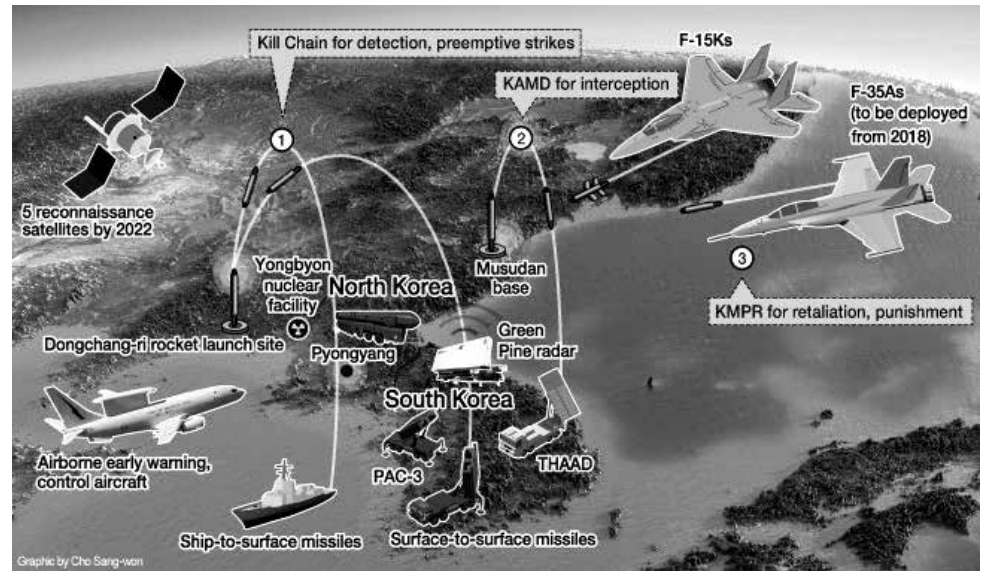
He says, "The first contrast was summed up in two wall-size digital maps at our Kuwait-based command center for the war on ISIS. One map displays every military aircraft the United States has in the skies over Syria and Iraq (as well as Russian, Syrian and Iranian aircraft) pounding ISIS targets. There are little symbols for B-52s, U-2s, F-16s, F-22s, F-15s, MQ-9 Reapers and jet refuelers. It is a giant aerial armada, a flying killer symphony orchestrated by the U.S. Air Force."

I worked in such a room in 1966, but not at command level, and not with computerized wall panels. It was the Target Room of the 388 Tactical Fighter Wing. We had F-105 Thunder Chiefs, or Thunder Hogs, or Thuds. Our mission was the bombardment of North Vietnam and Laos, striking targets whose coordinates were sent to us late at night by 7th Air Force in Saigon. Four other Thud wings from four other bases shared the job. So many F-105s attacked North Vietnam for so many years the mountain range that runs parallel to the Red River was known as Thud Ridge.

Before I was sent overseas I was in a Strategic Air Command bomb wing. Our B-47s were loaded with nukes aimed at the Soviet Union. Operations and Intelligence is always top heavy with officers because highly classified material needs an officer present, yet I did the same work as majors and lieutenant colonels. These majors and lieutenant colonels, who seemed old to me then, had been bomber crew members in WWII. They'd flown raids over Europe. Several had been shot down, one twice.

All of this took place before the invention of devices like the computerized wall maps Friedman saw in Kuwait. The crew members of the Strategic Air Command B-47s, and the pilots of the F-105 Thuds, took maps and target photos with them when they climbed up into their birds, the target materials prepared by the airmen in the Target Room. Maps and charts, scissors and rubber cement, felt-tipped markers and an ability to read coordinates were how we did it. On the wall of the F-105 Target Room was a big map of Southeast Asia covered in Plexiglas. Every grave shift a sergeant with a grease pencil drew the ingress and egress of all that day's sorties.

At the Strategic Air Command the old bomber crew members told WWII war stories as we worked. One day Col. Bonnett said the invention of the Norden Bombsite led to our victory in Europe. I remember hearing that so vividly that I'm inclined to think I heard it over and over. I was young and accepted it as fact. As much as I liked Col. Bonnett, though, I have to tell you he was wrong. Our government spent a fortune in the Norden Bombsite (making the inventor 46th on the list of people who profited from the war) and they were treated as highly classified material but they did not deliver the



pocked the earth around the target but the target was still there.

Forward to today's news. In an analysis story in the *New York Times*, "Talk of 'Preventive War' Rises in White House Over North Korea," Davis E. Sanger wrote, "Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said this week that President Trump had been presented with all military options and would meet threats with a 'massive military response' that would be 'effective and overwhelming.'" In a subsequent article Sanger wrote, "Mr. Mattis's assertion left open the question of whether

with it.

Friedman's amazement at the lit-up maps in Kuwait could translate back 50 years to a journalist visiting our target room and being amazed at how well we cut and glued the target charts for the F-105s. But all the efficiency and precision Friedman and I are talking about is in preparation for the birds taking off, very different from an ability to expend ordnance on a specific coordinate, a particular North Korean command and control center.

This has always been the way of war. To quote Mike Tyson, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." Or read *War and Peace* in which Tolstoy tells us the same thing in thirteen hundred and fifty pages. On D-Day the Allies had 2200 bombers "soften up" Normandy by dropping their payloads on Nazi coastal positions, but the weather was bad so the bombardment was largely ineffectual. Whole landing crafts of GIs didn't make it to the beach. There were a total of some 209,000 allied casualties, with close to 37,000 dead among the ground forces and a further 16,714 deaths among the Allied air forces. The invasion succeeded because between June 6 and August 21, 1944, more than 2,000,000 troops were landed in Northern France.

At the end of WWII, the Soviet Union and the United States divided the Korean peninsula into north and south along the 38th parallel and occupied it. The serious situation we are in now is the residue of that western colonialism. South Korea is 96 percent ethnic Korean. North Korea is over 99 percent ethnic Korean. If they consider themselves two different people, it is we and the Russians who did that. China, with whom North Korea does 85 percent of its trade, doesn't want a problem; they're busy conquering the world peacefully. Sophocles said, "All concerns of men go wrong when they wish to cure evil with evil." At all costs, for the sake of peace, the United States and allies should make Kim Jong-un feel he is not threatened. We should remove our troops and weapons from the Korean peninsula, should remove them from Japan and Okinawa. We should make North Korea a trading partner, we should invest in North Korea. That's the way to peace. Albert Einstein said, "If at first the idea is not absurd then there is no hope for it." Creative thinking involves taking risks.

Denny Riley is a member of VFP Chapter 69 in San Francisco.

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*When I got out in '67 I figured Southeast Asia was going to be a win for our side because we'd already destroyed everything in North Vietnam and Laos of strategic or tactical value, destroyed some of it two or three times.*

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precision bombing promised.

When I got out in '67 I figured Southeast Asia was going to be a win for our side because we'd already destroyed everything in North Vietnam and Laos of strategic or tactical value, destroyed some of it two or three times. But I learned that one third of the ordinance didn't explode, and I remembered bomb damage assessment photos of bridges and ferry crossings where dozens of bomb craters

the United States would, through direct attack or cyber-sabotage, try to destroy North Korea's missiles before they left the launch pad. That, in turn, could trigger a bigger operation—a plan called Kill-Chain that was named in a recent joint statement from the United States and South Korea—to systematically wipe out North Korea's launch sites, nuclear facilities and command and control centers. Its own authors have doubts about whether Kill-Chain could be executed swiftly enough to work, but the decision to publicly refer to it was deliberate, senior officials say. While the plan itself is classified, its goal is a systematic elimination of the North's ability to threaten South Korea, Japan and the United States."

It's generous of the Kill-Chain authors to admit they have doubts about it working. I would have had those doubts no matter how I heard about Kill-Chain. Aerial bombardment has always been a matter of lobbing explosives out of a plane. You might feel I should be reminded we took out two Japanese cities with one bomb each. I know. Those were aerial detonations over populated areas. Several analogies come to mind but it's all too terrible to say more about. I visited Kitty Hawk this summer and came away with a feeling I've had before, that the Wright Brothers figured out how to fly, then the government figured out how to kill people



# Brink of War

... continued from page 1

## War of Words to Potential Military Conflict

In the seven-decade history of the United Nations, never has a head of a member state threatened the total annihilation of another member state. If Charlottesville was a moment when neo-Nazis took off their hoods, then Trump's U.N. speech exposed the U.S. empire's unabashed drive to aggressively dominate those countries it opposes.

When Trump threatened genocide on North Koreans, he failed to mention that the crisis we are in today stems from the fact that the United States unleashed staggering destruction on North Korea during the Korean War. Sometimes referred to as the "Forgotten War," the U.S. onslaught killed millions of Koreans in just three years.

Kim Jong-Un fired back that Trump's threats "have convinced me, rather than frightening or stopping me, that the path I chose is correct and that it is the one I have to follow to the last." Trump tweeted in response, calling Kim Jong-Un "a madman who doesn't mind starving or killing his people" and claiming the North Korean head of state "will be tested like never before."

Trump quickly turned his threats into a display of military confrontation. During the night of Sept. 23, the U.S. Air Force flew B-1 Lancer bombers north of the Military Demarcation Line, technically into North Korean territory, the farthest north U.S. fighter planes have flown in the 21st century. Some speculated that the Trump administration acted unilaterally, when in fact South Korean President Moon Jae-in authorized the flight.

In response, a coalition of major peace organizations representing tens of thousands of South Koreans—including People's Solidarity for People's Democracy, Young Women's Christian Association and Women Making Peace—issued a statement on Sept. 25 protesting the military action. "The Moon Jae-in government should have rejected such military protest," the statement read. Jeong-ae Ahn-Kim of Women Making Peace told *In These Times* that massive protests have been taking place outside the U.S. Embassy in Seoul and will continue.

On Sept. 25, as North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho departed New York, he announced that the United States has "declared war on our country" and that North Korea has the right to defend itself, "including the right to shoot down United States strategic bombers even when they are not inside the airspace border of our country."

### Playing with Fire

Although a military confrontation between the United States and North Korea would be unimaginable, many are beginning to predict how it will unfold. In a terrifying article in *The Los Angeles Times*, Barbara Demick looks at how a U.S. war with North Korea would be fought. Demick begins her fearmongering piece



U.S. Naval Strike Force in the South China Sea

with, "This is the way a nuclear war begins." She quotes Rob Givens, a retired Air Force brigadier general who was stationed in South Korea, as saying: "There is only one way that this war ends. With North Korea's defeat—but at what cost?"

That is the moral quandary the Trump administration is—we can only hope—seriously weighing as it considers military action against North Korea. "When Mr. Trump threatens to annihilate 25 million people in North Korea, he is endangering 51 million South Koreans," said Ahn-Kim of Women Making Peace in South Korea in an email to *In These Times*. "Millions of South Koreans have family in the North. When he threatens

shows me that 10 million people in Seoul don't die in the first 30 minutes from conventional weapons, I don't know what you're talking about, there's no military solution here, they got us."

Yet, administration officials ultimately are not preventing Trump's dangerous escalation. The day before Trump's U.N. speech, when asked if there were any military options that would not endanger Seoul, Secretary of Defense Mattis said, "Yes there are. But I will not go into details."

In recent weeks, there has been a decisive shift by Washington toward military action. Many were hopeful that an off-ramp emerged as a possibility dur-

### Threat of Regional Escalation

Many analysts believe the escalation is fueled, in part, by Japan, whose neo-conservative Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has become Trump's closest foreign ally. In fact, the U.S. government appears to be sidelining South Korea, which is now headed by the liberal Moon Jae-in, who insists that a conflict on the Korean peninsula will not happen under his watch.

Abe was the first foreign dignitary Trump invited to his Mar-o-Lago resort, and it was during this visit that North Korea fired a missile as a message to both Washington and Tokyo. As University of Chicago historian Bruce Cumings said in March, "Basically, 70 or 80 years of history is represented by that particular missile test." Abe's grandfather was Kishi Nobusuke, a Class-A war criminal from World War II who hunted down, imprisoned, and tortured Korean guerrillas fighting for Korean independence from Japanese colonialism. Among them was Kim Il-Sung, the founder of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and grandfather to Kim Jong-Un.

President Moon came into office promising reconciliation between the two Koreas, not quite in alignment with Trump's strategy to choke off Pyongyang. This approach reflects public opinion: In survey after survey, eight out of 10 South Koreans express a desire for peace and reconciliation with their neighbors in the north.

Yet, in reality, Moon has largely gone along with the Trump administration's aggression toward North Korea and China. He installed the U.S. THAAD missile defense system in Seongju, despite earlier promises to conduct a yearlong environmental impact review.

At the same time, Moon has defied calls for complete isolation of North Korea by committing \$8 million to the United Nations for humanitarian aid to North Korea. Moon has also vowed to review his impeached predecessor's bilateral agreement with Abe forgiving Japan's wartime sexual slavery of hundreds of thousands

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*If Charlottesville was a moment when neo-Nazis took off their hoods, then Trump's U.N. speech exposed the U.S. empire's unabashed drive to aggressively dominate those countries it opposes.*

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them, he threatens us."

Even top Trump administration officials acknowledge that U.S. military action would be catastrophic. "It will involve the massive shelling of an ally's capital, which is one of the most densely packed cities on earth," U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis warned Congress in June when asked why Washington wouldn't just go to war with North Korea to prevent it from acquiring the capability to strike the United States. "It will be a war more serious in terms of human suffering than anything we've seen since 1953."

"There's no military solution, forget it," Steve Bannon told Robert Kuttner of *The American Prospect* on his way out of the White House last August. "Until somebody solves the part of the equation that

ing the August U.S.-South Korean "Ulchi Freedom Guardian" war drills, when the United States reduced the number of U.S. troops by 7,500—a sizeable cut from 25,000.

Unfortunately, according to veteran journalist Tim Shorrock, "the key elements of the exercises, including training in 'decapitation strikes' on the North Korean leadership, remained." This led to a counter-reaction from Pyongyang in the form of two missile tests, including over the Japanese island of Hokkaido. On Sept. 2, North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test. It was then that McMaster started "speaking openly of a 'preventive war,'" Shorrock explains, aimed at stopping "North Korea from threatening the United States with a nuclear weapon."

# Brink of War

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of Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and other women and girls.

Yet, the United States, South Korea, and Japan are all on the same page when it comes to profiting from the ongoing Korean conflict. On Sept. 5, Donald Trump tweeted, “I am allowing Japan and South Korea to buy a substantially increased amount of highly sophisticated military equipment from the United States.” Mark Lippert, the former U.S. ambassador to South Korea, now heads government relations for Boeing, to ensure a steady stream of fighter jets to Seoul.

Just as the United States needs the ongoing Korean conflict to sell more weapons, Japan is using the North Korean conflict to justify eliminating its Peace Constitution, including Article 9. According to Kozue Akibayashi, professor at Doshisha University in Kyoto, “Abe is using the North Korean nuclear threat to justify more militarization, such as revoking Article 9, which threatens the security of the entire region.”

## Reviving the U.S. Antiwar Movement

The time is now for mass mobilization and opposition to Trump’s drive for preemptive war on North Korea. According to a poll conducted in September by *The Washington Post* and ABC News, two thirds of Americans oppose a preemptive military strike against North Korea. Now, it’s the peace movement’s role to ensure that the Trump administration is held to account and pursues genuine diplomatic engagement to resolve the standoff.

The Trump Administration will hope-

fully arrive at this conclusion and agree to negotiate a nonaggression pact that would reduce the threat of a North Korean counterattack—and could freeze their nuclear and missile weapons development. But first it must agree to talk with North Korea unconditionally.

The good news is that there is a viable proposal now to freeze North Korea’s nuclear and missile program in exchange for a halt to the U.S.-South Korean military exercises. It was first introduced by Pyongyang and is now backed by China and Russia. According to Kye Chun-yong, the North Korean ambassador to India, “We are willing to talk in terms of freezing nuclear testing or missile testing ... if the American side completely stops big, large-scale military exercises temporarily or permanently, then we will also temporarily stop. Let’s talk about how to solve the Korean issue peacefully.”

Even President Moon’s senior advisor Moon Chung-in has proposed that South Korea consider scaling back the exercises to eliminate the most threatening aspects.

*‘A freeze-for-freeze option is the only remaining viable option to defuse the current crisis. It is actionable and carries relatively little risk. If successful, the payoff could be peace.’*

Many U.S. experts say such a move would be fair and do little—or nothing at all—to weaken the U.S.-South Korean deterrence capability.

A growing number of former U.S. officials support the dual freeze proposal, in-



cluding former State Department official John Merrill, who told PBS, “A freeze-for-freeze option is the only remaining viable option to defuse the current crisis. It is actionable and carries relatively little risk. If successful, the payoff could be peace.”

There is a precedent for halting U.S.-South Korean war exercises. In 1992, George Bush senior suspended the Team

then planned but not executed during the 1994 negotiations that culminated in the Agreed Framework that froze North Korea’s nuclear program for more than eight years. According to former Secretary of Defense William Perry, North Korea could have produced enough plutonium to build 50 nuclear bombs a year.

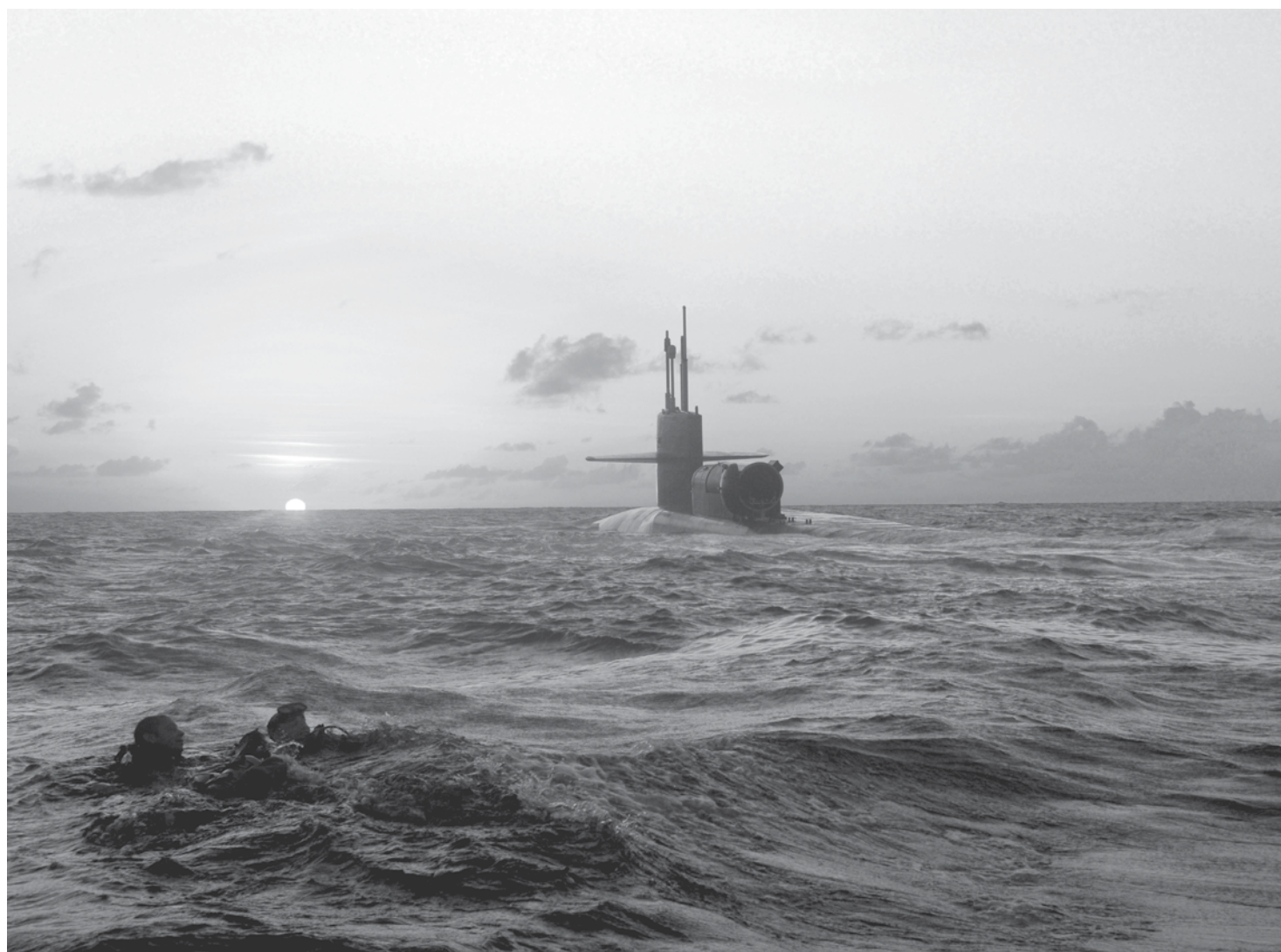
Another step the antiwar movement can take is to urge Congress to rein Trump in by limiting his ability to authorize a first strike on North Korea without congressional approval. Like the Markey-Lieu bill restricting first use of nuclear weapons, such legislation would prevent Trump from initiating military action without congressional authorization.

Time is not on the Trump Administration’s side. Every time North Korea conducts a missile or nuclear test, it is perfecting its ability to strike the U.S. mainland as a deterrent against a military invasion. As Obama acknowledged with Iran, Trump must realize that it is better to freeze North Korea’s nuclear and missile program before it can reach Washington, D.C. Rep. John Conyers, one of two Korean War veterans still in Congress, is spearheading congressional efforts to restrict Trump’s ability to launch a first strike.

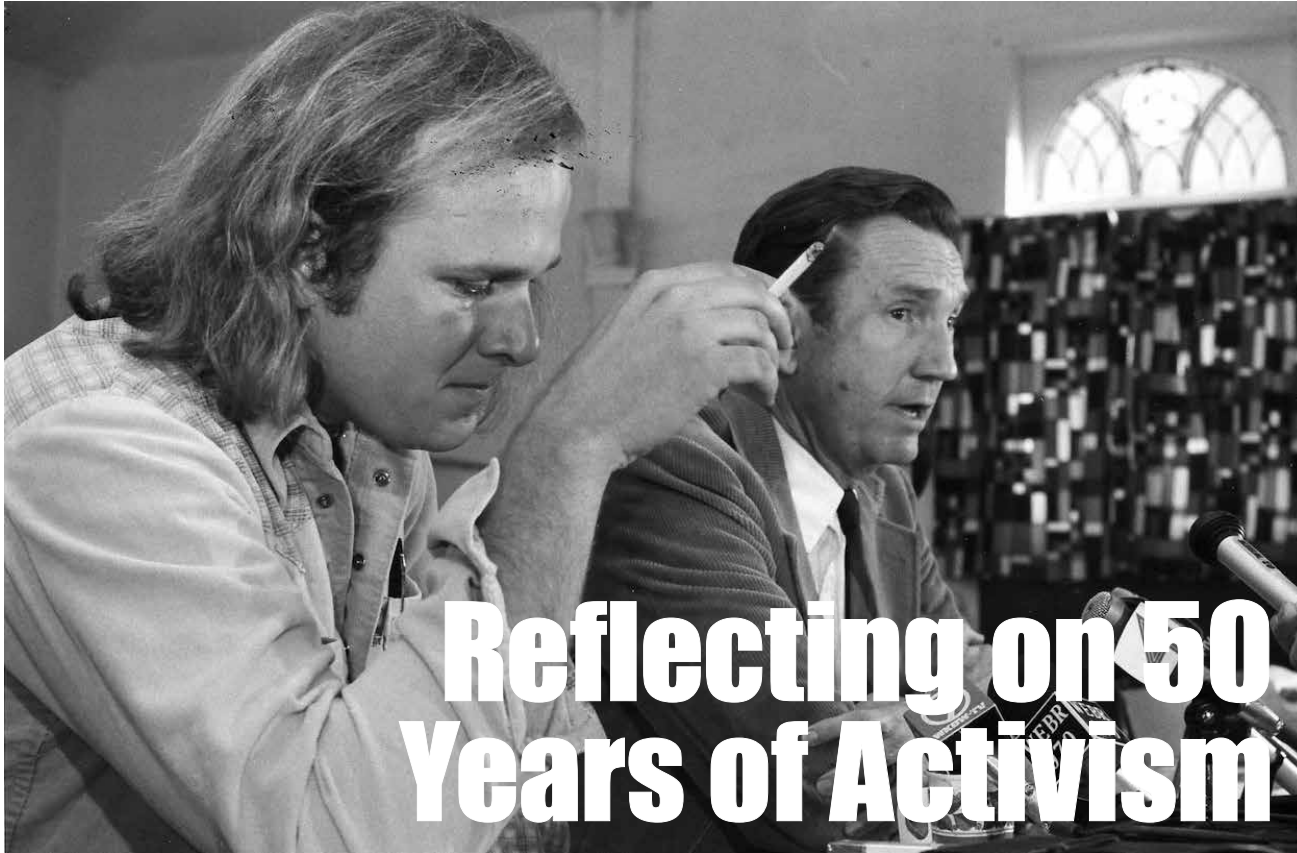
Finally, the U.S. peace movement must push for a final settlement of the unresolved Korean War with a peace treaty. We are in this crisis today because a fragile ceasefire has been in place for 64 years. North Korea is keenly aware of what happened to Iraq, which didn’t possess weapons of mass destruction, and it is not about to become victim to another U.S. military regime-change invasion. Furthermore, Trump’s threats to abrogate the Iran deal aren’t helping persuade the North Korean regime to de-nuclearize.

Pyongyang won’t even consider abandoning its nuclear weapons program as long as it is being threatened with “fire and fury like the world has never seen,” as President Trump has forewarned. Peace and diplomacy are the only way forward, and the first step is dialogue—unconditionally.

*Christine Ahn is the founder and international coordinator of Women Cross DMZ, a global movement of women mobilizing to end the Korean War, reunite families, and ensure women’s leadership in peace building. She is the co-founder of the Korea Policy Institute, Global Campaign to Save Jeju Island, and National Campaign to End the Korean War.*



Divers from SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 1 swim back to guided-missile submarine USS Michigan during exercise off North Korean coast. U.S. Navy photo by Specialist 3rd Class Kristopher Kirsop



**Bruce Beyer and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark on October 20, 1977, just before Beyer returned to the United States to face charges associated with his refusal to submit to the draft.**

### By Bruce Beyer

In 1966, having been thrown out of a private military academy, I barely graduated from Bennett High School in Buffalo, N.Y. My father insisted I attend college and I resentfully spent a year at a junior college before I unceremoniously failed out.

During the summer of 1967 I worked as a night clerk at the Imperial 400 Motel at Main/Summer Streets. It was eventful summer. I was robbed at gunpoint, stumbled on a friend of my parents who was cheating on his wife, became friends with jazz legend Jimmy Smith, and witnessed the police and media response when rebellion broke out on Buffalo's East Side.

Because of its proximity to the East Side, journalists from across the country made the motel their base. Buffalo police used the parking lot as a staging area as they planned forays into the streets. For two days it was like sitting beside a battlefield watching. I began to make connections to the Viet Nam war.

I knew my school failures would lead to being drafted but even my scant knowledge of the war made it sound uninviting. In an effort to avoid ground combat, I enlisted in the Air Force on a delayed entry basis. I read about Viet Nam. I drew parallels between the war and racial injustice but military service loomed large on the horizon.

In late August of 1967 I met a woman involved with antiwar activities. When she heard my plan to enlist she asked if I had ever considered just saying "NO." I had never heard of such a concept, nor had I considered it. Two days later I made the decision to attend an antiwar demonstration in Washington, D.C., and turn in my draft card.

On October 20, 1967, I stood on the steps of the Justice Department and returned my draft card to then-U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark. This act symbolized for me my opposition to the war and my desire to throw off what I came to describe as my "white skin privileges." By this time I came to realize that minorities and white working-class young people were serving while those of us from middle-class backgrounds were allowed an escape through a system of deferments. I would disavow my privileges. If it took going to jail as a way of serving my country then I was prepared to go.

Over the course of the next 10 months, I received three orders to report for induction. I publicly refused each time. Upon receipt of the third order, my friend Bruce Cline and I took symbolic sanctuary in my family church. After a mere 10 days, 32 FBI agents and federal marshals, backed up by 100 Buffalo police officers,

arrived at the church doors demanding my surrender. I refused.

What started out as a nonviolent protest against the war in Southeast Asia ended in a fist-swinging melee. I and eight of my friends were charged with assaulting federal officers in the process of carrying out their official duties. Of the nine of us arrested, four were veterans. William Yates, at age 16, lied about his age and enlisted in the Navy during World War II. He fought as a ground combatant in the Pacific. Ray Malak, Tom O'Connell, and Jim McGlynn all served in Viet Nam.

There were two Buffalo Nine trials. At the end of the first one, I alone stood convicted. At the end of the second trial, Yates and Malak were found guilty. They had refused to stand when Judge John Henderson entered the

courtroom. When ordered to do so, Malak said to the judge, "You don't stand for us, I won't stand for you!" Yates and Malak were immediately hauled off to jail for 30 days for contempt of court.

In 1969, having been convicted for the assault charges, I was out on bail and awaiting trial for having refused induction. My opposition to the war grew more vocal as the body count on both sides rose to staggering proportions. I spoke out at every opportunity I was given. I gave a speech at University of Buffalo after which students destroyed the ROTC offices located in the Clarke Gym. I was charged with inciting a riot, arson, burglary, and conspiracy to incite a riot.

Now facing considerable jail time, I jumped bail and fled the United States. After six months of hiding in Canada, I eventually made my way to Sweden, where I was granted humanitarian asylum. Two years later I married my Canadian girlfriend and we immigrated back to Canada. I lived in Canada for almost five years and began the process of applying for Canadian citizenship.

In the spring of 1977, a friend gave me a copy of a book entitled *Winners and Losers* by New York Times foreign correspondent Gloria Emerson. Reading her book changed my life. I realized that in order for me to resolve

my life, I needed to return to my homeland whatever the consequences.

My parents were getting older, my country was being told to "put the war behind us" by both Presidents Ford and Carter. I decided to come back publicly. I wanted to challenge the notion that the war was over. A government simply cannot engage in the mass murder of over three million people, sacrifice almost 60,000 of its young citizens in the process, and then tell people to put it all behind them. How many billions of dollars were wasted?

In making the decision to return to the United States, I searched for legal advice. The draft refusal charges against me had been dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court. The New York State riot-inciting charges had been dropped. I was facing three years in prison for the assault charges and the possibility of bail-jumping charges were extant.

Friends in the movement for universal unconditional amnesty suggested I contact former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark. I knew that he had been to Ha Noi shortly after leaving office, I knew that he had spoken out strongly against continuation of the war both in private to President Johnson and vociferously upon returning to public life. I phoned him in New York City and he responded, "Bruce, I'm the one who got you into this, I owe you the chance to resolve it."

A week later Mr. Clark flew to Toronto. We sat and got to know each other, talked legal strategy, and philosophy. I took an instant liking to him and when he flew back to New York City that afternoon my resolve to return to the United States was strengthened. I sent out a press release to the *Courier Express* and the *Buffalo Evening News* informing them of my intention to return home. Both newspapers carried the story and a columnist at the *Courier Express*, Michael Healy, wrote a piece entitled "War Protester to Face Music As Sounds of Grim Era Echo."

On October 20, 1977, I came home. Literally holding my hand as we crossed the Peace Bridge was Colonel Ed Miller, the highest-ranking Marine Corp ex-POW, who had spent five years in a Ha Noi prison camp. Ramsey Clark held my other hand. Gold Star mother Patricia Simon, author Gloria Emerson, my father and 50 mostly Viet Nam veterans made up the contingent of walkers. I was arrested at customs, transported to the federal building,

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*A government simply cannot engage in the mass murder of over three million people, sacrifice almost 60,000 of its young citizens in the process, and then tell people to put it all behind them.*

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and brought before Judge John Curtin. He took us into his chambers, looked at the U.S. Attorney, then to Mr. Clark, and turning to me said, "Mr. Beyer, I'm going to let you go home. I'm not going to require you to post bail and I expect you will present yourself in court when required to do so."

I waited a year for Judge Curtin to reach his decision regarding my incarceration. There were infrequent conversations with Ramsey Clark and I was reminded of how I felt after I turned in my draft card and waited for the FBI to come arrest me. In the end, he reduced my sentence from three years to 30 days. I was given "credit" for the 19 days I had already served in 1970. I spent 11 days at the Erie County Correctional Facility.

October 20, 2017. Fifty years since the day I returned my draft card and 40 since I came home.

The President of these United States is now threatening war against another small Southeast Asian country. We already murdered more than a million Korean people in the 1950s and we sacrificed more than 33,000 young American lives doing it. Are we going to continue to walk down this unending road to war?

When will we ever learn?

*Bruce Beyer lives in Western New York with his wife, Mary.*