The great lie of war in action

Time for Peace in Afghanistan

By Matthew Hoh

It has been more than nine years since I resigned in protest over the escalation of the Afghanistan War from my position as a political officer with the U.S. State Department in Afghanistan. It had been my third time to war, along with several years of working in positions affecting war policy in Washington, D.C., with the Department of Defense (DOD) and the State Department. My resignation in 2009 was not taken lightly by my superiors, and my reasons for opposing President Obama’s “surge” in Afghanistan found support among both military officers and civilian officials at senior levels in Kabul and Washington.

I was repeatedly asked not to resign and was offered a more senior position within the State Department. Richard Holbrooke, then the President’s appointed representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, told me he agreed with 95 percent of what I had written and asked me to join his staff, while the U.S. ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, told me my analysis was one of the best he had encountered and stated he would write an introduction endorsing my resignation letter if I remained with the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan for the remainder of my tour. In conversation with the U.S. deputy ambassador to Afghanistan, he agreed the war was not just unwinnable, but also corrupt, and stated he would not let his children serve in such a war. Further support for my views was provided by my counterparts serving as political officers in the most violent parts of Afghanistan: Kandahar, Helmand, Kunar, Nuristan and Oruzgan Provinces. These men and women made clear their agreement with my assessment and my resignation. The support from the military was equally effusive and genuine; often such support included apologies along the lines of “I’d like to resign too, but I’ve got kids heading to college in a few years…” (the golden handcuffs are an instrumental and integral aspect of the U.S. empire’s infrastructure). When I asked Karen DeYoung, the Washington Post correspondent who wrote the front-page, above-the-fold story on my resignation, why she wrote such a piece about me, she replied she could not find anyone at the Pentagon, State Department or White House who disagreed with me.

I relate the above not to cheerlead for myself (although the sadness and despondency from witnessing

A Planet in Crisis: The Heat’s on Us

By Dahr Jamail

I’m standing atop Rush Hill on Alaska’s remote St. Paul Island. While only 665 feet high, it provides a 360-degree view of this tundra-covered, 13-mile-long, seven-mile-wide part of the Pribilof Islands. While the hood of my rain jacket flaps in the cold wind, I gaze in wonder at the silvery waters of the Bering Sea. The ever-present wind whips the surface into a chaos of whitecaps, scudding mist, and foam. The ancient cinder cone I’m perched on reminds me that St. Paul, was, oh so long ago, one of the last places woolly mammoths could be found in North America. I’m here doing research for my book The End of Ice. And that, in turn, brings me back to the new reality in these far northern waters: as cold as they still are, human-caused climate disruption is warming them enough to threaten a possible collapse of the food web that sustains this island’s Unangan, its Aleut inhabitants, also known as “the people of the seal.” Given how deeply their culture is tied to a subsistence lifestyle coupled with the new reality that the numbers of fur seals, seabirds, and other marine life they hunt or fish are dwindling, how could this crisis not be affecting them?
Letters to the Editor

A Bad Choice
To the editor of Peace in Our Times, re: Mencken Prophecy cartoon
I was pleased to see the articles by Chris Hedges in the 2019 edition of Peace in Our Times. Mr. Hedges’s analysis of our society is summed up beautifully in the first sentence of his article on page 3. He wrote: “The idiots take over in the final days of crumbling civilizations.”

On the other hand, the cartoon entitled “Prophecy” with the Mencken quote attacking democracy, misses the point completely. It is not the “perfection of democracy” that has brought us to this stage of deterioration. It is that our democracy was set up by the 1 percent so that it could be turned into what I call corporate totalitarianism. Corrupt and inept leadership in a democracy does not represent what Mencken calls “the inner soul of the people”, it indicates a beaten-down population grasping at straws for help. Why would we struggle to convince people to try and change our system in the teeth of a climate catastrophe, if the goal of a “perfect democracy” is the kind of corrupt, inept leadership we find around us with Trump in the White House?

Trump is Mencken’s idea of where democracy takes us. Mencken was an anti-Semite, a racist, a misogynist, a white supremacist and an elitist. In a book entitled Defending the Master Race by Jonathan Peter Spiro, Mencken presented his elitism in the context of white supremacy, though I am blond and Nordic myself, though I am blond and Nordic myself, is that the genuine member of that great race, at least in modern times, is often indistinguishable from a cockroach.”

In his diary, published 25 years after his death in 1956, Mencken had a very negative view of women and African-Americans. Mencken said: “It is impossible to talk anything resembling discretion or judgment to a colored woman. They are all essentially child-like, and even hard experience does not teach them anything.”

There Oughtta Be a Law
Ilhan Omar, one of two Muslim women elected to Congress, has gone over the line in suggesting that politicians are influenced by money they get from the Israel Lobby. It is OK to say that our leaders are paid off by Big Oil, Big Pharma, and Wall Street. But it is anti-Semitic to imply that the Israel lobby would do such things.

There should be a law making it illegal to reveal how much Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer get from the Israel Lobby. It is anti-Semitic to report that the two of them met recently with multimillionaires Haim Saban and Sheldon Adelson and promised an extensive list of “pro-Israel lawmakers” be appointed to important committees.

Boycotts, although they have a long history of being used against slave owners, Nazis, Jim Crow racists, and homophobes, are simply antisemitic when used against apartheid Israel and should be illegal. In fact, even mentioning the Palestinian People is an attempt to deny that Israel is a Jewish state. Talking about the occupation is antisemitic as well. It is antisemitic to imply that the Israel lobby will do such things.

The effort to stop anti-Semitism has to start with the First Amendment. How dare our Founding Fathers promise freedom of speech and press without some qualifiers? “My impression, if you will, is that of a decaying pillar of our system. Authorities will not do it by mistakenly embracing other forms of racism and elitism no matter where they come from or what they appear to support. Mencken represents another decaying pillar of our system.

Edwin Krales, Chapter 34, January, 2019
Editor’s note: Thank you for pointing this out. We should have been more careful in our image selection.

A Note from the Editors
America’s Collective Amnesia
For a couple of weeks recently I was in the hospital because, it turns out, a cancerous mass had taken up residence in my small bowel ... not good news, especially on your birthday. But I’m in a country with a competent health care system—if expensive and rationed by insurance companies—at a good hospital with excellent care and skilled staff. The mass is removed, weeks of nausea ended, and treatment options are explained. The way to a new life is clear.

On the ride home, however, one thing uppermost in my mind had to be consciously suppressed: the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of people, many of them children, are suffering and dying right now in Iraq from our use of depleted uranium. And what of their journey through illness? Their hospitals, staff, medicines are of what quality? Is pain relief adequate? Electricity to cool the intense summer heat? Water to drink that won’t make them sicker? Family and friends healthy enough and with resources to provide critical support?

And that is “just” one category of just one country the Empire chews up and spits out on a regular basis. The list is long. We target a nation, destroy its economy, rape its environment, lay waste its people, and then … forget about it. Rarely is the nation close enough to our borders that its people, sick enough of the chaos and pain we’ve caused, can actually pound on the door … and no one understands why.

—Mike Ferner

Peace in Our Times
Peace in Our Times is published quarterly by Veterans For Peace. Bundles of 80 are $40 or $25 for 40, and individual subscriptions are $15/year. To donate, subscribe, or order bundles, visit peaceinourtimes.org or send a check to Veterans For Peace, 140 North Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63102. Letters, poems, articles, and images may be submitted to takauff@gmail.com.

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Mike Ferner before being arrested at the White House fence, Dec. 16, 2010.
Photo: Ellen Davidson.

Defending the Master Race
Time to Break the Silence, End NATO’s Militarism

By Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers

Fifty-two years ago on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., gave his most important speech ever, “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence.” King’s conscience drove him to take the unpopular position of publicly criticizing the Vietnam War and putting it in the context of the “great triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism.” The message of that speech remains relevant today because its wisdom has not been heeded.

We put this in the context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because this year on April 4, the anniversary of that speech and the anniversary of the murder of King by the government, NATO will be holding its 70th anniversary meeting in Washington, D.C. Protests and other activities are being planned.

NATO is a front for Western military aggression, which has resulted in destruction around the world, mass deaths, and mass migration as people are forced from their NATO-destroyed communities. It’s time to end it.

Would Dr. King oppose NATO?

The Black Alliance for Peace explains why Dr. King would speak out against NATO if he were alive today:

“Dr. King would be opposed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because it is an instrument of U.S. and European militarism. He would not be confused—and neither are we—about the illusion of the neocolonies, military-industrial complex, corporations and the corporate media that are opposed to ending an anarchistic structure. NATO’s only reason for being today is to serve as the military wing of the dying U.S.-European colonial project.”

Black Alliance for Peace is not alone in seeing the reality of NATO as an aggressive arm of the U.S. military. In the Chicago Tribune, Victor Davis Hanson writes, “In an era when the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact are now ancient history, everyone praises NATO as ‘indispensable’ and ‘essential’ to Western solidarity and European security. But few feel any need to explain how and why that could still be so.”

The truth is that not only is NATO not indispensable or essential—it is counterproductive. It creates conflicts and is being used as an aggressive military tool. Among the wars of NATO are Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Somalia, and Yemen as well as Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, and Yugoslavia.

David Swanson of World BEYOND War describes how NATO works against the rule of law, writing, “NATO is used within the U.S. and by other NATO members as cover to wage wars under the pretense that they are somehow more legal or acceptable.”

When the Soviet Union dissolved, the excuse for NATO ended. Indeed, it is well known that Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders received assurances that NATO would not expand. These assurances came not only from President George H.W. Bush but also from West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, former CIA Director Robert Gates, French leader François Mitterrand; Margaret Thatcher; British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd; and Manfred Woerner, the NATO secretary-general.

Instead of being ended after it no longer served any defensive military purpose, NATO expanded to 29 nations, 13 since the end of the Soviet Union, including countries on the border of Russia. One of the reasons for the U.S. coup in Ukraine was to antagonize Russia and prevent access to its naval fleet through Crimea. Ukraine is now partnering with NATO.

The current U.S. national military strategy calls for conflict with Russia and China. NATO continuously expanding, conducting military exercises and putting missiles, bases, and other military equipment on the Russian border are NATO member-countries are told they must abandon hard-won social programs in order to meet U.S. demands for even more military spending.”

Acting on King’s Clarion Call

In 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., warned, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” He described how militarism was destroying the soul of the United States and called for an end to the Vietnam War. He described in excruciating detail the U.S. destruction of Vietnam, mass bombings, napalm, poisoning of water and land, and the killing of more than a million Vietnamese. He said a foreign policy based on violence and domination abroad leads to violence and domination at home, and he warned that “we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.”

Time has shown the truth of his message as militarized police terrorize poor communities and are used to silence dissent, creating a war at home. Other as well do not face this reality, U.S. militarism would spread throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Today the United States has 883 foreign military bases with troops deployed in 149 countries; it sells or gives weapons to 98 countries. King described how the United States keeps troops in foreign lands to “maintain social stability for our investments accounts.”

He described U.S. imperialism as based on “refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investment.”

King connected the extreme materialism of capitalism to militarization and racism, describing a “thing-oriented” society rather than a “person-oriented” society, where “profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people.” King talked of the new hopes in the nation as the government confronted poverty with new programs to uplift the poor, but said he “watched this program broken and eviscerated” as war funding stole from funding the necessities of the people.

Today, U.S. military spending of more than a trillion dollars—the Pentagon
Trump Moves the World Closer to ‘Doomsday’

By Marjorie Cohn

In 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union adopted the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in an effort to eliminate missiles on hair-trigger alert for nuclear war due to their short flight times. It was the first time the two countries agreed to destroy nuclear weapons. That treaty outlawed nearly 2,700 ballistic or land-based cruise missiles with a range of roughly 300 to 3,000 miles.

The Trump administration thought nothing of pulling out of the INF. On February 2, the United States suspended its obligations under the treaty, starting a dangerous chain reaction that brings us closer to nuclear war. Russia followed suit and pulled out of the treaty the next day. Then the three countries with the largest nuclear arsenals quickly test-launched nuclear-capable missiles. France conducted a test of its medium-range air-to-surface missile on February 4. The next day, the United States fired a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). And an hour and a half later, Russia launched an RS-24 Yars ICBM.

Richard Burt participated in the negotiations of the INF during the Reagan administration. Last fall, he predicted that U.S. withdrawal would lead to Russia’s deployment of intermediate-range missiles and the United States’ development of new sea- and air-based weapons systems. Sure enough, on Feb. 4, Russia’s defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, announced his country’s plans to build mid-range, nuclear-capable missiles within two years.

The INF ban on intermediate-range cruise and ballistic missiles and low-yield warheads now being planned both in Russia and the United States are nothing other than filed-down triggers to all-out thermonuclear war,” Daniel Ellsberg, author of The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner, told Truthout. He warns of “nuclear winter,” which is the end of civilization as we know it. A consultant to the Defense Department and the White House in 1961, Ellsberg drafted Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s plans for nuclear war.

Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, concurs. “Trump has fired the starting pistol on Cold War II. Only this one could be bigger, more dangerous, and the world may not be so lucky this time around.”

Undermining Nuclear Disarmament

The adoption of the INF led to the 1991 signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which considerably reduced the number of long-range strategic nuclear weapons. The New START, signed in 2010, requires the U.S. and Russia to reduce the number of deployed nuclear warheads from a maximum of 2,200 in 2010 to 1,550 in 2018. Trump’s cavalier withdrawal from INF does not portend well for the renewal of New START in 2021.

Moreover, Trump’s Nuclear Posture Review of 2018 would allow the United States to use nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear attacks. This new U.S. policy opens the door to first-use of nuclear weapons, which is prohibited by international law.

The Nuclear Posture Review also violates the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which the United States is a party. This treaty requires parties “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”

Two Minutes to Midnight

In order to convey the urgency of the threat to humanity and the planet, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists created the Doomsday Clock. It uses imagery of the apocalypse (midnight) and a nuclear explosion (countdown to zero). The decision to either move or leave in place the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock is made each year. The Clock is a universally recognized measure of vulnerability to catastrophe caused by nuclear weapons, climate change or other emerging technologies that could pose a threat. On January 24, the Bulletin once again kept the Doomsday Clock at two minutes to midnight. And that was before the U.S. and Russia pulled out of the INF.

“Trump and Putin are both posturing as gunslingers in a Western movie,” Ellsberg warned. “But the weapons in their quick-draw holsters are not pistols; they are doomsday machines. And this is not high noon; it is two minutes to midnight.”

Toward Denuclearization

In his book, Ellsberg proposes the U.S. government undertake the following measures toward the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons:

• A U.S. no-first-use policy;
• Probing investigative hearings on war plans to avoid nuclear winter;
• Eliminating ICBMs;
• Ending the pretense of preemptive damage-limiting by first-strike forces;
• Foregoing profits, jobs and alliance hegemony based on maintaining that pretense; and
• Otherwise dismantling the U.S. nuclear arsenal, which Ellsberg calls the American Doomsday Machine.

On January 30, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, took a good first step. They introduced the No First Use Act, to establish in law that it is the policy of the United States not to fire nuclear weapons first so “that the United States should never initiate a nuclear war.”

The U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) forbids ratifying countries “never under any circumstances to develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” It also prohibits the transfer, use of, or threat to use nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices. The treaty, adopted in 2017, will enter into force after 50 nations have ratified it. Thus far, it has 21 ratifications. But the five original nuclear-armed countries, which also happen to be the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—the U.S., Russia, France, China and the U.K.—did not participate in the treaty negotiations and have not agreed to it.

Resistance against nuclear weapons also takes the form of civil disobedience, such as the recent action by the Kings Bay Plowshares 7.

The Kings Bay Plowshares 7

When I was growing up in the early days of the Cold War, the fear of nuclear annihilation was pervasive. Although U.S. nuclear weapons have been on hair trigger alert for 73 years, “nuclear weapons have become normal,” Patrick O’Neill told Truthout. He and six other...
Carmen Trotta, Prisoner of His Own Conscience

By Mary Reinholz

It's not every day that I get a chance to interview a devout man of faith and derring-do whose religiously inspired activism has put him under house arrest at an East Village soup kitchen and men's shelter run by Catholic Worker volunteers. However, I did just that when I recently sat down with Carmen Trotta, indicted last spring after an anti-nuke protest in the deep South.

There, inside the Catholic Worker's fifth-floor walk-up building on East First Street, his longtime residence, Trotta, 56, wears an ankle monitor and awaits trial out of state. The reason why? Trotta joined six elderly pacifists who, on April 4, broke into the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in Georgia under cover of darkness to protest the anti-ballistic nuclear missiles stored inside the port's Trident submarines, calling them illegal, immoral and an existential threat to the planet.

"To go to the scene of the crime," Trotta told me. He was referring to his Catholic comrades in the radical Plowshares movement who carried bolt cutters, hammers, crime-scene tape, vials of human blood and their own indictment of nuclear weapons. "These weapons are illegal," he insisted. "If they're not illegal, then there is no law."

It took naval officers more than two hours to discover the seven protesters, according to early news reports. A base spokesperson, Scott Basset, flat-out refused to answer my questions on what appeared to be a major breach of security at Kings Bay.

I reminded Trotta that he had broken laws to get inside a 1,700-acre base of the Atlantic Fleet, which has at least six subs that contain missiles with nuclear warheads capable of delivering far more firepower than the U.S. bomb dropped on Hiroshima. "Is it a crime to break into somebody's house if it's burning?" he responded.

In the wake of his April 5 arrest, for which he pleaded not guilty, Trotta—who was named Carmen after his immigrant Italian grandfather—spent about 50 days in a Georgia county jail. He was then released on $1,000 bond. He told me he now faces the possibility of up to 20 years in federal prison.

A court date for his jury trial has yet to be scheduled, so he continues to cook meals for hungry people who come to St. Joseph's House ("St. Joe's") from all over the city. A sturdily built bachelor described as "angelic" by criminal defense lawyer Ron Kuby, who once represented him years ago, Trotta also remains politically active. He's an associate editor for the Catholic Worker newspaper and a member of the executive board of the War Resisters League. Since 2009, he has divided his time between St. Joe's, where he helps feed hungry people from all over the city, and Long Island, where he looks after his 91-year-old widowed father.

Trotta's life changed dramatically when he and his co-defendants were hit with an indictment for alleged criminal conduct at Kings Bay. Among the others are Martha Hennessy, 63, a granddaughter of the late Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Christian anarchist Catholic Worker movement, which is committed to fostering peace and social justice. Day is being considered for sainthood by the Catholic Church.

The aging protesters are being called the Kings Bay Plowshares Seven. They were charged with three felonies, including conspiracy to commit damage on federal property and one misdemeanor for trespassing.

Trotta said their intent was to stage a nonviolent and "symbolic disarmament" of the Trident submarines.

"We wanted to address the single most-lethal weapons on earth," he said. "A single Trident submarine, if it's blasted off, with all it has inside of itself, could drastically change life as we know it on this planet."

Trotta's protest at Kings Bay was his first "non-Gandhian" action under the aegis of Plowshares. A controversial movement, Plowshares takes its name from the biblical prophecy of Isaiah, who called on nations to "beat their swords into plowshares." There have been about 100 raids of nuclear sites since the group's founding in 1980 by the famed Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan and his brother Philip Berrigan.

During a hearing on the case in U.S. District Court in Brunswick, Ga., federal prosecutor Karl Knoche claimed that the movement has created a "cottage industry" for activists seeking to demoralize the U.S. "I believe that they think they are trying to prevent the end of the world," countered Bill Quigley. A prominent civil-rights lawyer and professor at Loyola Law School in New Orleans, Quigley is one of a group of pro bono attorneys representing the Plowshares defendants.

He views them as part of a long tradition of civil disobedience by peace activists "willing to risk arrest and prison" for their beliefs.

On Jan. 16, Quigley filed a brief in Georgia's Southern District Court for dismissal of the charges against the Plowshares defendants. His argument was based on provisions of a little-known federal law called the Religious Freedom Revival Act of 1993.

As for Trotta, who had no prior felonies from his more than 30 arrests over decades of activism, Quigley believes that "realistically" he could spend a year behind bars. Trotta is not that optimistic.

"I'm preparing for five years," he said. "A long time."

This reporter hopes he gets lucky. Originally published by The Villager...

Mary Reinholz is an award-winning New York-based journalist who has written for numerous publications, including The Nation, The New York Times, and Newday. She is a former columnist for the New York Daily News.

Doomsday

… continued from previous page

Catholic activists are facing up to 25 years in prison for their symbolic action to disarm the nuclear weapons on Kings Bay Naval Base in Georgia (see story above). The base is homeport to six nuclear ballistic missile submarines each armed with 16 Trident II missiles. They carried with them a copy of Ellsberg's book and left it on the base.

The defendants, who will likely go to trial this spring, maintain that any use or threat to use nuclear weapons of mass destruction is illegal. Kings Bay Plowshares 7 spokesperson Bill Ofenloch told Truthout. They are also arguing that their prosecution violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. As for Trotta, who had no prior felonies from his more than 30 arrests over decades of activism, Quigley believes that "realistically" he could spend a year behind bars.

Trotta is not that optimistic.

"I'm preparing for five years," he said. "A long time."

This reporter hopes he gets lucky. Originally published by The Villager...

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The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom

By Michael Steven Smith

The Federal Bureau of Investigation tried to destroy left organizations and the black freedom movement during the last major upsurge in radical politics in this country, in the 1960s. It looks like they are trying to do it again.

The FBI's Cointelpro (Counterintelligence Program) was a secret operation the bureau carried out against left-wing groups from 1956 to 1971. It first targeted the Communist Party, and was expanded to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1961 and the “New Left” in 1968. In a secret 1968 memo, longtime FBI director J. Edgar Hoover directed his agents to “expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize the activities of various new left organizations. We must frustrate every effort of these groups and individuals to consolidate their forces or to recruit new or faithful elements.”

Hoover directed his venom especially at the Black movement, writing that “we must prevent the rise of a new black messiah.” The FBI and its accomplices in the Chicago Police Department admitted to the 1969 assassination of Chicago socialist and Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton in his bed along with his bodyguard Mark Clark. The circumstances around the murders of Martin Luther King—who was harassed by the FBI for years—and Malcolm X remain suspicious.

Although Cointelpro was ended after it was exposed in 1971, and the FBI investigation of the SWP ended in 1976, their practices of government surveillance, infiltration and disruption of radical groups have never gone away.

Most of what we know about Cointelpro resulted from a lawsuit, Socialist Workers Party vs. The Attorney General, which the SWP filed in 1970 through its attorney Leonard Boudin, the finest movement constitutional litigator of his time. In 1986, a federal judge in Manhattan awarded the party $264,000 in damages. The case is most famous for the rule it established: The 1986 victory was historic. The federal court decision held that advocating for socialism and being in a socialist organization were legal, ruling that “these disruption operations were directed at the kind of political activities that the SWP had a constitutional right to carry out.”

The FBI had used 300 infiltrators and 1,300 informers over a 15-year period, and burglarized SWP offices and members’ homes more than 200 times.

The 1986 trial took three months. What was proved? The FBI had used 300 infiltrators and 1,300 informers over a 15-year period, and burglarized SWP offices and members’ homes more than 200 times.

Fred Hampton, a leader of Chicago’s Black Panther Party who was killed during an FBI-sponsored police raid: “You can jail a revolutionary, but you can’t jail the revolution.”

The FBI has already infiltrated Muslim mosques and admitted to a program targeting those whom they call “black identity extremists,” that is, black people organizing to oppose police violence. Under Obama, the FBI and Homeland Security worked closely with local police departments in the fall of 2011 to monitor and later break up Occupy encampments in various cities.

We need to build solid organizations that can withstand government attempts at disruption. Here are some key practices to remember:

Don’t say anything on social media or other electronic communications you would not want the government to see. They have access to all of it when they want it.

Within our movements, don’t turn political disagreements into personal feuds. Don’t engage in needlessly disruptive behavior—and be wary of those who do so on a regular basis. The government has a long history of using infiltrators to sow strife within left organizations.

Socialism is no longer a dirty word. We are growing in numbers and strength. It would be naïve to think that the powers that be are not cognizant of the threats to their power and privilege and are not taking steps to block it.

Michael Steven Smith is a past board member of the Center for Constitutional Rights. He co-hosts the nationally broadcast weekly radio show Law and Disorder with Heidi Boghosian and is the author of the forthcoming book Lawyers For the Left: In the Courts, In the Streets, and On the Air.
The King We Would Rather Forget

By John Marciano

On Nov. 9, 1967, Dr. King gave the Annual Convocation address of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) at SUNY Buffalo. On behalf of the GSA, I was co-organizer of the event and his driver that evening. This speech was seven months after his historic “Beyond Vietnam” oration at New York’s Riverside Church in which he condemned that war. That evening, we discussed the harsh attacks he received for his opposition. King calmly and patiently explained that he opposed the Vietnam conflict because conscience demanded it; he resolutely stayed the course until his assassination five months later.

“Beyond Vietnam” is perhaps his greatest speech, although unknown to most Americans compared with his “I Have a Dream” oration at the August 1963 March for Freedom and Jobs in Washington. Those who have heard or watched King’s magnificent oration of the New York Airborne Division in North Carolina; his side was ready “to cut the power to the public-address system if rally speeches proved incendiary”; Washington banned all alcohol sales for the first time since Prohibition; and hospitals prepared “for riot casualties.”

The event was a huge success: it drew a record crowd of some 250,000 people in a marvelous and peaceful show of support for justice (Taylor Branch, “Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1954–63”).

Four years later, King articulated powerful truths about the War in Vietnam and this nation. He laid his firm opposition to the war squarely on the shoulders of the U.S. government—which had denied the Vietnamese their right to independence, aided brutal French colonialism there, created and supported Diem’s dictatorship in South Vietnam, and violated the 1954 Geneva Agreement.

King denounced the United States as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today,” and saw the war as “a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit.” Later that spring, he asserted that “the evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together”: We could not “get rid of one without getting rid of the others [and the whole structure of American life must be changed].” He stated that the injustice of the conflict was inextricably linked to the African-American struggle for civil rights.

The war was an enemy of poor people because it diverted money that could be used to mitigate the effects of poverty. And the poor, especially the African-American poor, were being killed or maimed in higher proportions than their representation in the U.S. population (Southern Christian Leadership Conference Report, 1967).

King’s speech elicited vicious attacks by the political and corporate media establishment and civil rights leaders. Life Magazine stated, “Much of his speech was a demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi.” The New York Times called his effort to link civil rights and opposition to the war a “disservice to both. The moral issues in Vietnam are less clear-cut than he suggests.” It concluded that there were “no simple or easy answers to the war in Vietnam or to racial injustice in this country.” The Washington Post claimed that some of his assertions were “sheer inventions of unsupplied fantasy”; that King had “diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country and to his people.” The corporate media

The New York Times called [King’s] effort to link civil rights and opposition to the war a ‘disservice to both.’

I Take a Knee

By Sam Wright

America, I love ya, But
In the face of police brutality, I Take a Knee.
And I Take a Knee,
When you sell arms to the Saudis to starve and kill Yemenis
And I Take a Knee, and bow my head in shame, When Israeli soldiers snipe Palestinians, then claim the victims are to blame.

America, I love ya, But
Stop calling every soldier and cop a hero! Guns are not heroic and I never asked anyone to go to war for me!
Nor did I ask those who serve and protect to kill someone for stealing a TV.
I’ve never called minorities a blight, nor said that foreigners threaten my rights.
And I never once condoned a bullet in the back, just because a man is black.
America, what perversions your subtle propaganda is meant to instill.
Teaching our children to hate, conquer, and kill in whatever theater you will.

America, I love ya, But
It’s time to get it right.

It’s the teacher, the social worker, the public defender who are the heroes here;
It is they who man the trenches, they who tend the weak and allay their fears.
It is they who toil for a pitance, dedicate themselves to the greater good.
It is they who know the difference between how we act and how we should.
They are in the game for the long haul and none better know the score.
It’s just that they measure success by giving, not by taking more.

American, I love ya, But
I Take a Knee
When you talk about building a barrier, a fence, some grotesque hateful wall as if Justice is measured by the height of obstacles built to bar the thrall.
And I take a knee when you declare it’s your duty to tear innocent children from their parents’ arms, then claim things ain’t quite as bad as they seem, after all, those brown folks have no right to claim our American Dream.

America, I love ya, But
I Take a Knee
Because you’ve taken your eye off the ball: You vilify the protestor who’s taken to the streets, and demonize the “socialist” in your pithy snarky tweets. What right have others, you ask, to redistribute your hard-earned backs?

When the formula for success, or as you’ve been taught to believe, is sweat and just a touch of (self-righteous, pale-skinned) luck.

Wake up America! Don’t you know I love you too? That every star on Old Glory represents a state … of mind, hopeful and true.
You’ve settled for lip service to the poor, the out-of-work, the disenfranchised.
You’ve become a mouthpiece for the capitalists, given a green light to their greed.
While millions live in poverty, go hungry, see no way to succeed.

America, I love ya, But
When I Take a Knee, I doubt your indignation allows you to see me! I suspect you see a terrorist, an ingrate attacking the Red, White, and Blue.
I was hoping you’d come to realize it isn’t only for me that I kneel, it’s just as much for you.

Yes, America, I’m a dreamer, So I shall continue to Take a Knee! It’s more dignified than begging or groveling on the floor, representing my rights on Kneeling. I Will Stand For It No More!

Sam Wright is a Toledo, Ohio, writer and activist.
Planet in Crisis

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While on St. Paul, I spoke with many tribal elders who told me stories about fewer fish and sea birds, harsher storms and warming temperatures, but what struck me most deeply were their accounts of plummeting fur seal populations. Seal mothers, they said, had to swim so much farther to find food for their pups that the babies were starving to death before they could make it back.

Just before flying to St. Paul, I met with Bruce Wright in Anchorage, Alaska. He’s a senior scientist with the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, has worked for the National Marine Fisheries Service, and was a section chief for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for 11 years. “We’re not going to stop this train wreck,” he assures me grimly.

Later, my book research would take me back onto Denali’s fast-shrinking glaciers and also to Glacier National Park in Montana. There I met Dr. Dan Fagre, a U.S. Geological Survey research ecologist and director of the Climate Change in Mountain Ecosystems Project. “This is an explosion,” he assured me, “a nuclear explosion of geologic change. This ... exceeds the ability for normal adaptation. We’ve shoved it into overdrive and taken our hands off the wheel.”

We’re not even trying to slow down the production of CO₂ [carbon dioxide], and there is already enough CO₂ in the atmosphere.”

While describing the warming, ever more acidic waters around Alaska and the harm being caused to the marine food web, he recalled a moment approximately 250 million years ago when the oceans underwent similar changes and the planet experienced mass extinction events “driven by ocean acidity. The Permian mass extinction where 90 percent of the species were wiped out, that is what we are looking at now.”

I wrap up the interview with a heavy heart, place my laptop in my satchel, put on my jacket, and shake his hand. Knowing I’m about to fly to St. Paul, Wright has one final thing to tell me as he walks me out: “The Pribilofs were the last place mammoths survived because there weren’t any people out there to hunt them.” We’ve never experienced this, where we are headed. Maybe the islands will become a refuge for a population of humans.

The Loss Upon Us

For at least two decades, I’ve found my solace in the mountains. I lived in Alaska from 1996 to 2006 and more than a year of my life has been spent climbing on the glaciers of Denali and other peaks in the Alaska Range. Yet that was a bittersweet time for me as the dramatic impacts of climate change were quickly becoming apparent, including quickly receding glaciers and warmer winter temperatures.

After years of war and then climate-change reporting, I regularly withdrew to the mountains to catch my breath. As I filled my lungs with alpine air, my heart would settle down and I could feel myself

‘This [explosion of geologic change] exceeds the ability for normal adaptation. We’ve shoved it into overdrive and taken our hands off the wheel.’

roots back into the Earth.

Later, my book research would take me back onto Denali’s fast-shrinking glaciers and also to Glacier National Park in Montana. There I met Dr. Dan Fagre, a U.S. Geological Survey research ecologist and director of the Climate Change in Mountain Ecosystems Project. “This is an explosion,” he assured me, “a nuclear explosion of geologic change. This ... exceeds the ability for normal adaptation. We’ve shoved it into overdrive and taken our hands off the wheel.” Despite its name, the park he studies is essentially marooned by human development on the landscape.

I asked him what he would say to people who still have time to mitigate the impacts of runaway climate change. “We can’t undo this,” he replied. “How are you going to cool down the ocean? We’re already there.”

As if to underscore the point, Wanless told me that, in the past, carbon dioxide had varied from roughly 180 to 280 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as the Earth shifted from glacial to interglacial periods. Linked to this 100-ppm fluctuation was about a 100-foot change in sea level. “Every 100-ppm CO₂ increase in the atmosphere gives us 100 feet of sea-level rise,” he told me. “This happened when we went in and out of the Ice Age.”

As I knew, since the industrial revolution began, atmospheric CO₂ has already increased from 280 to 410 ppm. “That’s 130 ppm in just the last 200 years,” I pointed out to him. “That’s 130 feet of sea-level rise that’s already baked into Earth’s climate system.”

He looked at me and nodded grimly. “We can’t undo this, that as a nod to his research and a note of anger slowly creeping into his voice. “We’re taught the Creator made everything. We’re taught the Creator made the trees, the rocks, the air we breathe. Each has its own way to write its own story. The skies open up with rain. The Grandfathers provide the heat. The winged ones sing their songs. The drums talk in a beat. The streams carry the life of us all. The oceans carry a mighty fight. It’s not a splash or spray from a falls. Listen closely, it’s how our waters write.”

Richie Plass
09-11-18
Inside the mass protests that are rocking France

By Cole Stangler

PARIS—In Belleville Park, a small, steep public garden with panoramic views of the city, about 40 supporters of the gilets jaunes (Yellow Vest) movement have gathered on a chilly January night for a neighborhood meeting. It’s the third such meet-up to discuss what residents of this historically working-class quarter can do to support the wave of demonstrations.

It’s a wide-open question, much like the future of the Yellow Vest revolt. Online anger over a planned doubling of the fuel tax, to about 25 cents a gallon, spilled into the streets in November 2018. The movement took its symbol from the clothing item required of French motorists since 2008. Rooted in rural areas and outer suburbs, the demonstrations quickly spread, thanks in no small part to social media. They soon came to represent deeper frustrations with the rising cost of living. Far from anti-environmental, the movement simply called on the wealthy to pick up the tab for France’s transition away from fossil fuels.

After weeks of traffic blockades, disruptive marches and occasionally violent clashes with the police, in December 2018 a YouGov study from late November 2018 found 70 percent of the country backed the Yellow Vests, a more recent version of the movement’s single most important demand, to nullify laws, to revoke legislators and to amend the constitution—all by referendum. Some Yellow Vests consider it the movement’s single most important demand, though others seem more suspicious. “It’s much bigger than talking points or public relations,” Amparo, a 62-year-old schoolteacher who declines to give her last name, says to applause. “We’re in the fight for our lives! … Opinion polls go up and down, the stock market goes up and down, but much fun he had for our lives.” Revolutionary ambitions notwithstanding, several pressing issues loom over the movement today. First, there’s the question of the Citizens’ Referendum Initiative, known as the RIC. The most prominent version of the proposal would allow French citizens to introduce and authorize legislation, to nullify laws, to revoke legislators and to amend the constitution—all by referendum. Some Yellow Vests consider it the movement’s single most important demand, though others seem more suspicious. “It’s a super-revolutionary proposal,” bellowed one enthusiastic activist at the Belleville meeting—even though he was the only one to mention it.

Then, there is the so-called great national debate. Instead of taking up the RIC, the French government has responded to the protests with a series of discussions—online and in person—designed to address what it views as the country’s deepseated political malaise. They focus on four key themes: taxes and public spending, public services, the fossil-fuel transition and “democracy and citizenship,” which includes immigration. Most Yellow Vests view the entire endeavor as a sham, a desperate effort from authorities to redirect popular frustrations into an institutionalized dead end. Ultimately, the movement’s future could hinge on its capacity to set forth a coherent alternative.

For its part, the group in Belleville has committed to more immediate plans. By the end of the meeting, they’ve set a gathering point for the weekend’s protest in Paris. And they’ve vowed to find a better location to keep holding their “popular assemblies” over the winter—preferably indoors.

Cole Stangler writes about labor and the environment. His reporting has also appeared in The Nation, VICE, The New Republic, and International Business Times. He can be reached at cole@inthesetimes.com. Follow him @colestangler.

NATO

… continued from page 3

military parade, called for people to unify around protests against NATO during their meetings.

The No2NATO2019 coalition, which is organizing protests against NATO, writes: “… in a grotesque desecration of Rev. King’s lifelong dedication to peace, this is the date that the military leaders of NATO have chosen to celebrate NATO’s 70th anniversary by holding its annual summit meeting in Washington, D.C. This is a deliberate insult to Rev. King and a clear message that Black lives and the lives of non-European humanity, and indeed the lives of the vast majority, really do not matter.”

World BEYOND War is organizing No to NATO—Yes to Peace Festival, which will include an art build, food, music and teachings on April 3 and a march from the Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial on April 4.

People are planning strategic, nonviolent protests against NATO’s meetings and organizing nonviolent direct action training to prepare for them.

We reflect on the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. who urged us to “re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world.”

Protest to end NATO will be a step toward ending what King called “the deadly western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long.” It is time for peace “take precedence over the pursuit of war.”

This article was originally published at popularresistance.org.

Margaret Flowers is a pediatrician. Kevin Zeese is a public interest attorney. They co-direct Popular Resistance.
‘A War I’ve Lived With My Whole Life’

By Susan Schnall

World War II was for me a very personal war. It was the war in which my father, a Marine, was killed on the island of Guam. It was a war I’ve lived my whole life. It was the war in which my father felt he had to do his share and help give something to this world. He did, and I never knew him except through pictures and letters and others’ memories. It was a war that destroyed my mother and her hopes and dreams and future. And we were part of another dead soldier. Every time I watch the news and hear about the casualties—whether, American, Iraqi, Afghan, Syrian, Palestinian—I feel this deep sense of loss for that person, for that family, for that child who lost a mother or a father or a sister or a brother.

From a Father: May 13, 1944

Dearest Susan,

Guess you don’t remember your daddy, but he sure remembers you. You were just a little tyke the last time I saw you, and now Mama says you’re a big girl.

I have your picture and it sure is nice. But, honey, you want to watch what you do with those beautiful eyes of yours or when you get older you’ll cause all kinds of problems when you walk down the street.

Mama says you have been taking good care of her for me, and I’m glad that you’re such a good little trooper and wants to watch what you do with those beautiful eyes of yours or when you get older you’ll cause all kinds of problems when you walk down the street.

Dad

From a Daughter: 2015

It’s Sunday: Cemetery Day

It’s Sunday in Chicago. Papa and I drive to pick up lox, smoked whitefish, sable, cream cheese and bagels, and then we get the three Sunday newspapers and go home.

Papa dresses as usual in his suit, tie, and hat; Nana puts on her suit and heels, and we leave for our Sunday drive through Rosehill Cemetery. It is a war that destroyed my father. Papa has the radio tuned to a mystery-detective program. We stop at this small florist to pick up flowers. When we arrive at the cemetery gates, Papa turns off the radio. It’s important to be quiet and respectful among the dead. I am six or seven or 13, but I’ve learned to walk cautiously in the cemetery—never on the graves; always on the pavement. Papa brings flowers slowly along the windy roads, huge bushes and old oak trees, old mausoleums. It’s quiet and peaceful here among the dead.

We park and leave the car; Papa carries the flowers. In winter we bring pansies. My papa is meticulous in everything he does: He goes to the grave, takes the old wilted flowers from the tin container in the ground, pours out the old water, and carefully fills the container with fresh water and the bouquet, putting them back at the headstone. Nana falls to her knees, crying: “Harold, Harold, look. Here’s Susie—your daughter—see how she’s growing.” Papa takes my hand and we walk away to visit other relatives as Nana continues to talk with her son, sobbing at times. In her beautiful suit, open-toed shoes, and nylons, she is in her grave. At times, I think she leans over to hug him—over the grave—her shoes, kneeling in her nylons next to the grave. At times, I think she leans over to hug him—over the grave—her youngest son, her beautiful Harold.

And Papa, strong, stubborn Papa, so composed—and me, visiting my father on Sunday.

Years later, when I spoke with my mother about those visits, she wanted to know why I never mentioned them to her. I replied: “I don’t know. I thought that what kids did on Sundays, visit their fathers.”

Susan Schnall

From the San Francisco Chronicle, March 12, 1966

A Girl’s Tribute to Her Father

A 22-year-old Stanford senior this week paid a unique tribute to her hero father who died in action as a Marine in World War II. She is Susan Marina LeVine. Wishing to honor the memory of her father, Harold, who paid the supreme sacrifice for his country when she was nine months old, Susan Marina enrolled in the Navy Nurse Corps and will discard her campus dress for a uniform as soon as she is graduated. It will be her way of demonstrating her desire to continue her father’s fight for freedom and justice for America and the world.

Susan Schnall is a co-coordinator of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign. She is a professor at ONU and a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. She is President of Veterans For Peace Chapter 34, New York City.

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Israeli Militarism and U.S. Border Imperialism

Two Crimes, One Weapons Company

By Ariel Gold and Ursula Rozum

In January, 43-year-old Amal al-Tamasi became the third woman, along with a 14-year-old child and medic Razan al-Najjar, to be killed in Gaza by Israeli snipers since the Great March of Return began over nine months ago.

Israel has just announced they will block Qatari funds from entering Gaza despite the 7-mile-long densely populated enclave already having reached a status of non-livability. Medicine is close to running out, 97 percent of the water is contaminated by sewage and saline and unfit for consumption, 54 percent of the labor force (70 percent of Gaza youth) are unemployed, and 31.5 percent of households are either severely or moderately food insecure. Since March 30, 2018, over 250 people have been killed as the population desperately risks their lives in the hopes of achieving freedom.

At the U.S.-Mexico border the situation is also desperate: Families trying to enter and seek refuge are being tear-gassed and separated from their children. The dire circumstances that have caused thousands to flee on foot from their homes in Honduras and Guatemala are not dissimilar from the crises of violence, poverty, and food insecurity in Gaza.

From the suffering both in Gaza and at the U.S.-Mexico border, weapons giant Elbit Systems is reaping profits.

Elbit Systems is Israel’s largest weapons company and has helped make Israel the world’s leading exporter of military and surveillance drones. As of 2017, Elbit was the 28th-largest weapons manufacturing company in the world, bringing in $3.38 billion in revenue. Elbit subsidiary Israeli Military Industries (IMI) produces cruise missiles, cluster bombs, bullets for Israeli snipers, and many more tools of death. Elbit helps ensure that the slaughter and repression of Palestinians by the Israeli government is as efficient as possible. Along with ammunition, weaponized drones carried out direct attacks, and surveillance drones that guide fighter jets and snipers in Gaza, in the West Bank, Elbit provides surveillance technology for Israel’s apartheid wall in the West Bank and, through a contract with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S.-Mexico border.

For the past 14 years, Elbit has brought its brand of violent border surveillance to the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2004, Hermes drones manufactured by Israel’s Elbit Systems were the first unmanned aerial surveillance vehicles deployed at the U.S. southern border. U.S. Customs and Border Protection began contracting with Elbit Systems in 2014 for sensors, cameras, radars and “integrated fixed towers” in the desert along the Arizona border with Mexico. The towers are based on the technology used by Elbit for surveillance along Israel’s apartheid wall in the West Bank, which separates Palestinians from their lands and families. The towers in the Arizona borderlands, like the border itself, are built on the lands of the indigenous people of the area, the Tohono O’odam, many of whom have actively organized against the construction of the border wall and towers on their lands.

The Elbit surveillance towers in southeast Arizona are intentionally positioned in the desert, miles away from the border wall, to track and harass migrants once they have crossed the border. According to testimony from migrants, when Border Patrol locates groups of people who have crossed, they fly their helicopters close to the ground to intentionally kick up dust. This tactic scares and scatters migrants traveling in groups, separating them into the desert and decreasing their chances of survival.

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The Elbit towers in the Arizona desert are rooted in a sinister 1994 Clinton-era strategy of “Prevention Through Deterrence,” which aimed to prevent illegal immigration by sealing off urban entry points into the United States such as those in San Diego and El Paso. The intention was to funnel migrants to cross through dangerous wilderness routes where they knew they would risk injury, dehydration, heat stroke, exhaustion, and hypothermia.

The logic of deterring migration by making the journey more dangerous has not only failed to decrease migration, the policy has increased migrant deaths. According to Border Patrol, over 6,000 people have died trying to cross the desert since the 1990s. Volunteers from organizations like No More Deaths hike the trails and leave water, food, socks, blankets, and other necessary supplies. In acts of even further cruelty, Border Patrol agents are known to destroy the water containers. Volunteers from No More Deaths were just convicted of federal charges for providing aid to undocumented migrants.

U.S. and Israeli military contractors are making billions in profits from a system that activists have come to call “border imperialism.” A term coined by anthropologist Harsha Walia, border imperialism conceptualizes how capitalism and racism manifest in the form of militarized border enforcement to control land, maintain inequality and oppression, and reinforce white European cultural dominance (a.k.a. white supremacy) around the world. This is the case in Israel, where Elbit and U.S. military contractors allow Israel to maintain and expand its occupation of Palestinian lands, and in the Americas, where politically imposed borders are becoming increasingly militarized and migration is criminalized.

Elbit Systems, like the rest of the weapons manufacturing industry, is making a fortune from death and repression. They sell weapons across the world, and in the United States, they donate money to congressional campaigns every year in order to maintain access to U.S. government contracts.

The movement to divest from war and repression is growing. Swedish and Norwegian pensions funds divested from Elbit in 2009, and over the last decade, activists around the world have pushed universities and banks around the world to follow suit. On Dec. 21, 2018, a successful campaign by UK activists, HSBC Bank announced that it would divest from Elbit systems, citing concerns over human rights and Elbit’s manufacturing of cluster munitions.

Since CODEPINK launched its Stop Elbit campaign less than a year ago, numerous actions have taken place, including petitions, meetings asking Senator Janeen Shaheen—the largest Democratic recipient of Elbit campaign contributions—to stop taking Elbit money, and creative protests calling for a consumer boycott of the high-tech cycling glasses produced by Elbit subsidiary EverySight.

CODEPINK is actively campaigning to get investment banks—such as Bank of New York Mellon, which claims to be committed to socially responsible investment and U.N. Sustainable Development goals—to divest from Elbit and other corporations that profit from death and repression, such as Lockheed Martin and CoreCivic, the largest for-profit immigrant detention corporation in the country.

Israel is able to maintain its occupation and repression of Palestinian people through technology companies like Elbit and through military aid and diplomatic support from the United States. We must continue to call for an end to unconditional U.S. military aid to Israel, even though a military embargo is unlikely in the near future. In the meantime, divestment from Elbit Systems and other war profiteers will play a major role in the institutional and economic support that allows Israel to commit war crimes with impunity and the United States to increase border repression.

This article was originally published by Mondoweiss.

Ariel Gold is the national co-director for CODEPINK and leads their campaigns for Palestinian rights. Ursula Rozum is CODEPINK’s Palestine Campaigns Coordinator. In November 2018, she visited the Arizona borderlands to learn about the impact of Elbit surveillance towers.
The Lesson: Stay Human

By Mike Tork

What started out as a trip to learn firsthand what was happening on the border, and to help provide a little aid to asylum seekers ended up being much more. I met a caring and thoughtful group of men and women in the United Deported Veterans, Sjt. Barrios Memorial VFP Chapter 182, Tijuana, Mexico.

What I witnessed was a strong community of Deported Veterans and supporters that set their own struggles aside to help asylum seekers. I saw veterans supporting each other through difficult times. They were so unselfish toward each other and asylum seekers that it made me step back and recognize how important it is that we all remain human no matter how bad it gets. Seguire siendo humano—stay human.

These men served their country honorably—some in combat, some highly decorated—but were deported for relatively minor mistakes they made after being discharged, mistakes like so many fellow veterans made after being discharged. Many of us have been forgiven for our mistakes—they have not. They remain deported, separated from families and friends, paying a disproportionately high price for something they did a long time ago. They have not been given the opportunity to make amends or move forward.

Many grew up in the United States, went to school in the United States, played high school sports in the United States, worked in the United States, and paid taxes in the United States. They did not necessarily join the military to become citizens, as many felt like they were already citizens. Many joined the military because they felt it was their duty. The fact that they were deported after serving their country is incomprehensible to me, because these are the exact people I would want as neighbors and fellow citizens.

Deported veterans and VFP members from San Diego delivered food, water, toilet paper, blankets, gloves, socks, backpacks, and wool caps to asylum seekers at the El Barretal Shelter.

We served a church—a small church—known as Little Haiti, where the Church of Iglesia Embajadores de Jesus is being used as a shelter for asylum seekers from Central America and Haiti. We delivered aid to this church because the Deported Veterans chapter had a relationship with the pastor, and because there was a need.

Things on the border are not going to get better soon. As members of the last caravan said, “We are not the first and we won’t be the last.” The crisis will remain. Real, comprehensive, immigration reform is needed, but in the meantime people are dying and living in unacceptable conditions. We need to remain compassionate.

Mike Tork served in the U.S. Navy Mobile Riverine Force during the Viet Nam War. He recently retired from working as a marine biologist in Woods Hole, Mass.

Hector

After serving six years in the military Hector got caught selling marijuana (now legal in California and other states) and was sent to prison.

What he was about to be released, he said, “Oh, I’m going home. I told my kids, everybody. Then the day before I was going home, they called me in to say, ‘Oh no, you’re going to immigration hold.’ And they told me that I could never ever been an employee of the federal government? Have you ever been in the military enlisted?” I told them, ‘Yeah, to both of those. I served my country for six years. I have an honorable discharge.’ It didn’t matter.

“When I got deported, I couldn’t find my way around here in Tijuana. It was like somebody dropped me off on the moon. Because I’m an American. I speak English. I did know some Spanish, but it’s not the Spanish that people here speak. I wanted to go back home.”

Eventually, he made his way back (undocumented) across the border to his family and his life, but after four years, the border police came to his house.

He said, “When I got deported, I could come to my house, I said, ‘You got the wrong person. I’m a veteran of the United States Armed Forces. Doesn’t that actually mean anything? It didn’t.’”

In detention, Hector fought his case for three years. “I sold my 18-wheeler truck. We sold our house. My wife got half the money and my half I spent it all on my immigration attorney. I spent over $100,000 fighting my immigration case. Sold everything I had, I borrowed $20,000 from my sister, and still I was deported.”

Lupita

We asked Lupita, a U.S. citizen, how she got involved with the deported veterans.

“I got involved because of Hector. His mom and my uncle are first cousins. We had met in Madera, California, when we were young. I was 12 years old, and he was a year older than me. It was summer vacation, and it was like my first crush, my first little love. I thought he was like my boyfriend even though we didn’t say anything.”

Thirty-seven years later, they reconnected. Lupita was living in California; they had both been married but were now single. Through her aunt and uncle she heard about Hector and Lupita’s dad said, “Give him Lupita’s phone number.”

“I was all excited—my heart was like jumping, butterflies in my stomach. I could have been in love—the only sad thing was that they said, before they left, ‘Oh, but one thing is, he’s deported.’”

Eventually, they started talking by phone. “I was like a teenager. I went back to my young years of love. I was like, Oh my god! He called me! So that was it. From then on, we talked every day for hours. In July I went to see him for the first time.

“I had a lot of reprimands from my family, from my kids, you know, because of all the dangers that I might face out there, and warnings, but that love was so strong already and the thing that made it easier—he was helping an orphanage. I thought that was wonderful. He’s committed to his community. He’s healthy. I’m going. And then of course it was also the injustice that he was deported, even though he is a veteran. Helping the community, so I really got involved with that. And I would come every weekend. So it became not only love that motivated me to come down, but also the commitment of helping, because I also wanted to serve my country. I had the same feeling that they have … because I’m a first-generation Mexican, born in the United States. And I know what commitment to the country means—and I thought, it’s wrong these veterans who served the country were deported, and that needs to be corrected.

“I feel that you just can’t do that to somebody that is willing to risk their lives, put their lives on the line—for our lives, for our government, for our country—for whatever reason.”
Meaning for Service at the Border

Deported Veterans: Finding a New Good, and I started using more more specific." recreational drugs, cocaine to be ended up experimenting with the way to a regional manager. the ranks from a ticket agent all for over 18 years—rose through productive, worked for the airlines we really are serving. You're and more to the point that I started getting in trouble with the law. I had drug addiction. I had a problem. I needed help. I wanted help. So I pled guilty to a charge that I didn't commit so I could be sent to drug rehab. So instead of being sent to drug rehab, they put me in immigration proceedings to be deported.”

Robert was at work but eventually they got him. He was moved to the Santa Ana City jail in California, where “they deported me again after 18 months that I spent fighting my case.”

Robert wound up in Tijuana and eventually got back in the states, his wife of 21 years left him, “I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat. I’d go to work and I’d be working, and all of a sudden I’d have to get up and go put water on my face. I was just freaking out.”

because he realized he needed help. One day, coming out of church he, “saw a sign on the door that said, ‘Deported Veterans.’ I had heard about deported veterans down here in Mexico. So I went in and I met the guy who was in charge of the place and I just found that the more I got involved with veterans, homeless people, deported children, veterans’ children, the better I felt.”

This was a familiar story to me—having something positive to focus on taking someone out of his own personal trauma. We’ve seen this with vets who are coming back from combat or have PTSD; they get involved with Veterans For Peace and the more positive work they do, the better they feel. Robert went further, “There’s something that I would really like to say. Will Griffin [a former U.S. Army paratrooper who served in Iraq and Afghanistan] put this thought in my mind, regarding service in Veterans For Peace. A lot of the veterans, even deported veterans, still say that if they had to they would do it all over again, even though what’s happened to them and everything. And they talk about the pride in their service and what they did and everything. Then I heard Will, on a video, talking about when people say, ‘Thank you for your service,’ how it would upset him, and he would tell them, ‘You want to thank me for my service? Well, what did I do? I served so that the greedy military-industrial complex can continue to get richer, that people like Trump can continue to get richer, and countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel can continue to oppress people? Is that what you’re thanking me for? Because I helped them to do that? I didn’t serve to protect the people of the United States, the constitution. I served that one percent. So no, please don’t thank me.’ ”

“Thank the reason I mention this,” Robert continues, “and I mention Veterans For Peace, is because I tell the guys, being involved with what we’re doing—now we really are serving. You’re not serving now to help some wealthy person continue to get richer. You’re helping the people you were in the trenches with. Now you can say, when somebody says, ‘Thank you for your service,’ you can say, ‘You know what? You’re really welcome, I appreciate that.’

For more information and videos about deported veterans, visit facebook.com/VeteransWithoutBorders.

Tarak Kauff is a former U.S. Army paratrooper, a former member of the Veterans For Peace national board of directors, president of Woodstock VFP, and the managing editor of Our Times.

Robert

Robert is an essential member of the Deported Veterans chapter. He was deported but he’s not a veteran. His older brother was a Viet Nam veteran and his other brother was a Vietnam-era veteran, so he had this very close connection with veterans.

“I had been in the States since the age of 15 . . . when we came to the States, we moved to the U.S. legally, lived there, you know, I was raised the re, got my school, got married, had my kids, the whole nine yards. I was to working, taking care of my family. I bought a new car, we got a home, we were doing really well—until immigration showed up at my door one day portraying to be law enforcement, police department, not immigration.”

He was living in Chicago: “Things were not going very good, and I started using more and more to the point that I started getting in trouble with the law. I had drug addiction. I had a problem. I needed help. I wanted help. So I pled guilty to a charge that I didn’t commit so I could be sent to drug rehab. So instead of being sent to drug rehab, they put me in immigration proceedings to be deported.”

He was deported to Mexico. “When I got here I couldn’t even get a job as a security guard. So three months later I decided to go back to the U.S. undocumented, and I did. I made it. I never used drugs and alcohol again, and I dedicated myself to working, taking care of my family. I bought a new car, we got a home, we were doing really well—until immigration showed up at my door one day portraying to be law enforcement, police department, not immigration.”

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Venezuela: The U.S.’s 68th Regime Change Disaster

The most valuable way the U.S. can help is to stop making the Venezuelan economy and people scream (on all sides), by lifting its sanctions and abandoning its radical regime change operation.

By Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J. S. Davies

In his masterpiece, Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions Since World War II, William Blum, who died in 2018, wrote chapter-length accounts of 55 U.S. regime change operations against countries around the world, from China (1945–1960s) to Haiti (1986–1994). Noam Chomsky’s blurb on the back of the latest edition says simply, “Far and away the best book on the topic.” We agree. If you have not read it, please do. It will give you a cleaner context for what is happening in Venezuela today, and a better understanding of the world you are living in.

Since Killing Hope was published in 1995, the U.S. has conducted at least 13 more regime change operations, several of which are still active: Yugoslavia; Afghanistan; Iraq; the 3rd U.S. invasion of Haiti since WWII; Somalia; Honduras; Libya; Syria; Ukraine; Yemen; Iran; Nicaragua; and now Venezuela.

William Blum noted that the U.S. generally prefers what its planners call “low intensity conflict” over full-scale wars. Only in periods of supreme overconfidence has it launched its most devastating and disastrous wars, from Korea and Vietnam to Afghanistan and Iraq. After its war of mass destruction in Iraq, the U.S. reverted to “low intensity conflict” under Obama’s doctrine of “COIN” (counterinsurgency in Iraq) and “nation building” in Afghanistan.

Obama conducted even heavier bombing than Bush II, and deployed U.S. special operations forces to 150 countries all over the world, but he made sure that nearly all the bleeding and dying was done by Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis, Somalis, Libyans, Ukrainians, Yemenis and others, not by Americans. What U.S. planners mean by “low intensity conflict” is that it is less intense for Americans. President Biden, who as U.S. Senator recently revealed that a staggering 45,000 Afghan security force deaths have been killed since he took office in 2014, compared with only 72 U.S. and NATO troops. "It shows who has been doing the fighting," Ghani candidly remarked. This disparity is common to every current U.S. war.

This does not mean that the U.S. is any less committed to trying to overthrow governments that reject and resist the U.S. imperial sovereignty, especially if those countries contain vast oil reserves. It’s no coincidence that two of the main targets of current U.S. regime change operations are Iran and Venezuela, two of the four countries with the largest liquid oil reserves in the world (the others being Saudi Arabia and Iraq).

In practice, “low intensity conflict” involves four tools of regime change: sanctions or economic warfare; propaganda or “information warfare”; covert and proxy war; and aerial bombardment. In Venezuela, the U.S. has used the first and second, with the third and fourth now “on the table,” since the first two have created chaos but so far not toppled the government.

The U.S. government has been opposed to Venezuela’s socialist revolution since Hugo Chávez was elected in 1998. Unbeknownst to most Americans, Chávez was well loved by poor and working-class Venezuelans for his extraordinary array of social programs that lifted millions out of poverty. Between 1996 and 2010, the level of extreme poverty plummeted from 40 percent to 7 percent. The government also substantially improved health care and education, cutting infant mortality by half, reducing the malnutrition rate from 21 percent to 5 percent of the population and eliminating illiteracy. These changes gave Venezuela the lowest level of inequality in the region, based on its Gini coefficient. Since Chávez’ death in 2013, Venezuela has descended into an economic crisis stemming from a combination of government mismanagement, corruption, sabotage, and the precipitous fall in the price of oil. The oil industry provides 95 percent of Venezuela’s exports, so the first thing Venezuela needed when prices cratered in 2014 was international financing to cover huge shortfalls in the budgets of both the government and the national oil company. The strategic objective of U.S. sanctions is to exacerbate the economic crisis by denying Venezuela access to the U.S.-dominated international financial system to roll over existing debt and obtain new financing.

The blocking of Ciglo’s funds in the U.S. also deprives Venezuela of a billion dollars per year in revenue that it previously received from the export, refining and retail sale of gasoline to American drivers. Canadian economist Joe Emersberger has calculated that the new sanctions Trump unleashed in 2017 cost Venezuela $6 billion in just its first year. In sum, U.S. sanctions are designed to “make the economy scream” in Venezuela, exactly as President Nixon described the goal of U.S. sanctions against Chile after its people elected Salvador Allende in 1970.

Alfred De Zayas visited Venezuela as a U.N. rapporteur in 2017 and wrote an in-depth report for the United Nations. He criticized Venezuela’s dependence on oil, poor governance and corruption, but he found that “economic warfare” by the U.S. and its allies were seriously exacerbating the crisis. “Modern-day economic sanctions and blockades are comparable with medieval sieges of towns,” De Zayas wrote. “Twenty-first century sanctions attempt to bring not just a town, but sovereign countries to their knees.” He recommended that the International Criminal Court should investigate U.S. sanctions against Venezuela as crimes against humanity. In a recent interview with the Independent newspaper in the UK, De Zayas reiterated that U.S. sanctions are killing Venezuela. “Venezuela’s economy has shrunk by about half since 2014, the greatest contraction of a modern economy in peacetime. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the average Venezuelan lost an incredible 24 pounds in body weight in 2017.”

Mr. De Zayas’ successor as U.N. Rapporteur, Idriss Jazairy, issued a statement on Jan. 31, 2019, in which he condemned “coercion” by outside powers as a “violation of all norms of international law.” “Sanctions which can lead to starvation and medical shortages are not the answer to the crisis in Venezuela,” Mr. Jazairy said. “…precipitating an economic and humanitarian crisis is not a foundation for the peaceful settlement of disputes.”

While Venezuelans face poverty, preventable disease, malnutrition, and open threats of war by U.S. officials, those same U.S. officials and their corporate sponsors are looking at an almost irresistible gold mine if they can bring Venezuela to its knees: a fire sale of its oil industry to foreign oil companies and the privatization of many other sectors of its economy, from hydroelectric power plants to iron, aluminum, and, yes, actual gold mines. This is not speculation. It is what the U.S.’s new puppet, those same U.S. officials and their corporate sponsors are looking at an almost irresistible gold mine if they can bring Venezuela to its knees: a fire sale of its oil industry to foreign oil companies and the privatization of many other sectors of its economy, from hydroelectric power plants to iron, aluminum, and, yes, actual gold mines. This is not speculation. It is what the U.S.’s new puppet, Dick Maduro, who was installed in an illegal coup by U.S. officials and their corporate sponsors, is looking at.

Oil industry sources have reported that Guaido has plans to introduce a new national hydrocarbons law that will nationalize the oil industry. “The capitalistic approach, the one they’ve been following for years, is not a foundation for the peaceful settlement of disputes.”

“Modern-day economic sanctions and blockades are comparable with medieval sieges of towns,” [Alfred] De Zayas wrote. “Twenty-first century sanctions attempt to bring not just a town, but sovereign countries to their knees.”

This generation of Americans has already seen how our government’s endless sanctions, coups, and wars have left country after country mired in violence, poverty, and chaos. As the results of these campaigns have become predictable catastrophically for the people of each country, the U.S. and its corporate sponsors are looking to bring not just a town, but sovereign countries to their knees. They are looking at an almost irresistible gold mine if they can bring Venezuela to its knees.

“How is Venezuela (or Iran or North Korea) different from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and at least 63 other countries where U.S. regime change operations have led only to long-lasting violence and chaos?”

Mexico, Uruguay, the Vatican, and many other countries are committed to diplomacy to help the people of Venezuela resolve their political differences and find a peaceful way forward. The most valuable way the United States can help is to stop making the Venezuelan economy and people scream (on all sides), by lifting its sanctions and abandoning its failed and catastrophic regime change operation in Venezuela. But the only things that will force such a radical change in U.S. policy are public outrage, education and organizing, and international solidarity with the people of Venezuela.

This article was produced by Local Peace Economy, a project of the Independent Media Institute. Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK for Peace, is the author of Inside Iraq: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the U.S.-Saudi Connection. Nicolas J. S. Davies is a researcher for CODEPINK and the author of Blood on Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq.
How Trump’s Attacks on Venezuela Triggered a Revolution in Haiti

By Kim Ives

Chaos reigned in Haiti in February, as people rose up against President Jovenel Moïse over his corruption, arrogance, false promises and straight-faced lies. But the crisis will not be solved by Moïse’s departure, which appears imminent. Today’s revolution shows all the signs of being as profound and unstoppable as the one that took place 33 years ago against dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier and triggered five years of popular tumult.

Despite fierce repression, massacres, a bogus election and three coups d’état, the uprising culminated in the remarkable December 1990 landslide election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, virtually taking over the Haitian elite, virtually took over the Haitian military occupations carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. That year, the Haitian people managed to win a sort of stalemate by electing René Préval (an early Aristide ally) as president.

By 2006, Washington had punished the Haitian people for twice electing Aristide (1990, 2000) with two coups d’état (1991, 2004) and two foreign military occupations carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. That year, the Haitian people managed to win a sort of stalemate by electing René Préval (an early Aristide ally) as president.

On the day of his May 14, 2018, inauguration, Préval signed up for the PetroCaribe deal, greatly vexing the Haitian people’s deep sense of consequences and blowback, fed by the not-so-sudden collapse of the rotten political and economic edifice it has built in Haiti over the past 28 years.

The PetroCaribe deal effectively ended in October 2017. Life in Haiti, which was already extremely difficult, now became untenable. With the Venezuelan crude spigot now closed, Washington’s enforcer, the International Monetary Fund, told Moïse he had to raise fuel prices, which he tried to do on July 6 last year. The result was a three-day popular explosion that was the precursor to today’s revolt.

At about the same time, a mass movement began asking what had happened to the $4 billion in Venezuelan oil revenues that Haiti had received over the previous decade. The PetroCaribe Fund was supposed to pay for hospitals, schools, roads, and other social projects, but the people saw virtually nothing accomplished. Two 2017 Senate investigations confirmed that the money had been mostly diverted into other pockets. So, what was the straw that broke the camel’s back? It was Moïse’s treachery against the Venezuelans after their exemplary solidarity.

On Jan. 10, 2019, in a vote at the Organization of American States (OAS), Haiti voted in favor of a Washington-sponsored motion that said Maduro is “illegitimate,” after he won more than two-thirds of the presidential vote last May.

Haitians were already angry about the unbridled corruption, hungry from skyrocketing inflation, unemployed, and frustrated from years of false promises and foreign military humiliation and violence. But this spectacularly cynical betrayal by Moïse and his cronies, in an attempt to win Washington’s help to put out the growing fires beneath them, was the last straw. Surprised and paralyzed by its lack of options (and its own internal squabbles), Washington is now watching with horror.
Advisory (LHA) limit for both chemicals different in Okinawa, where researchers and of Defense. Although few in America who in Okinawa have been shown to contain more than 100 times that level, while in communities adjacent to the U.S. Air Force’s Kadena Air Base and the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in the Japanese Prefecture of Okinawa. The chemicals are found in the fire-fighting foam used in routine fire-training exercises on base. The health effects of exposure to these chemicals include frequent miscarriages and other severe pregnancy complications. They contaminate human breast milk and sicken breast-feeding babies. PFAS contribute to liver damage, kidney cancer, high cholesterol, decreased response to vaccines, and an increased risk of thyroid disease, along with testicular cancer, multiple myeloma, and low sperm count in males. Researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health say that an approximate safe dose of PFOS and PFOA in drinking water is 1 part per trillion (ppt). Meanwhile, municipal water systems in Okinawa have been shown to contain more than 100 times that level, while ground water is contaminated at a level 1,000 times higher. The contamination is not confined to Okinawa. For instance, groundwater at China Lake, Calif., was recently tested at 8 million ppt, according to a little-known report by the Department of Defense. Although few in America who live adjacent to military bases are aware of the contamination, the situation is different in Okinawa, where researchers and activists have been sounding the alarm. The Okinawans are speaking to us. The EPA’s combined Lifetime Health Advisory (LHA) limit for both chemicals is 70 ppt, while a growing chorus in the scientific community that aims to protect public health says that 70 ppt is exceedingly high. Bowing to chemical industry pressure, the EPA still does not regulate PFAS. In fact, in early 2018, Scott Pruitt’s EPA and the White House frantically sought to block publication of a federal health study on PFAS, after one Trump administration aide warned it would cause a “public relations nightmare.” New toxicological profiles released in June 2018 by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has set lifetime drinking water levels of 11 ppt for PFOA and 7 ppt for PFOS. Okinawan authorities, who represent communities straddling the bases, have been recently denied access to the source of the ongoing contamination. The Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) does not give Japanese authorities access to U.S. bases, preventing them from investigating sources of such contamination. The SOFA states, “Within the facilities and areas, the United States may take all the measures necessary for their establishment, operation, safeguarding and control.” The SOFA differs from those in force in European nations like Germany, where local authorities are allowed to enter bases. According to Japan’s SOFA, Japanese officials may not conduct investigations without U.S. consent. In Germany they can. The refusal of the U.S. military to allow Japan’s officials access to the bases hinders Japanese officials from properly addressing problems caused by the bases. No wonder most Okinawans and many Japanese oppose new military base construction. Disregarding domestic and international laws and the Okinawa Prefectural government’s cancellation of the permit for reclamation works, the compliant Japanese central government has just started construction on a massive U.S. airlift on the beautiful Oura Bay in Henoko. Eighty percent of the Okinawan people oppose the construction. Accordingly, they demonstrated their opposition by electing Gov. Denny Tamaki in September of 2018. Like his predecessor Takeshi Onaga, Governor Tamaki has said “No!” to Tokyo. Tokyo’s actions against Tamaki and his government are “discriminatory, undemocratic and even illegal,” in the words of Okinawa affairs expert Gavan McCormack. Exactly how much Tamaki is going to resist Tokyo and Washington remains to be seen. Although he is opposed to the Henoko project, Tamaki has declared his general support for shared Japanese-American military bases. For generations, Okinawans and the U.S. military have lived on the Futenma site. In 2015, the water at the Chatan Water Treatment Plant measured up to 120 ppt for PFAS, exceeding EPA guidelines. Furthermore, the Dakujakugawa River that runs through the base was found to contain 1,279 ppt of PFAS. Groundwater containing PFAS near the base has been detected at these levels: Winter survey 2017 ng/L Hyakagā 190 ppt Mendakarihījāgā 680 ppt Ogumuya River 100 ppt Furuchingā upstream--Ogumuya River 83 ppt The topography is such that polluted Ginowan City is lower on the ocean side, (northwest) of the Futenma Air Station. The topography is such that polluted Ginowan City is lower on the ocean side, (northwest) of the Futenma Air Station. The soil is more contaminated on the runway, contaminating this side much more than the communities on higher ground straddling Route 330 on the southeast side of the base. This scenario is common in vulnerable communities adjacent to U.S. bases around the world. The relatively porous limestone soil is highly permeable and soluble. The topography is such that polluted Ginowan City is lower on the ocean side, (northwest) of the Futenma Air Station, while abandoning seriously contaminated Futenma. Governor Tamaki is appealing to the world, “Without solving issues related to democracy in Okinawa, the U.S.-Japan security alliance is going to be very, very vulnerable.” In a March 2014, more than 70 percent of voters opposed construction of the new base in relatively unspoiled Henoko. The vast majority of islanders want the U.S. military to leave permanently and immediately—and they want the United States to clean up the mess they’ve made. A petition to President Trump demanded cessation of work on Henoko until the referendum was held. The Numbers on PFAS Contamination According to a Marine Corps document obtained by British journalist Jon Mitchell in February 2016, PFOS at a concentration of 27,000 ppt and PFOA at a concentration of 1,800 ppt were detected when investigating the sewage in the firefighting training area on U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. The Okinawan Prefectural Government has identified 15 rivers and water treatment facilities with dangerous levels of PFOS and PFOA contamination, exceeding the EPA’s combined Lifetime Health Advisory limit of 70 ppt. In November 2018, Okinawa Prefectural Government officials reported that 2,000 ppt of the chemicals were detected at the Chunnagā Spring Water Site (Kiwimiku Chunnagā) in Kiyuna, Ginowan City. In the summer 2016 survey, 1,300 ppt of the compounds were discovered at the same site. The Chatan plant supplies water to Chatan Town, Okinawa City, Kitana Village, Urasoe Village, Nago City, and Naha City. In 2015, the water at the Chatan Water Treatment Plant measured up to 120 ppt for PFAS, exceeding EPA guidelines. Furthermore, the Dakujakugawa River that runs through the base was found to contain 1,279 ppt of PFAS.
Leaking Jet Fuel Threatens Hawaii, Not North Korean Missiles

It’s time for the U.S. military to retire the leaking Red Hill Storage tanks—and protect our precious water supply

By Ann Wright

After the big North Korean missile scare in Hawaii a year ago, one would think that missiles are the greatest threat to the island of Oahu. Yet, it’s not missiles that are the threat, it’s our own U.S. military and its massive jet fuel storage tanks that are leaking into Oahu’s drinking water aquifers.

A complex of mammoth 20-story military jet fuel storage tanks buried 20 stories down in a bluff called Red Hill is perched only 100 feet above Honolulu’s water supply. The walls on the 75-year-old jet fuel tanks are now so thin that the edge of a dime is thicker. Each of the 20 tanks holds 12.5 million gallons of jet fuel, although 18 are in operation now. Two-hundred and twenty-five million gallons of jet fuel are a mere 100 feet from causing a catastrophic disaster for the island of Oahu.

Disaster struck in 2014, when 27,000 gallons of jet fuel leaked from a tank that had been repaired with a welded patch. The welding gave way and tens of thousands of gallons of fuel leaked into the water supply. Studies have documented leaks dating back to 1947, the continued corrosion of the tank liners, and the risk of a catastrophic fuel release.

Concerned citizens on the island have been trying for decades to get the U.S. Navy remove the dangerous tanks. The military states that the underground fuel tanks are of strategic importance to national security and they are being maintained as well as 75-year old tanks can be. Yet those who live on Oahu say: “That’s not good enough! You can’t have national security by jeopardizing the health security of your citizens.”

It is not surprising that the Navy has made little effort to remove the tanks and put replacements in a less dangerous place. The military’s hold on the island of Oahu and its politicians is strong both psychologically and economically. Oahu is filled with military bases and accompanying corporations that supply the military with equipment and services.

Hawaii is one of the most militarized states in the nation and Oahu is one of the most militarized islands with seven major bases and a total of 36,620 military personnel.

When the 64,000 military family members and military contractors are added to the active-duty military, the military-industrial complex on Oahu numbers about 100,000, 10 percent of Oahu’s total population of 988,000. The state of Hawaii has only 1.4 million citizens.

Construction of the military installations on the island of Oahu began soon after the overthrow of the sovereign nation of Hawaii by U.S. businessmen and a small contingent of U.S. Marines:

• Pearl Harbor Naval Base, headquarters of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Navy and homeport for 25 warships, 15 attack submarines, nine guided-missile destroyers, and a guided-missile cruiser;
• Hickam Air Force Base, headquarters of the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, with squadrons of F-15s, F-22, C-17 and B-2 bombers;
• Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam, with a Marine Air Station and three Marine regiments;
• Schofield Barracks, home to the 25th Infantry Division;
• The Tropic Regions Test Center (TRTC);
• Camp Smith, headquarters of the United Indo-Pacific Command (responsible for all U.S. military activity in the greater Asia and Pacific region including India) and headquarters of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific;
• Fort Shafter, headquarters for the U.S. Army Pacific;
• Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, a military educational facility for military and civilian officials from Asia and the Pacific;
• Tripler Army Medical Center and Veterans Administration Medical Center;
• U.S. Coast Guard 14th District for the Pacific (while not part of the Department of Defense, during wartime, the Coast Guard can go under command of DOD), which includes three 225-foot buoy tenders, four 110-foot patrol boats, two 87-foot coastal patrol boats, four small boat stations, two sector commands, an air station, a Far East command, five detachments, and over 400 aids to navigation.

Major military installations have been built on other islands of Hawaii. The Pahakaloa Training Area, the largest U.S. military training area in the world with 133,000 acres for artillery, mortar, small arms and crew-served weapons firing, is located on the Big Island of Hawaii. Air Force bombers flying from the continental United States drop ordnance on the area between the two volcanoes of the island of Hawaii.

On the island of Kauai, the Pacific Missile Range Facility Barking Sands (PMRF) is the world’s largest-range-capable of supporting surface, submarines, aircraft, and space operations simultaneously. PMRF has over 1,100 square miles of instrumented underwater range and over 42,000 square miles of controlled airspace. The Navy is currently using PMRF to test “hit to kill” technology in which anti-ballistic missiles destroy their targets by using only the kinetic energy from the force of the collision. The Navy’s Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System and the Army’s Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System, or THAAD, are tested on Kauai at PMRF.

On the island of Maui, the Maui High Performance Computing Center, a Department of Defense Supercomputing Resource Center managed by the Air Force Research Laboratory, provides DoD scientists and engineers with one of the world’s largest computers to solve war-making computational problems.

According to the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce, the direct and indirect economic impacts of military expenditures in Hawaii bring $14.7 billion into Hawaii’s economy, creating more than 102,000 jobs. The military’s investments in Hawaii total $8.8 billion. Military procurement contracts amount to about $2.3 billion annually, making it a prime source of contracting opportunities for hundreds of Hawaii’s small businesses, including significant military construction projects.

The presence of the military on the Hawaiian islands and on its politicians at all levels cannot be underestimated, nor can the protection the military is given by its retirees and the citizens who benefit from it. The pressure on city and state officials to accept the status quo is very strong.

Finally, the U.S. government has acknowledged the medical problems the contamination of the drinking supply caused in another community—the huge U.S. Marine Base at Camp Lejune and Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) New River in North Carolina. From 1953 through 1987, tens of thousands of Marines and their families were contaminated by two on-base water wells that were contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE), perchloroethylene (PCE), benzene, and vinyl chloride, among other compounds from leaking storage tanks on the base and an off-base dry cleaner.

The Veterans Administration has acknowledged the dangerous situation on the bases in North Carolina that ignored for decades. The VA has declared that a large number of diseases are caused by the chemicals and that military personnel and their family members who have contracted these diseases and who are still living will be compensated. We can expect the same type of diseases with the continuing leaks at Red Hill.

On the other side of the country from North Carolina, the Navy has already closed down one complex of underground jet fuel storage tanks at Point Loma, Calif., which had 54 storage tanks. The riveted seams on the underground tanks began leaking as they aged. When 1.5 million gallons of fuel spilled from the site in 2006, the U.S. Navy decided to replace the tanks.

For us on Oahu, the bottom line is that when, not if, the massive jet fuel storage tanks leak into the aquifer of Honolulu, city, state, and federal officials must be held accountable—the public has given them plenty of warning of their concerns. As with lead in the water supply in Flint, Mich., officials knew that the drinking water was contaminated but didn’t do anything to stop the community from using it. Remarkably, no Flint officials have gone to jail yet, but the community is demanding accountability for malfeasance in office—which will also happen in Honolulu when the jet fuel storage tank disaster strikes.

Why, we citizens ask our elected leaders, do they allow such a disaster to continue to threaten our water supply in Honolulu when we know that 75-year-old tanks with corroding walls are continuing to leak.

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A Terrifying 12 Years

In October 2018, 15 months after Jirinec’s words brought me to tears in the Amazon, the world’s leading climate scientist authored a report for the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warning us that we have just a dozen years left to limit the catastrophic impacts of climate change. The gist of it is this: we’ve already warmed the planet one degree Celsius. If we fail to limit that warming process to 1.5 degrees, even a half-degree more than that will significantly worsen extreme heat, flooding, widespread droughts, and sea-level increases, among other grim phenomena. The report has become a key talking point of political progressives in the United States, who, like journalist and activist Naomi Klein, are now speaking of “a terrifying 12 years” left in which to cut fossil fuel emissions.

There is, however, a problem with even this approach.

Reports tend to use the lowest common denominator in their projections, which makes their science … overly optimistic.

It assumes that the scientific conclusions in the IPCC report are completely sound. It’s well known, however, that there’s been a political element built into the IPCC’s scientific process, based on the urge to get as many of the world’s leading climate scientists on board the Paris climate deal as possible, and this has meant leaning toward low estimates, agreement and other attempts to rein in climate change.

To do that, such reports tend to use the lowest common denominator in their projections, which makes their science overly conservative (that is, overly optimistic).

In addition, new data suggest that the possibility of political will coalescing across the planet to make a difference (not to speak of the heat that’s already been absorbed by the oceans?) is reasonably near future is essentially a fantasy. And the odds are stacked against us.

The International Energy Agency has already shown that maintaining our current fossil-fueled economic system would virtually guarantee a six-degree rise in the Earth’s temperature before 2050. To add insult to injury, a 2017 analysis from oil giants BP and Shell indicated that they expected the planet to be five degrees warmer by mid-century.

In late 2013, I wrote a piece for TomDispatch titled “Are We Falling Off the Climate Precipice?” Even then, it was already clear enough that we were indeed heading off that cliff. More than five years later, a sober reading of the science indicates that we are now genuinely in free fall.

The question is no longer whether or not we are going to fail, but how are we going to comport ourselves in the era of failure?

Listening While Saying Goodbye

It’s been estimated that between 150 and 200 plant, insect, bird, and mammal species are already going extinct every day. In other words, during the two and a half years I worked on my book 136,800 species may have gone extinct.

We have a finite amount of time left to coexist with significant parts of the biosphere, including glaciers, coral, and thousands of species of plants, animals, and insects. We’re going to have to learn how to say goodbye to them, part of which should involve doing everything we humanly can to save whatever is left, even knowing that the odds are stacked against us.

I often visit a small natural altar I’ve created amid a circle of cedar trees growing around a decomposing mother tree. In this magical spot, I grieve and express my gratitude for the life that is still here. I also go to listen. Where do you go to listen? And what are you hearing? For me, these days, it all begins and ends with doing my best to listen to the Earth, with trying my hardest to understand how best to serve, how to devote myself to doing everything possible for the planet, no matter the increasingly bleak prognosis for this time in human history. Perhaps if we listen deeply enough and regularly enough, we ourselves will become the song this planet needs to hear.

Originally published at Tomdispatch.com.
Dahr Jamail, a Truthout staff reporter, is the author of The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption, The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied IraqJamail has reported from Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey and has won the Izzy Award and the Martha Gellhorn Award for Investigative Journalism.

Leaking Fuel Tanks

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I will make this personal. I am 72 years old and served 29 years in the U.S. military. I retired 20 years ago. The 20 jet fuel storage tanks are 75 years old and have served each of those 75 years and are still serving.

At 72, I have had the normal number of aches and pains including a hip replacement that didn’t turn out the best and skin cancer surgery that left skin grafts and scar tissue on my face, head, and leg.

At 75, the 20-story jet fuel storage tanks also have had aches and pains as well as their skin getting thinner and thinner due to seven decades of corrosion. Patching the system, even if every country that signed the Paris climate accord were to fully honor its commitments, which most of them are not currently doing.

To give you an idea of how much heat the oceans have absorbed: if that heat had instead gone into the atmosphere, the global temperature would be 97 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than it is today. For those who think that there are still 12 years left to change things, the question posed by Wanless seems painfully apt: How do we remove all the heat that’s already been absorbed by the oceans?

Two weeks after that Nature article came out, a study in Scientific Reports warned that the extinction of animal and plant species thanks to climate change could lead to a “domino effect” that might, in the end, annihilate life on the planet. It suggested that organisms will die out at increasingly rapid rates because they cannot depend on other species that are also on their way out. It’s a process the study calls “co-extinction.” According to its authors, a five- to six-degree Celsius rise in average global temperatures might be enough to annihilate most of Earth’s living creatures.

To put this in perspective: just a two-degree rise will leave dozens of the world’s coastal mega-cities flooded, thanks primarily to melting ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica, as well as the thermal expansion of the oceans as they warm. There will be 32 times as many heat waves in India and nearly half a billion more people will suffer water scarcity. At three degrees, southern Europe will be in permanent drought and the area burned annually by wildfires in the United States will sextuple. These impacts, it was warned, will already be baked into the system, even if every country that signed the Paris climate accord were to fully honor its commitments, which most of them are not currently doing.

The question is no longer whether or not we are going to fail, but how are we going to comport ourselves in the era of failure?

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Afghanistan

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wars up close and from afar and their cruel constant murder, does, at times, necessitate such crutches for me), but to relay my own personal observation of the great lie of war in action; the ability of the machine of war to propel itself forward even when those most intimate with the war, those most responsible for it and without whose support the war could not continue, carry on the war while knowing and living the lie full well.

Almost a decade after my resignation, there are reports of a possible peace deal in the making for Afghanistan. Just as my mind, and my soul, can recall the bright scarlet red of fresh arterial blood that dulls in contact with dust and cloth, or the clay-like frozen flesh of a dead young man, whether he is an Afghan, American or Iraqi, I recognize, clearly and sickeningly, the same lies used so skillfully and effectively by politicians, generals, and the media to escalate the war in 2009, now being recirculated to defeat any current attempts for peace.

Sacrifice Does Not Confer Sanctity

When President Obama entered office in 2009, fewer than 30,000 U.S. troops were in Afghanistan. Within a year and a half that number would reach 100,000, an increase to an estimated 60,000 NATO soldiers from Europe and over 100,000 private contractors. Since 2001, more than 2,400 U.S. service members have been killed in Afghanistan, nearly 1,800 of them since 2009. European armies have had more than 1,100 soldiers killed, and more than 1,700 contractors have been killed while performing work in previous conflicts. The numbers of Afghans who have been killed are truly unknown. The United Nations, which only began counting civilian casualties in 2009, reports tens of thousands killed, with nearly each year since 2009 showing an increase in civilian dead and wounded, a monstrous and grievous accomplishment of annual record upon record. UNAMA itself cautions that its numbers should be understood to be a minimum or base level due to UNAMA's methodology. Assessments of the total dead in Afghanistan over the last 17 years put total dead at more than 100,000 civilians, although most who are familiar with war, including myself, are quick to say that is a low-end estimate. For example, Jonathan Steele has estimated more than 20,000 Afghans died as a result of the U.S. bombings in the first four months of U.S. military action following 9/11.

At least one million Afghans are internally displaced, while Afghans make up the second largest portion of the largest refugee population the world has known in World War Two, with millions living in camps in Iran and Pakistan or claiming asylum in Europe. Of course the Afghanistan War did not begin in 2001, but began more than 40 years ago and not with the Soviet Union's invasion, but with an internal civil war that saw maybe as many 100,000 dead before the Soviets invaded, U.S. support to Afghanistan's mujaheddin, the grandfathers of the young men we are fighting today in Afghanistan, began six months prior to the Soviet invasion. Over 40 years of war have completely devastated the people and land of Afghanistan. As a consequence of the violence, Afghanistan is devastated by PTSD and drug use; the countryside has been demaded and deforestation, resulting in agricultural troubles and water shortages, and no industry exists besides the illicit drug trade that, despite billions of U.S. dollars spent, yields record poppy crops and narcotics exports nearly every year (2018 was an exception due to drought).

There is a desperate sunk cost argument that haunts all wars that are lost and unworthy. As it is, more often than not, it is those who have not experienced the pain and the destruction of the war who demand more blood and more sacrifice. Turn on Fox News or open the Washington Post and this will be apparent. What makes such an argument even more mean and craven is that these deaths are forever tied and bound by the lies of the war, making them eternally ignoble and worthless. The dead will never be heroes, despite the exaggerations of eulogies, bordering often on hagiography, but will only be futureless victims of the greed and egos that advance and maintain the war.

Matt Hob has nearly 12 years experience with U.S. wars with the Marine Corps and the State and Defense Departments. He is a Center For International Policy senior fellow. In 2009, he resigned his post in State Department post in Afghanistan over the U.S. escalation of the war. His writings have appeared in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Defense News, the Guardian, the Huffington Post, and the Washington Post. He is a member of the board of directors of the Institute for Public Accuracy and of the VFP Advisory Board Member.

Okinawa

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The PFAS used in the aqueous fire-fighting foam are not regulated substances. The U.S. military is correct. The EPA, despite worldwide controversy, continues to allow their use. Reining in these substances and admitting their destructive impact might unleash a flood of lawsuits and unrest worldwide.

In an attempt to remove PFAS from drinking water, Okinawa Prefecture has installed a carbon filtration system at the Chatan Water Treatment Plant at a cost of $1.5 million. Constructing an entirely new plant would have been better for public health. The U.S. military did not offer to pay the costs of addressing the contamination at Chatan. The military has also dodged financial responsibility for PFAS contamination in communities near bases in the United States. The Pentagon’s policy is to deny responsibility and refuse to pay for new water systems.

Of course, PFAS contamination is only part of the U.S. military legacy of contamination in Okinawa. Following is a brief rundown of the toxic cocktail the United States has bequeathed to Okinawa over the years. Many of these chemicals are taken generations or longer to break down.

Camp Kinser

In 2015, after a protracted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process, the Pentagon released records detailing high levels of contamination on Camp Kinser land that were scheduled for return to civilian use. Camp Kinser includes a 46,000 square-meter highly contaminated outdoor chemical storage area located on the southern shoreline of the installation. “Retrograde shipments from Vietnam,” including insecticides, herbicides, and nerve agents, and hexavalent chromium.

The Pentagon evades responsibility for the damage its bases cause. Massive amounts of pesticides were buried at Camp Hansen in the town of Kin. Japanese officials are demanding that the United States follow EPA guidelines for remediation before returning the land and the beaches to civilian use. The Pentagon has yet to release any comment on the contamination.

The FOIA-released documents appear to corroborate the accounts of the hundreds of U.S. veterans who claim they were sickened by dioxin-tainted defoliants—including Agent Orange—in Okinawa. If the Henoko base is completed, it will spoil another beautiful area of Okinawa—the way communities surrounding Futenma, Kinser, and Kin are have been contaminated. After three quarters of a century of being occupied by a foreign military, this fresh assault on Okinawa must be halted.

Special thanks to Joseph Essertier, Associate Professor, Nagoya Institute of Technology, and coordinator of Japan for a World BEYOND War. Some of the findings in this article are based on the research of Jon Mitchell, a British journalist and author based in Japan, and Masami Kawamura of the Okinawa-based Inform-Public Project, a research organization focusing on environmental issues.

Pat Elder currently serves on the Coordinating Committee of World BEYOND War, worldbeyonddwar.org, a rapidly expanding organization with membership in 160 countries.
Michelle Alexander is Right About Israel-Palestine

By Marjorie Cohn

As a progressive Jew, I find that many of my family members and friends are still what we call “PEP”—progressive except Palestine. Amid ever worsening injustices created by the Israeli system of apartheid and Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, it is past time for this to change.

I am hopeful that the firestorm sparked by Michelle Alexander’s book, “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration the Age of Colorblindness,” will finally generate the heat necessary to force more people and groups on the left to overcome the fundamental hypocrisy of the “progressive except Palestine” approach.

I was deeply inspired by Alexander’s columns and her decision to face the truth about the difficulty of overcoming the fear of backlash over taking a public stand against the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Striking a comparison between the risk taken by prominent critics of Israel and the risk Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. took by publicly criticizing the Vietnam War, Alexander observes, “Those who speak publicly in support of the liberation of the Palestinian people still risk condemnation and backlash.”

Invoking Dr. King’s exhortation that “a time comes when silence is betrayal,” Alexander’s column on “The Excuses and Rationalizations that have kept me largely silent on one of the great moral challenges of our time: the crisis in Israel-Palestine.”

Alexander’s words resonated with me, a Jew who uncritically supported Israel for many years until I saw the parallels between U.S. policy in Vietnam and Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. My activism and critical writings have followed a trajectory from Vietnam to the Palestinian territories.

Although many of my articles are controversial as they criticize the actions of the U.S. government—under both Democratic and Republican regimes—I get the most pushback from my writings about Israeli-Palestine. When I analyze Israel’s illegal occupation and crimes against the Palestinians, I am often called a “self-hating” Jew, a “Zionist,” a “pro-Israeli” Jew, or “anti-Semitic.”

I was born in 1948, the year Israel was created out of whole Palestinian cloth. When tasked with finding a destination for Jews displaced by the Holocaust, the United Nations chose Palestine. Thus began a brutal and illegal occupation that continues to this day.

In his book Injustice: The Story of the Holy Land Foundation Five, Israeli-American Miko Peled describes the 1948 “ethnic cleansing” campaign that was sweeping through Palestine like wildfire, destroying everything in its path.”

Palestinians call it the “Nakba,” Arabic for “catastrophe.”

My family was not religious but we were proud of our Jewish heritage. My father fought the Nazis in World War II and relatives perished in the Holocaust.

I have become sharply critical of Israel. I have become a “Palestinian” Jew, as defined by Jews fighting for liberation of the Palestinian people. I was a “self-hating” Jew until I saw the parallels between U.S. policy in Vietnam and Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.

My activism and critical writings have followed a trajectory from Vietnam to the Palestinian territories. My activism and critical writings have followed a trajectory from Vietnam to the Palestinian territories.

When I first read the 1977 NLG delegation report, I visited Ellis Island, where my grandparents arrived in the United States. It is now a museum. As I walked the route they traveled, I felt very emotional about what they endured. But my deep feelings about the suffering of my ancestors during the Holocaust are not inconsistent with my criticisms of Israel for subjecting the Palestinians to a different kind of oppression.

As stories continue to emerge about Israel’s killing of unarmed protesters at the Gaza border in the Great March of Return, it is increasingly difficult to ignore the facts. Yet even those who see the truth about Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians worry about reprisals for speaking out.

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Ilhan Omar Was Right About AIPAC

I’m ashamed to admit that endorsing AIPAC positions was all about the Benjamins for me and my candidate.

By Ady Barkan

In February, Republican House minority leader Kevin McCarthy said he would seek to formally sanction the first two Muslim congresswomen, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, because their criticism of Israel’s occupation of Palestine was even more reprehensible than Congressman Steve King’s defense of white supremacy.

What motivated McCarthy’s false accusations of anti-Semitism? On Twitter, Omar suggested, “It’s all about the Benjamins baby,” quoting Puff Daddy’s ’90s paean to cash money. Omar subsequently specified that she was talking about spending from the likes of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, better known as AIPAC, the powerful pro-Israel lobbying organization.

AIPAC mobilized its allies to condemn Omar’s comment for playing into centuries-old anti-Semitic tropes that wealthy Jews control the world. Even the Democratic leadership put out a statement condemning her. All because she dared to point out that the emperor has no clothes.

As a Jew, an Israeli citizen, and a professional lobbyist (ahem, activist), I speak from personal experience when I say that AIPAC is tremendously effective, and the lubricant that makes its operation hum is dollar, dollar bills.

In 2006, fresh out of college, I landed a job as the first real staffer on a long-shot Democratic congressional race in deep-red Ohio. My boss, Victoria Wulsin, was a charming hippie doctor with a lefty perspective on international affairs. She was skeptical of military force and opposed to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

About a month after winning the Democratic primary, we were struggling to gain attention or money. Nobody gave us a chance to win. One political-action organization, however, did reach out to us. It wasn’t Emily’s List, although Vic was fiercely pro-choice. It wasn’t labor union or even a doctors’ association. It was AIPAC.

A local Democratic volunteer leader of the Cincinnati AIPAC chapter sat down in Vic’s living room and said that he would like to raise $5,000 for our campaign and would also like to see Vic take a public stance on two relatively obscure issues related to Israeli sanctions, arms sales to Israel, or some other such topic that very few voters in the district cared about.

Vic and I both thought of ourselves as pro-peace, not pro-Israel. We both felt lily about doing it: it was too hawkish and too quick pro quo. But we were desperate. So I read the AIPAC position papers that the volunteer left with us, I wrote up a statement saying that Vic supported AIPAC’s stance on its two pet issues of the cycle, she approved it, I posted it online, and the checks promptly arrived in the mail thereafter. We didn’t win, but the money helped us get close.

It was, I am ashamed to say, definitely about the Benjamins. We never would have done it otherwise. AIPAC’s power is about more than money, certainly. It’s about great organizing (they built a local chapter, and sent a local Democratic volunteer emissary who then facilitated the contributions). It’s about diligence (they paid attention to Vic’s campaign long before anyone else, and were happy to donate to both us and the militaristic political contributions. Instead, as it notes proudly on its website, individual members of its “Congressional Club,” like that Cincinnati resident, do the bundling and donating directly, both as individuals and through Political Action Committees that AIPAC and its members have set up.

Omar is right to point all this out. These dynamics are not unique to the Israel-Palestine issue, however, and there is no reason that Americans should be surprised or offended by what she or I am saying. The NRA and the broader gun lobby operate in the same way. Same with ExxonMobil and the fossil-fuel lobby. But since Omar and Tlaib are powerful new spokespersons for the movement to end the Israeli occupation, delegitimizing them is a central aim of the Israel lobby. AIPAC and its partners, which include Christian Zionists and military contractors, are a central pillar of the Israeli occupation. Without congressional support, the Likud anti-Palestine/pro-occupation project would be radically undermined. The money that AIPAC and the rest of the lobby spend is indispensable to its work. That’s why they spend it. Pointing this out is not anti-Semitic.

We do, in fact, have a growing anti-Semitism problem in America. But Omar and Tlaib are not a part of it. They are allies of mine and of Jews across this country who are fighting for peace, racial justice, immigrants’ rights, and the defeat of fascism. The anti-Semites are the Nazis and white supremacists who marched and murdered in Charlottesville, whom Donald Trump called “very fine people,” and the MAGA supporter who massacred worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue.

The Israel lobby flexed its muscles in response to Omar’s tweet. Almost all of Capitol Hill, sadly including the Democratic leadership that I have supported, was up in arms. It flexed with equal potency last month in marshaling through the Senate a clearly unconstitutional law to ban speech promoting a boycott of Israel.

For 12 years, I have harbored minor private shame for advising Vic to endorse AIPAC’s position papers and more significant shame for not doing enough to stop the oppression of the Palestinian people.

Omar and Tlaib are powerful new spokespersons for the movement to end the Israeli occupation; delegitimizing them is a central aim of the Israel lobby.

Alexander

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Alexander describes the silence of many civil rights activists and groups, “not because they lack concern or sympathy for the Palestinian people, but because they fear loss of funding from foundations, and false charges of anti-Semitism.” She mentioned the case of Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.

Amawi’s case is only the most recent. Sanctions National Committee, says, “As a citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.” She mentioned the case of Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic. Amawi’s case is only the most recent. Sanctions National Committee, says, “As a citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.” She mentioned the case of Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic. Amawi’s case is only the most recent. Sanctions National Committee, says, “As a citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.” She mentioned the case of Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic. Amawi’s case is only the most recent. Sanctions National Committee, says, “As a citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.” She mentioned the case of Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic. Amawi’s case is only the most recent. Sanctions National Committee, says, “As a citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.” She mentioned the case of Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic.
Ilhan Omar

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I am speaking up now because it may be my last chance. Although I am only 35, I am dying. As I write these words, I am sitting with my wife in the waiting room of the Santa Barbara hospital emergency room, basically paralyzed from the neck down. My hands do not work and almost nobody can understand my mumbling, so I am using amazing technology that tracks the location of my eyes and allows me to slowly type out these words with my pupil-tips.

This is my chance to redeem my Jewish guilt, to speak out against the oppression that is being perpetrated in my name, and I do not intend to let a minor obstacle like ALS stop me.

Young Jews across America increasingly agree with Omar and me, and that is making the Israel lobby very nervous. As it should: humanity of Johnny’s journey and show that his radical politics were not born out of ideology but from seeing poverty and oppression firsthand.

Johnny had become determined to campaign for equality when he witnessed the brutal violence against Jews and Muslims and was horrified at the stories they told him. He was smuggled to Paris and then walked through the Pyrenees to get to Spain, and joined the International Brigade. He was wounded three times (once temporarily blinded) and was incredibly lucky to come back alive.

Only a few weeks after he returned in the summer of 1939 he went to Westminster to meet his local MP, Winston Churchill happened to be passing and Johnny was introduced to him as a young socialist soldier just returned from Spain. Churchill looked suspiciously at the 19-year-old and asked, “Would men like you be prepared to fight Hitler?” “I’ve been fighting Hitler all my life,” answered Johnny.

On the first day of the Second World War, Johnny went to Richmond, but was turned away—because he had fought in Spain. He didn’t give up, and became a sergeant, fought at El Alamein and Monte Cassino, and was rewarded for gallantry. Back home, he married Pauline, raised a family and became a rather reluctant civil servant. But he didn’t forget much about his early life but kept from them the true extent of the horrors of war.

By early 2018 the story and 16 songs were ready. With help from the remarkable Cally of Antar.cc, we created a live show that plunges audiences into Johnny’s world. Photographs and newspaper cuttings are projected onto a backdrop of Spanish street posters. A copy of a revolutionary newspaper is on every seat and Johnny’s own voice comes from a 1930s-style radio.

Our first tour ended in Stockton-on-Tees, almost 100 years after Johnny had been born there. Three generations of Longstaffs lined the front row. At the end of the show we pointed them out to the audience, and the people of Teesside rose to their feet to applaud them. We all cried.

After that show someone else came up to chat. “There must have been thousands of Johnny Longstaffs out there whose stories will never be heard,” he said. “That’s OUR story. We can speak for them. I think he’d be glad of that.”

Sean Cooney, is a songwriter and member of the Young’uns. In 2018, their album Strangers was crowned Best Album at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards.
Movie Review

They Shall Not Grow Old, Narrated By Those Who Did

By Lisa Savage

It was my grandfather’s experiences in WWI that led him to teach his only child, my father, who passed it along to us: “Don’t believe them when they say the next war is a good war; there is no such thing.” Brooks Elliott Savage was wounded on the 11th day of the 11th month, basically the 11th hour of the war, by shrapnel and then mustard gas. He suffered through a long recovery and it took his parents in Skowhegan, Maine, most of a year to even find him. Brooks, who had marched off as an idealistic high school graduate, was talking to his son about Korea, but hoped at the time as crucial to fending off communism emanating from Red China. My dad went away after his dad died, but by then it was postcombat. Still, the suffering of the Korean people who had lost millions of family members and couldn’t feed their kids made an impression on him.

“War is hell,” is what he taught us. “There’s nothing glorious about living the rest of your life with a bum leg, bad lungs, and a guilty conscience.”

They Shall Not Grow Old is a historical marvel, but it isn’t a good film. Cobbled together from archival footage as a project of the Imperial War Museum in England by New Zealand director Sir Peter Jackson (Lord of the Rings and Hobbit trilogies), the project applies modern technology to restore images and insert sound tracks. Lip reading was used to render some of the dialogue, but most is voiceover narration drawn from BBC oral history interviews with veterans. The title of the film is never explained; we are meant to understand that it is a reference to a poem glorifying the “Great War” at its inception.

“In “For the Fallen,” published in 1914, Robert Laurence Binyon wrote: ‘Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. / At the going down of the sun and in the morning, / We will remember them.’

Jackson began to discuss the years condemned the one million imperial troops who died in the scramble for the colonial spoils of the unrelenting Ottoman Empire. To a student of history like me, WWI set off a bloody chain of events that led directly to WWI and thence to the Zionist project in Palestine. Plastic Surgery of the Face, showing how red-hot shrapnel can carve bone and muscle into monstrous forms and the freakish configurations that accompany attempts at reconstruction

The wounded receive mute witness rats. The dead flit across the screen in graphic view of young men growing up with shared comradery and purposeful adventures of the 70s and 80s, the film narrows its focus to other than the archive of BBC interviews.

Jackson artfully presents it, using no narration for the ‘70s. His goal was to have “120 men telling stories got to me. His mouth was shut; nothing, apparently, would happen from that moment on. As long as they keep their mouths shut, nothing, apparently, would be done about their fantastically bad teeth. The rot lurking in their goofy smiles as they head off for their great adventure is an omen.

The industrial-scale carnage is no surprise to us but it was to many of the lads. Amid the cacophony one can almost hear the keening of the cash register as merchants of war sell the machinery of war. Real human beings firing missile after missile aren’t worth much and are easily replaced amid the sophisticated propaganda campaigns and coward-shaming back home.

It’s a deep psychological film, but such an ugly and amoral picture of human endeavor made me proud to be an anti-military woman. There are no nurses ever at any point in the film, which is historically ignorant, nor suffragette antiwar activists. Just a few moms who don’t want their sons mangled, and lots of prostitutes. As the credits roll, we’re treated to a lengthy version of a contemporaneous song with rude lyrics about women, for example:

Oh, Mademoiselle from Armentieres, Parlez-vous? (repeat)
She’ll do it for wine, she’ll do it for rum,
And sometimes for chocolate or chewing gum!

It’s unclear to me why Jackson displays his lack of analysis or historical perspective devoid of ethics as if they were sources of pride. Sexism—and racism—hiding behind historical drama is a hallmark of what passes for Anglo culture in the 21st century.

It may be true, but it’s nothing to be proud of.

Lisa Savage is a peace activist, educator, and blogger. She is the manager of Bring Our War Dollar Home and the Maine BDS Coalition. She is the founder of the Maine Natural Guard.

Missed Opportunities

By Mike Ferner

Newspapers on the other side of the world are calling it “the biggest U.S. cinematic event of all time.”

Critical acclaim has poured in from all corners for the BBC production, They Shall Not Grow Old, a technical and emotional masterpiece on the Great War, the war to end all wars, and the Maine BDS Coalition. She is the founder of the Maine Natural Guard.

The industrial-scale carnage is no surprise to us but it was to many of the lads. Amid the cacophony one can almost hear the keening of the cash register as merchants of war sell the machinery of war. Real human beings firing missile after missile aren’t worth much and are easily replaced amid the sophisticated propaganda campaigns and coward-shaming back home.

It’s a deep psychological film, but such an ugly and amoral picture of human endeavor made me proud to be an anti-military woman. There are no nurses ever at any point in the film, which is historically ignorant, nor suffragette antiwar activists. Just a few moms who don’t want their sons mangled, and lots of prostitutes. As the credits roll, we’re treated to a lengthy version of a contemporaneous song with rude lyrics about women, for example:

Oh, Mademoiselle from Armentieres, Parlez-vous? (repeat)
She’ll do it for wine, she’ll do it for rum,
And sometimes for chocolate or chewing gum!

It’s unclear to me why Jackson displays his lack of analysis or historical perspective devoid of ethics as if they were sources of pride. Sexism—and racism—hiding behind historical drama is a hallmark of what passes for Anglo culture in the 21st century.

It may be true, but it’s nothing to be proud of.

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war that Jackson left out. Ever since nursing GIs returning from Vietnam, I’ve firmly believed that no member of Congress should be allowed to vote on war funding until working for a month in the back ward of a VA hospital, emptying urine bags, turning flaccid, sallow bodies and daubing the bed sores of formerly healthy youths that Dorothy (Judy Garland) was not in Kansas anymore? They Shall Not Grow Old bursts into colorization to signal that the scrappy teens of working-class England have entered the Great War. With their undernourished limbs whipped into shape by regular meals and bullying drill sergeants, they start to resemble an imperial army. As long as they keep their mouths shut; nothing, apparently, would be done about their fantastically bad teeth. The rot lurking in their goofy smiles as they head off for their great adventure is an omen.

They Shall Not Grow Old allows the reminiscences of 70 year-old veterans to breathe life into the determined, youthful war that Jackson left out. Ever since nursing GIs returning from Vietnam, I’ve firmly believed that no member of Congress should be allowed to vote on war funding until working for a month in the back ward of a VA hospital, emptying urine bags, turning flaccid, sallow bodies and daubing the bed sores of formerly healthy youths that Dorothy (Judy Garland) was not in Kansas anymore? They Shall Not Grow Old bursts into colorization to signal that the scrappy teens of working-class England have entered the Great War. With their undernourished limbs whipped into shape by regular meals and bullying drill sergeants, they start to resemble an imperial army. As long as they keep their mouths shut; nothing, apparently, would be done about their fantastically bad teeth. The rot lurking in their goofy smiles as they head off for their great adventure is an omen.

They Shall Not Grow Old allows the reminiscences of 70 year-old veterans to
Delivering the Facts About VA Healthcare

Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation’s Veterans
By Suzanne Gordon

By Denny Riley

Suzanne Gordon’s latest book *Wounds of War* is about the Veterans Healthcare Administration, the healthcare plan under attack by conservative politicians and commentators, the two fabulously wealthy Koch brothers, and Veterans For America, a sham veterans organization financed by the Kochs. They all malign the VHA (often simply called the VA) on the flimsiest of anecdotal facts. Many of us have been convinced by this attack that the Veterans Health Administration is in worse shape than the men and women who turn to it for care. Many people, even veterans who qualify for VHA care, put their health in the hands of hope. They hope the HMO or private healthcare plan they’re signed up with offers them healthcare professionals who are good. Whether they are good—whether they’ve had malpractice suits settled against them or had their licenses suspended at some time—can be difficult to discover. For-profit healthcare companies and the medical associations keep their disciplinary procedures as far from the public eye as possible. The assumption is that HMOs and private healthcare employ good people. They say so in their advertisements. Certainly better than the Veterans Healthcare Administration, one would think.

Gordon swings our attention to a different view of healthcare in America. The RAND Corporation and the MITRE Corporation “confirmed, in great detail, that the quality of the VHA’s frontline care was equal to or superior to that delivered in private sector … wait times for appointments with primary care providers or medical specialists at the VHA were actually shorter than those experienced by patients using private doctors or hospitals.”

Those might be sufficient words to convince a person if discussing the matter over dinner or a glass of wine, but the force amassed to convince the public to turn the VHA’s budget ($200 billion annually) over to the private sector has tremendous clout. So Gordon did the work, and with *Wounds of War* the facts are known. They are here in black and white.

Full disclosure compels me to say I am a military veteran who receives healthcare at a Veterans Health Administration facility Suzanne Gordon writes about in *Wounds of War*, and I am satisfied with the care I get, generally pleased. Compared to my friends who are enrolled in private healthcare, I may be the only one pleased with his care.

Gordon hasn’t written *Wounds of War*, however, as a champion of the VHA. She is an award-winning journalist whose 18 published books are about healthcare, patient safety, nursing, and teamwork, and she goes at this thorough book about the VHA with the mastery she has applied to all of her chosen subjects.

Subtitled “How the VA Delivers, Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation’s Veterans,” the book covers all of those issues and more. Written in 17 topical chapters with an introductory conclusion, and an epilogue, *Wounds of War* tells it all. The evolution of many VHA programs is explained, usually in the words of the physicians and clinicians who developed them, with brief biographies of veterans who participated. Gordon approaches the title of every chapter but some of the more expressive names are “Promises Broken and Kept,” “When Wounded Warriors Are Women,” “Mental Health the Way It Should Be,” “Suicide Prevention,” “Transcending Trauma,” “Off the Streets: Reducing Veteran Homelessness,” and “Better Care Where?” There is more detail in these chapters than some readers might need but for those with a particular interest in a particular subject, a great deal will be gained. Let’s take the chapter on mental health, a subject everyone is interested in, either for yourself or for a friend or your boss.

Gordon approached the VHA not through interviews either in person or in emails or on the phone. No, she visited a VHA facility and spent days with caregivers, in their offices, in staff meetings, and with patients. She visited psychiatrist LANIER SUMMERALL at a VHA Medical Center in South Carolina and also at a VHA Medical Center in Vermont. Doctor Summerville has been with the VHA several decades. From a mental health point of view, Dr. Summerville describes the integrated healthcare unique in the United States to the VHA.

“We have a breadth of psychological services under one roof that is unequaled even in the most well-resourced private sector environment,” Gordon quotes her. “If a person is homeless, they can get help with a variety of agencies to get housing. If they are having trouble getting a job, we have supportive employment and compensated work therapy. We have residential programs for PTSD and substance abuse and for chronic, hard-to-treat psychiatric illnesses like bipolar or schizophrenia.” Summerville goes on, “Our patients have lifestyle problems, relationship problems, work problems.” She says many of the patients cannot possibly coordinate their own care or take responsibility for self-care. “The paramount thing for these people is that everybody here [the VHA facility] knows each other. We are all on the same team in the same place.” Dr. Summerville continues, “We have the only system of integrated mental health and primary care in the country.”

As Gordon reveals, the VHA functions very differently from the way it is depicted in most mainstream media coverage. The Veterans Healthcare System has 150 hospitals, 819 clinics, and 300 mental health centers, employing 250,000 people (a third of whom are veterans themselves) and seeing 230,000 patients a day. Among the many VHA innovations and inventions are the implantable cardiac pacemaker, CAT scans, the nicotine patch, the first successful liver transplant, the use of low-dose aspirin regimen to prevent heart attacks, and prosthetic technology to help restore the sense of touch for those who have lost an upper limb or use an artificial hand. All of this was done on the Veteran Healthcare Administration research budget where there is no profit incentive, no patents to file, and all discoveries are made available to all Americans.

Then why are problems the VHA may have not simply fixed? Why is there a movement toward privatization rather than getting it operating at the level our veterans deserve? After all aren’t these the people we’ve been told to thank for their service, people often referred to as heroes? Well, first of all there is that $200 billion budget the Koch brothers and their allies would like shifted to the private sector. And to a lesser degree the VHA is in a different light than private healthcare. It is a public institution with the mission to fulfill President Lincoln’s promise “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s veterans. As a public institution supported by taxpayers, its books are open. We can look behind the curtain and see how it is run. So those with their eye on the big budget can poke and point with ease.

Private sector healthcare has no equivalent damning light. For instance the Cleveland Clinic, a highly regarded general medical and surgery system with 11 hospitals and 18 health centers, was fined $650,000 for serious lab violations in 2015 and paid $1.6 million to the Justice Department to settle “accusations that it implanted care devices in patients too soon after a heart attack or surgery,” in 2016, while the CEO received huge salary increases. The Cleveland Clinic averaged more than $730,000 on lobbying between 2014 and 2018. No one clamored for the CEO’s dismissal or the closing of any of the Cleveland Clinic facilities.

Of course money is the issue, it always is. But 70 percent of the United States’ medical residents and 40 percent of all other healthcare professionals receive some or all of their training at a VHA facility. The VHA is the spine of American healthcare. Gordon clearly and extensively makes that point. And the VHA is looking at a stream of disabled veterans for at least the next 50 years (an estimate based on disarmament happening some time soon.) Who among us will be the one to tell the returning soldier we do not care? Anyone who wants the VHA dismantled does not know the facts. Suzanne Gordon delivers the facts in *Wounds of War*.

Denny Riley is an Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, a writer, and a member of the San Francisco chapter of Veterans For Peace.