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

Volume 5 Number 1 Winter 2019 Donations Accepted

U.S. Opened Doors After Vietnam War and Can Do So Again

By Ann Wright

People from Central America, as well as those displaced by wars in the Middle East, should get the kind of U.S. welcome that the military helped provide to refugees from Indochina in 1975

The thousands of people now trying to flee violence in Central America are small in number compared to those who were desperately trying to escape from Vietnam and other Indochina countries decades ago.

In the spring of 1975—with the U.S. either on the brink of pulling out of Vietnam, or already gone—over 131,000 South Vietnamese fled the country, some on the last planes out of Vietnam and other in flotillas of small boats. It was the beginning of a much larger exodus. All told, about 750,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos came to the United States between 1975 and 1986. They came under two resettlement initiatives established by Congress: the Refugee Parole Program and the Orderly Departure Program.

After the United States signed a peace agreement with North Vietnam, U.S. military ships that were still off South Vietnam began picking up hundreds of people each day who had left South Vietnam on small boats. The vast majority had been on the U.S.-backed southern side of the war and feared reprisal by the new communist government from the North. At worst they could be killed and at the least forced into re-education camps.

No equation of those refugees from the Vietnam War with people now and in recent years seeking refuge from widespread social instability in Central America—marked by gangs of drug cartels and linked to decades of covert U.S. operations—can be exact. But today’s refugees from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, along with the millions of people displaced by U.S.-backed military interventions in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, deserve comparable consideration, given the U.S. role in disrupting their lives.

Instead, President Donald Trump is turning a hostile face on Central American migrants and refugees—by separating children from parents, by insisting on building a wall, by having people rounded up. Longstanding concerns about the conditions inside the U.S. detention centers were renewed by the Washington Post report of a 7-year-old girl dying of dehydration.

The United States has also shown indifference to refugees from Iraq and Syria by barely opening its doors. Admission numbers were already paltry under the Obama administration, when the United States was only allowing tens of thousands of refugees a year. Now, under Trump, 2018 is on track to hit a 40-year low, finds Global Citizen in an analysis of U.S. State Department data. More than 5 million Syrians are registered refugees, with Turkey hosting the highest number, followed by Lebanon and Jordan, according to December data from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees. More than six million Syrians have had to seek refuge inside their own country.

In a cruel backtracking of U.S. commitments, the Trump administration is once again signaling its intention to deport Vietnamese immigrants who 40 years ago fled retaliation and have lived in the United States for four decades, according to a Dec.

A U.S. Veteran Who Can Never Leave Afghanistan

By Rory Fanning

I’m here in Chicago, 7,000 miles and 15 years away from Jalalabad, a desolate town in southeastern Afghanistan. Yet sometimes it seems to me as if it were yesterday, or even tomorrow, and anything but thousands of miles distant.

There are moments when it feels like I never left—or maybe I mean, when it feels like it left with me, like Afghanistan and my once-upon-a-time life as a U.S. Army Ranger are all right here, right now, in my unheated garage workshop. Right here, right now, in fact, the sawdust is swirling as I run a two-inch slab of walnut through my lousy Ryobi table saw. The dust and the noise from that saw instantly bring to mind an image of an American helicopter landing in the Afghan countryside, not too far from Jalalabad. It all seems suddenly to flash before my eyes—only the dust in Afghanistan was chalkier and finer than the dust from this walnut slab, which is old, but not Afghanistan old.

Each of those dusts has dry, earthy, almost sugary smells. It’s hard right now for me to tell which is louder, the helicopter
What Hell Are We Waiting For?

For over two years now, throughout the 2016 Election and through 690 days of his illegitimate presidency, we have had our intelligence and our conscience assaulted and further compromised.

Every day we face rabid unchecked White supremacy, xenophobia and greed, the bedrock of this country, been given permission to foment through Trump as president. We endure the daily brazen lies and indignities. We witness as so many suffer the harm done. The majority of people remain seated watching, as if in an audience watching a Reality TV Show. A Reality TV Presidency.

Before our very eyes we see he is a criminal. We do know this. Yet the powers in charge wait as though we can afford more time to pass before indictments are served to demand Trump’s arrest.

The prisons and jails in this country are packed with populations of black and brown people who on a daily basis are picked up for nothing, processed quickly with little regard for any thorough investigation, or made to wait, jailed without any due process. Every day, people who should be free are not free.

Do we accept that once a man gets his will, he gets to act out in the highest of places in the land? Is that our president or someone acting out in the highest of places in our land? It has been clear all along that Trump is a sexual predator, greed and hate-filled man, violent, cruel, racist white supremacist, xenophobic white nationalist, misogynist sexual predator, greed and hate-filled man remains free to act out in the highest of offices of this country.

There is no justice.

It has been clear all along that Trump should be stopped. Yet, we see that a deadly system of deep corruption has a high tolerance for crime in this country, committed on its behalf. So far Trump remains unchecked. No law applies to the lawless at the very top.

Do we accept that once a man gets his foot in the door of the White House there may only be crime and no punishment? It seems Trump counted on this all along.

Will we accept more insult and injury? Or will we take a different path?

Will we check absolute power and balance the U.S. Presidency? Will We Arrest Trump?

Laurie Arbeiter
New York City

A Promise Fulfilled

This December 17, Mike Hanes, a former Force Recon Marine who served in Iraq, walked the final miles up to McAfee Knob, elevation 3,197 feet, on Catawba Mountain in Virginia, to complete the 2,191 miles of Appalachian Trail. He was fulfilling a promise made long ago to himself, and to his beloved younger brother who died in an accident while Mike was due to leave for his epic hike.

Mike is a treasured friend to many of us in Veterans For Peace who have had the experience of being on Peace Team delegations with him to Jeju Island, South Korea; Okinawa and Palestine. He is in the upper echelon of VFP, where they hold him in great respect as well.

He started the trail on May 1. In October, taking a break from his epic journey, Mike stayed at Ellen Davidson’s and my house in Woodstock, N.Y., for a week, resting an injured foot. What a pleasure it was to spend time with our pal of many adventures and what joy to watch him eat! I have never seen someone his size (about 150 lbs) eat so much. Where did it all go I wondered? But Mike was burning so many calories on the trail it was impossible, no matter how much he ate, to keep weight on. He’s always been all muscle, impossible, no matter how much he ate, to keep weight on. He’s always been all muscle, no matter how much he ate, to keep weight on. He’s always been all muscle, no matter how much he ate, to keep weight on.

Mike had begun his trek at Springer Mountain in Georgia and went to McAfee Knob, where he connected with his Uncle Steve, who had taken a 12-year-old Michael hiking there some 30 years earlier. It became a place that was special to both of them. Young Mike saw other hikers and told himself, “Some day I’m going to do that.” From McAfee Knob, he took a train to Maine, where he “flipped” and headed back south from Mount Katahdin.

After his stay in Woodstock, Mike had some 700 hard miles to go from Bear Mountain, N.Y., to McAfee Knob. There was no question for me that I would drive to Virginia and hike the four miles up to the top of my lungs, Then the tears came as I felt my brother’s presence. I wished so much he was there. He would have been. It was at this moment, I felt a shift—I was a changed person. The trail has broken me down and built me back up, made me a stronger and better man. Now I am ready to go back into the world and make a positive difference with a new sense of focus and purpose I didn’t have before.

“I thank all of you who have followed me through this sacred journey and for your encouragement, motivation and positive thoughts. May peace, prosperity and a zest for living life to the fullest permeate you all.”

—Tarak Kauff
Trump: An ‘Idiot Entertainer’ Who Only Cares about Lurid Spectacles of Sex, Gore, and Fantasy

By Chris Hedges

The idiots take over in the final days of crumbling civilizations. Idiot generals wage endless, unwinnable wars that bankrupt the nation. Idiot economists call for reducing taxes for the rich and cutting social service programs for the poor, and project economic growth on the basis of myth. Idiot industrialists poison the water, the soil, and the air; slash jobs, and depress wages. Idiot bankers gamble on self-created financial bubbles and impose crippling debt peonage on the citizens. Idiot journalists and public intellectuals pretend despotism is democracy. Idiot intelligence operatives orchestrate the overthrow of foreign governments to create lawless enclaves that give rise to enraged fanatics. Idiot professors, “experts” and “specialists” busy themselves with unintelligible jargon and arcane theory that buttresses the policies of the rulers. Idiot entertainers and producers create lurid spectacles of sex, gore, and fantasy.

There is a familiar checklist for extinction. We are ticking off every item on it.

The idiots know only one word—"more." They are unencumbered by common sense. They hoard wealth and resources until workers cannot make a living and the infrastructure collapses. They live in privileged compounds where they eat chocolate cake and order missile spectacles of sex, gore, and fantasy.

Donald Trump is the face of our collective idiocy. He is what lies behind the mask of our professed civility and rationality—a sputtering, narcissistic, bloodthirsty megalomaniac. He wields armies and fleets against the wretched of the earth, blithely ignoring the catastrophic human misery caused by global warming, pillages on behalf of global oligarchs and at night sits slack-jawed in front of a television set before opening his “beautiful” Twitter account. He is our version of the Roman emperor Nero, who allocated vast state expenditures to attain magical powers, the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang, who funded repeated expeditions to a mythical island of immortals to bring back the potion that would give him eternal life, and a decayed Russian royalty that sat around reading tarot cards and attending séances as their nation was decimated by war and revolution brewed in the streets.

This moment in history marks the end of a long, sad tale of greed and murder by the white races. It is inevitable that for the final show we vomited a grotesque figure like Trump. Europeans and Americans have spent five centuries conquer- ing, plundering, exploiting, and polluting the earth in the name of human progress. They used their technological superiority to create the most efficient killing machines on the planet, directed against any-one and anything, especially indigenous cultures, that stood in their way. They stole and hoarded the planet’s wealth and resources. They believed that this orgy of stealing and hoarding the planet’s wealth and resources is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Par- adise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. Magic thinking is not limited to the beliefs and practices of pre-modern cultures. It defines the ideology of capitalism. Quotas and projected sales can always be met. Profits can always be raised. Growth is inevitable. The impossible is always possible. Human societies, if they bow before the dictates of the market-place, will be ushered into capitalist paradise. It is only a question of having the right attitude and the right technique. When capitalism thrives, we are assured, we thrive. The more we turn to those who chant, delusion is a career opportunity for charlatans who tell us what we want to hear. The capitalist collective has robbed us of our agency, creativity, capacity for self-reflection and moral autonomy. We define our worth not by our independence or our character but by the material standards set by capitalism—personal wealth, brands, status and career advancement. We are molded into a compliant and repressed collective. This mass conformity is characteristic of totalitarian and authoritarian states. It is the Disneyfication of America, the land of eternally happy thoughts and positive attitudes. And when magical thinking does not work, we are told, and often accept, that we are the problem. We must have more faith. We must envision what we want. We must try harder. The system is never to blame. We failed it. It did not fail us.

All of our systems of information, from self-help gurus and Hollywood to political monstrosities such as Trump, sell us this snake oil. We blind ourselves to impend- ing collapse. Our retreat into self-delusion is a career opportunity for charlatans who tell us what we want to hear. The magical thinking they espouse is a form of infantilism. It discredits facts and realities that defy the glowing cant of slogans such as “Make America great again.” Reality is banished for relentless and baseless optimism.

Half the country may live in poverty, our civil liberties may be taken from us, militarized police may murder unarmed citizens in the streets and we may see the world’s largest prison system and mersal war machine, but all these truths are studiously ignored. Trump embodies the essence of this decayed, intellectually bankrupt, and immoral world. He is its natural expression. He is the king of the idiots. We are his victims.

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Chris Hedges writes a regular column for Truthdig. His most recent book is Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt.
How Capitalism Torched the Planet and Left It a Smoking Fascist Greenhouse

By Umar Haque

Sometimes, when I write scary essays, I encourage you not to read them. This one’s different. It’s going to be brutal, scary, jarring, and alarming. But if you want my thoughts on the future, then read away.

It strikes me that the planet’s fate is now probably sealed. We have just a decade in which to control climate change—or an unknown level of catastrophic, inescapable, runaway warming is inevitable. The reality is: we’re probably not going to make it. It’s highly dubious at this juncture that humanity is going to win the fight against climate change.

Yet that is for a very unexpected—yet perfectly predictable—reason: the sudden explosion in global fascism, which in turn is a consequence of capitalism having failed as a model of global order. Brazil elects a neo-fascist who plans to raze and sell off the Amazon—the world’s lungs—how do you suppose the fight against warming will be won? It will be set back by decades—decades we don’t have. America’s newest Supreme Court justice was already striking down environmental laws in his first few days in office, but he will be on the bench for life … beside a President who hasn’t just decimated the EPA, but stacked it with the kind of delusional simpletons who think global warming is a hoax. Again, the world is set back by decades it doesn’t have. Do you see my point yet? Let me make it razor sharp.

Catastrophic climate change is not a problem for fascists—it is a solution. History’s most perfect, lethal, and efficient means of extermination—one of just a handful in all of history. If we had been serious, at any point, really, about preventing climate catastrophe, we would have made an effort to “price in” this extinction—with a new set of global measures for GDP and profit and costs and tariffs and taxes and so on. But we didn’t, so all these dead beings, these animals and plants and microbes and so on—strange and wonderful things we will never know—are “unpriced” in the foolish, self-destructive economy we have made. Life is literally free to capitalism, and so capitalism therefore quite naturally absolves it and destroys it, in order to maximize its profits, and that is how you get a spectacular, eerie, grim mass extinction in half a century, of which there have only been five in all of previous history.

Biological life was not the only unpaid cost—“negative externality”—of capitalism. It was just one. And these unpaid costs weren’t to be additive: they were to multiply, exponentiate, snarl upon themselves—in ways that we would come to find impossible to untangle.

Capitalism promised people—the middle classes which had come to make up the modern world—better lives. But it had no intention of delivering—its only goal was to maximize profits for the owners of capital, not to make anyone else one iota richer. So first it ate through people’s towns and cities and communities, then through social systems, then through their savings, and finally, through their democracies. Even if people’s incomes “rose,” cleverly, the prices they paid for the very same things they can to accelerate it and prevent every effort to reverse or mitigate it.

I want to tell you the sad, strange, terrible story of how we got here. Call it a lament for a planet, if you like. You see, not so long ago, we—the world—were optimistic that climate change could be managed, in at least some way. The worst impacts probably avoided, forestalled, escaped—if we worked together as a world. But now we are not so sure at all. Why is that? What happened? Fascism happened—precisely the wrong moment. That shredded all our plans. Fascism happened because capitalism failed—failed for the world, but succeeded wildly for capitalists.

The world is in the midst of a great mass extermination. The capitalists had gotten rich—unimaginably rich. They were richer than kings of old. But capitalism had imploded into fascism. History laughed at the foolishness of people who once again believed, like little children hearing a fairy tale, that capitalism—which told people to exploit and abuse one another, not hold each other close, mortal and frail things that they were—was somehow going to benefit them.

When we tell the story of how capitalism imploded into fascism, it will go something like this: the social costs of capitalism weren’t just additive to the environmental costs—they were more like multiplicative, snarled upon themselves, like a great flood meeting a great hurricane. The social costs of capitalism sold back to them with the other hand, the very things they were busy producing, rose even more—and so middle classes began to stagnate, while inequality exploded. Let’s specify the unpaid costs in question: trust, connection, cohesion, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth itself. These were social costs—not environmental ones, like the mass extinction above.

A sense of frustration, of resignation, of pessimism came to sweep the world. People lost trust in their great systems and institutions. They turned away from democracy, and toward authoritarianism, in a great, thunderous wave, which tilted the globe on its very axis. The wave rippled outward from history’s greatest epicenter of human stupidity, America, like a supersonic tsunami, crossing Europe, reaching Asia’s shores, crashing south into Brazil, cresting far away in Australia. Nations fell like dominoes to a new wave of fascists, who proclaimed the same things as the old ones—reigns and camps and reigns of the pure. People began to turn on those below them—the powerless one, the different one, the Mexican, the Jew, the Muslim—in the quest for the sense of superiority and power, the fortune and glory, capitalism had promised them, but never delivered.

The capitalists had gotten richer—unimaginably rich. They were richer than kings of old. But capitalism had imploded into fascism. History laughed at the foolishness of people who once again believed, like little children hearing a fairy tale, that capitalism—which told people to exploit and abuse one another, not hold each other close, mortal and frail things that they were—was somehow going to benefit them.

We tell the story of how capitalism imploded into fascism, it will go something like this: the social costs of capitalism meant that democracy collapsed into neo-fascism—and neo-fascism made it unlikely, if not outright impossible, that the world could do anything at all about climate change in the short window it had left, at the precise juncture it needed to act most. Do you see the link? The terrible and tragic irony? How funny and sad it is?

The social costs of capitalism weren’t just additive to the environmental costs—they were more like multiplicative, snarled upon themselves, like a great flood meeting a great hurricane. The social costs of capitalism were famously “externalities” of capitalism.
Why Green New Deal Advocates Must Address Militarism

Where is the call for the New Peace Deal that would free up hundreds of billions from the overblown military budget to invest in green infrastructure?

By Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater

In the spirit of a new year and a new Congress, 2019 may well be our best and last opportunity to steer our ship of state away from the twin planetary perils of environmental chaos and militarism, charting a course toward an earth-affirming 21st century.

The environmental crisis was laid bare by the sobering December report of the U.N. climate panel: If the world fails to mobilize within the next 12 years on the level of a moon shot, and gear up to change our energy usage from toxic fossil, nuclear, and industrial biomass fuels to the already known solutions for employing solar, wind, hydro, geothermal energy and efficiency, we will destroy all life on earth as we know it. The existential question is whether our elected officials, with the reins of power, are going to sit by helplessly as our planet experiences more devastating fires, floods, droughts, and rising seas or seize this moment and rising seas or seize this moment and rising seas or seize this moment and rise to address the irreversible catastrophic climate crisis of our time.

Endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere are unraveling at the same time that conventional arms and nuclear arms control treaties, old and new, are being dismantled. The war on terror unleashed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack has led to almost two decades of unchecked militarism. We are spending more money on our military than at any time in history. Endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere are still raging, costing us trillions of dollars and creating humanitarian disasters. Old treaties to control nuclear arms are unraveling at the same time that conflicts with the major powers of Russia and China are heating up.

Where is the call for the New Peace Deal that would free up hundreds of billions from the overblown military budget to invest in green infrastructure? Where is the call to close a majority of our nation's 800 military bases overseas, bases that are relics of World War 2 and are basically useless for military purposes? Where is the call for seriously addressing the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons?

With the crumbling phenomenon of outdated nuclear arms control treaties, it is unconscionable not to support the recently negotiated U.N. treaty, signed by 122 nations, to prohibit and ban nuclear weapons just as the world has done for chemical and biological weapons. The U.S. Congress should not be authorizing the expenditures of one trillion dollars for new nuclear weapons, bowing to corporate paymasters who seek a larger arms race with Russia and other nuclear-armed countries to the detriment of our own people and the rest of the world. Instead, Congress should take the lead in supporting this treaty and promoting it among the other nuclear weapons states.

A New Peace Deal and a Green New Deal should go hand in hand. We cannot afford to waste our time, resources, and intellectual capital on weapons and war when climate change is barreling down on all of humankind.

Environmentalists need to contest the Pentagon’s staggering global footprint. The U.S. military is the world’s largest institutional consumer of fossil fuels and the largest source of greenhouse gasses, contributing about 5 percent of global warming emissions. Almost 900 of the EPA’s 1,300 Superfund sites are abandoned military bases, weapons-production facilities, or weapons-testing sites. The former Hanford nuclear weapons facility in Washington state alone will cost over $100 billion to clean up.

If climate change is not addressed rapidly by a Green New Deal, global militarism will ramp up in response to increases in climate refugees and civil destabilization, which will feed climate change and seal a vicious cycle fed by the twin evils of militarism and climate disruption. That’s why a New Peace Deal and a Green New Deal should go hand in hand. If the nuclear weapons don’t destroy us then the pressing urgency of catastrophic climate will.

Moving from an economic system that relies on fossil fuels and violence would enable us to make a just transition to a clean, green, life-supporting economy. This would be the quickest and most positive way to deal a death knell to the military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned about so many years ago.

Medea Benjamin is a founder of CODEPINK Women for Peace and, along with activist and author Kevin Danaher, of the fair trade advocacy group Global Exchange. Her most recent book is Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Alice Slater is the New York director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and serves on the coordinating committee of World Beyond War. Her articles have appeared in The Nation, commondreams.org, and other publications.

If the nuclear weapons don’t destroy us then the pressing urgency of catastrophic climate will.

Demonstrators highlighted the enormous and negative impact of the U.S. military during the 2014 People's Climate March in New York City. Photo: Ellen Davidson
Two More Knees Need Attention

Camp Lejeune’s history of poisoned drinking water causing illness, disease, birth defects, and death is one all Americans should hear about

By Nancee Kesinger

This tale of two knees is timely and true. The first knee is mine, touching down to meet the cool tile floor of a hospital exam room in mid-September. Yet, the story is not mine.

Far from stadium crowds and television cameras, under fluorescent clinical lights that render no warmth, I tilt forward out of my chair to approximate eye level with my loved one who is lying face down on the low table enduring the physical pain of a bone marrow biopsy and aspiration.

He has the pose of a day-dreaming sunbather with arms raised above his shoulders and hands casually crisscrossed under his head, but this beautiful black man doesn’t need a tan, and his relaxed position betrays some starker truths.

My taking a knee on this day is wholly in support of this glad-hearted and serene Marine—my partner of many years—who is learning on this day the complete details of his alarming, week-old leukemia diagnosis (cancer of the blood and bone marrow). My sliding forward to strategically post one knee requires frequent adjustments and subtle head turns to avoid having my tears or my sweat roll off my face onto his bare skin as the hematologist-oncologist introduces a spinal-length needle into my man’s flesh to administer local anesthesia from skin surface through multiple muscle layers to hip bone before using the sheer force and leverage of his full body weight to drive a long metal rod with a hollow center down the same path until he hits bone.

Once the doctor reaches his destination, he pauses and gathers his strength to exert even more pressure to pierce the hip bone with the screw-driver-like instrument. A catheter is inserted to collect a bone marrow sample, and then the doctor continues through the hollow rod to chip away a piece of hip bone. The doctor’s assistant shows me the bone fragment, jiggles it in the tiny specimen jar before me like a precious baby tooth still smeared with blood in storage for the tooth fairy.

Some living readers and many long-departed spirits may sense where this story of knees needing attention leads when it is revealed that my “fit, healthy, Marine Corps rugby-team-athlete” was stationed at Camp Lejeune (while assuming no responsibility) even before the scandal, suppressing vital information and environmental study results; meanwhile, the Marine Corps issued a number of dismissive statements to veterans and their families who were exposed to carcinogenic water at Camp Lejeune from 1953 until the affected wells were shut down in 1985.

Of the eight hallmark diseases that medical evidence readily correlates to Camp Lejeune’s water poisoning, adult leukemia is often listed first (the other seven presumptive diseases are aplastic anemia, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and Parkinson’s disease).

Camp Lejeune’s history of poisoned drinking water causing illness, disease, birth defects, and death is one all Americans should hear about, and it still may turn out to be the worst water contamination case our country has ever seen.

More shameful is that our government and our military have been complicit and negligent for over five decades, actively denying the toxic mixture of chemicals in the water at Camp Lejeune and repeatedly disregarding warning signs of contamination.

The government and military have long tried to cover up the scandal, suppressing vital information and environmental study results; meanwhile, the Marine Corps issued a number of dismissive statements to veterans and their families who were exposed to carcinogenic water at Camp Lejeune (while assuming no responsibility) even though documents released in 2012 show that the Marines knew about the contamination as early as October 1980.

So, my taking the knee in the hospital exam room was simply to comfort my loved one, a reticent man disinclined to making these circumstances public, a man who served his country honorably and appears to have been repaid for his service with an incurable disease. As epidemiologists agree, the extended latency period of numerous types of cancer suggests that my loved one’s adult leukemia is one of many more future cases attributable to Camp Lejeune contamination (no reliable estimate exists of the number of total illnesses, disabilities, and deaths caused by Lejeune’s contamination-caused cancers). That the land he and other Marines swore to protect should be the very land that caused calamitous harm is not lost on all.

In 2012, dedicated advocates won a qualified victory when President Obama signed the Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act, which aims to ensure that those sickened by Camp Lejeune water receive medical treatment through the Department of Veteran Affairs.

This illuminating discovery was made during an epic research blitz on adult leukemia, Camp Lejeune, chemotherapy treatments, bone marrow production, Philadelphia chromosomes, etc., that lasted several days after the troubling diagnosis, an online information-devouring marathon that only screeched to a halt on Sept. 23, 2017, when the evening news broadcast the U.S. President making remarks to a rally crowd in Alabama about NFL players “taking a knee,” referencing the gesture of quarterback Colin Kaepernick a year earlier.

This was the moment when all the impossibly raw emotions I felt in relation to my loved one’s dire health crisis, his bone marrow biopsy, his brave optimism during the first two rounds of chemotherapy he was undergoing that week, his “always faithful” sense of duty, the circumstances of his life and family history, could no longer hold, and my other knee decided it “wasn’t having it.” I closed all the tabs on the computer, wiped the screen clear, discontinued my research on bone marrow cancer, turned off the television, and opened a blank doc to compose this essay.

Allow me to insert, briefly, a metaphorical knee (not my second, real knee), symbolically lowered in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick and all of the other professional athletes and protesters who were drawn to perform a simple, nonviolent action to hold viewers’ attention on racial strife in the United States.

Kaepernick’s was never a protest of the American flag, the U.S. military, the national anthem, or the United States itself, a misrepresentation that drew applause when a President cynically warped its expressed intent.

As a black man in America, my loved one has experienced the discriminatory policing practices that continue to undermine our nation and devastate our people. He has faced the wide range of racism’s daily indignities and insidious “double standards” before, after, and during his military service, in and out of uniform, and in all parts of his life. His proud grandparents (both maternal and paternal) fled the segregation and brutal prejudice of east Texas to build lives in Los Angeles in the 1950s, landing first in Watts, and were present during the riots, which afforded them a California “lens” on resonant crises of racial disparity.

That the President wedged himself into a peaceful protest against racial injustice and made it about himself should surprise no one, but the lives of generations of continued on page 8…
Afghanistan Vet

... continued from page 1

in my head or the table saw in front of me. That helicopter is taking away two Afghan men with sandbags over their heads. It’s dark out, but my night vision goggles make everything seem eerily bright green.

I helped snatch those two men—or were they teenagers?—from a house in the middle of the night. That was in May of 2003 and sometimes, right here in my workshop, I can still hear the screams of the little kids inside that house. They’re louder than the helicopter, louder than the saw. Maybe one of those men had info that would help lead us to Osama bin Laden, then missing in action somewhere, it was believed, in Pakistan—or so we were told anyway. My job wasn’t to ask or understand; it was just to snatch people, sandbag them, and ship them out. Others higher up the chain of command would ask the questions under duress that we now know—and I guessed then—were anything but pretty.

My own kids are three and five, probably close in age to those terrified children I glimpsed ever so briefly in that house and still can’t get out of my head. My daughter and son couldn’t be sweeter, but they do like to tell me “no” a lot. Sometimes they, too, scream and sometimes, particularly since my kids were born, they just won’t leave and I end up writing them down. That, at least, gives me the passing feeling of being a little more in control.

I’ve taken that endlessly unnerving trip back to Afghanistan. It was one thing years ago to get through the workday on no sleep; it’s another to raise two little kids while bleary-eyed and sleepless. It’s not good for them, my wife, or me.

Making a Desk in ‘Afghanistan’

I’d much rather make furniture in my spare time than write or think about Afghanistan: that’s what I think and promptly write down before beginning my search for the tape measure I had in my hand only a few minutes ago. Somehow, I misplaced it as that helicopter landed yet again (and now can’t find it). As the table saw drones on, I discover that Afghanistan is still on my mind, but so many of those memories, too, are cloudy.

I could hardly tell you anyone’s name in my old unit—Pat Tillman aside—or who was with me on the particular night that’s plaguing me right now, or on any of the similar raids that I took part in over the course of my two deployments there. The only exceptions: my closest military friends with whom I still stay in touch and who are both named Kevin. When we talk, though, it’s strange how rarely we mention Afghanistan.

It bothers me that I can’t remember names or a lot of what happened in that country while standing here in my shop. I wish I had access to more of the details. I’d like to write them down. Somehow, that blank space leaves me feeling vulnerable. You can’t pack away something that’s not immediately there. It’s in the distant past—so I try to convince myself. No one here seems to know or care about Afghanistan anyhow. How much attention was given to the 20 people who were killed by a suicide bomber at a wrestling club in Kabul in early September, or Brent Taylor, the Utah mayor and National Guardman, killed during his fourth tour of duty in an “insider attack” in early November by a man whom U.S. forces were supposed to be training? Or what about the other U.S. personnel killed or wounded in similar ways recently? Or what about the suicide bomber who targeted Afghan election headquarters in Kabul in October?

Washington has spent between $900 billion and $2 trillion in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 9/11 and certainly killed tens of thousands of Afghans in that never-ending war. Yet, just about everything that happens there is generally ignored here. That’s perplexing in a way. After all, we could have paid for the college education of every student in America for the last 25 years with $2 trillion. Forget it, I tell myself. Focus on the saw blade and the wood. There’s furniture to be made and kids to raise. If I want to be a good parent I have to have a good memory. A good memory makes you more empathetic. That’s what I now say to myself, repeating the words of my mom.

I remember one day in particular when I was at a conference in Bonn, Germany, in December 2001, the Taliban controls or is fighting for half the districts in the country. It holds more territory than at any moment since the U.S. invasion.

I wish I had a safer saw.

Not enough thinking and I’ll get careless.

And how will my kids turn out? Will there still be an American war in Afghanistan when the older one reaches fighting age in 2030? Given the history of that conflict so far and a Pentagon focused on “infinite” war, that’s easy enough to imagine.

It’s colder than normal on this particular October night. I shut the garage door. I’m making a desk for a friend. The cheap new blade makes me nervous. And any chance I get, I still talk to high school or college students about all the things military recruiters ignore when it comes to the war on terror. I’ve even been to Japan twice to support that country’s antiwar movement.

As I sweep up the sawdust, I’m reminded of something a psychologist once told me: “The thought will only keep me going in different ways until you confront it head on … Otherwise, it’s like yelling at your kids.” And that suggestion—not to repress the thoughts that continue to disturb you—stuck with me.

Sometimes, when I’m feeling calmer, it seems selfish to stand in this garage and think mainly of furniture. After all, there’s a war still going on in which, long ago, I hurt families like my own. Other U.S. soldiers must still be doing the same.

In truth, I just can’t stop thinking about that war, which should have ended 14 years ago for me and never really began for most Americans. Still, there must be an awful lot of ex-soldiers like me in this country who sometimes find themselves in Afghanistan when the rest of the council...
A Celebration of Killing and Dying

By Camillo Mac Bica

November 10 was the 242nd birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. It is a time of celebration during which current and former Marines acknowledge the storied history and glorious traditions of the branch of the military in which they so proudly served. I, however, am torn. As a former Marine Corps officer with service during the Vietnam War, I still occasionally admit to having been a Marine, perhaps also with a measure of pride. Yet I have realized that this admission encompasses more than the pomp and pageantry that we celebrate each year on November 10. I realized what being a Marine actually entails, that as a young man I underwent, perhaps endured is better, a profound life-altering experience, Marine Boot Camp, during which everything I was, embraced, stood for, and held sacred was brutally and methodically destroyed, with the resultant void filled with the values, "virtues," and abilities appropriate to the new man I was about to become.

The Marine Corps builds men (and women), it is said, albeit of a specific sort. I have realized that much of this physical, emotional, psychological, and ethical conversion and conditioning process is intended to create effective instruments of death and destruction, killing machines who will do the bidding of our nation's political and military leadership without hesitation or question. I have realized that Marine training focuses on building an intense fraternity and camaraderie with others who wear the uniform. Anyone who has experienced the insanity of the battlefield understands that when the shit hits the fan, we kill and sacrifice not for god, flag, country, or even for corps, but for the man or woman at our side.

I have realized that I and many others who claim the title of Marine have had our selflessness, dedication, and patriotism exploited; have been asked, better compelled, to make sacrifices fighting in wars that were (are) ill-conceived, unnecessary, unjust, and immoral. I have realized that as a Marine I was not fighting for freedom—ours, or in my case, the Vietnamese—a claim we hear so often, and that I was an aggressor, an invader, and occupier fighting for corporate profit and national hegemony, placed in an untenable survival situation of kill or be killed.

I have realized that by living according to the Marine ethos, I have become a murderer, a realization that has caused me (and many others) profound guilt, shame, and moral distress. For many of us, PTSD and moral injury have made recovery from war difficult, if not impossible, and death by one's own hand a viable alternative to living in war's aftermath. I know little of the life of Ian David Long, the latest of this nation's plethora of mass shooters. What I do know is that he was a product of Marine training, imbued with the behaviors and values of a warrior, reinforced by the horrors of the battlefield, eventually to take the lives of 12 strangers, and then to end his own. When you make Marines, create killers, send them to war to kill and to destroy, sometimes they can't leave it on the battlefield.

Reclaiming Nov. 11 as Armistice Day

Veterans For Peace chapters around the country marched Nov. 11 to reclaim Armistice Day as a time to promote an end to war. Left: In Washington, D.C., veterans held a solemn procession through the many war monuments in the capital, carrying signs about veteran suicide and other costs of war. Right: In New York City, a large contingent of VFP members marched in the parade to make a statement against the glorification of militarism that has become the norm for Veterans Day. Photo: Bud Korotzer

Two Knees

...continued from page 6
decent African-American citizens in my loved one's family are respectfully honored when Kaepernick and others take a knee. A maternal grandfather is buried nearby at Fort Rosecrans Cemetery, a WWII veteran, and many other family members have served devotedly in the U.S. military. It is their flag as well as the President's, their song, their country, and every American's right to call out and spotlight injustice where it is found.

There is no need to be coy, so replacing the metaphorical knee above (taken in support of Colin Kaepernick's objective) is my real knee—the second knee of the title—down in rebuke and protest of U.S. military brass and the U.S. President.

I take a knee in protest of indefensible military brass that the President deems blameless, whose negligence is and has been inexcusable, causing pain, anguish, and unnecessary death. I protest all hol-
Radical Attorney Says Take Over Democratic Party

By Denny Riley

At a church hall in a pleasant suburb in California, a progressive organization that applies its concerns to our country’s interference in Central and South America held its annual dinner. The guest speaker was constitutional attorney Danny Sheehan. His clients are a who’s who of the “movement.” Daniel and Patricia Drinan, Dick Gregory, Dr. Spock, Ralph Abernathy, a group seeking to bring attention to the mysterious death of labor union activist Karen Silkwood. He was counsel for the Native American Rights Committee at Wounded Knee, counsel for the New York Times during the Pentagon Papers. And here’s one you probably aren’t aware of: He worked to successfully overturn a decision by the school district in Drake, North Dakota, that banned—and burned—Kurt Vonnegut’s novel Slaughterhouse Five. And the high school English teacher who had assigned it Drake, North Dakota, population 4,000.

For 45 minutes Danny Sheehan delivered an uncomfortable message of what is happening on the ramparts of legal resistance to our government’s nefarious activities. None of his words were issued in anger, but what he covered offered sufficient opportunity for the emotion. Most recently he was chief counsel of the Lakota People’s Law Project on the Standing Rock reservation where charges against 800 Water Protectors for trespassing were dropped because it was proved they were on Lakota land. Charges against Chase Iron Eyes for sedition were also dropped. Sheehan framed TigerSwan as a company whose personnel largely come from the same ranks as the modern corporate wing of the Second World War, when the United States manufactured everything the world needed and money poured in, the Democrats slowly became just another sold-out political party. Bill and Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama knew how to talk about social justice but they threw in with Wall Street. Sheehan told us the Democratic ticket in 2020 will be Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, a façade of liberalism but both stooges of big business. This is Sheehan’s summation of what became of social-democratic politics in our lifetime. He says it can be fixed.

One element of the Standing Rock confrontation he felt should be widely known is the involvement of TigerSwan, the name Blackwater goes by now. Wikipedia has a page about the outfit but it’s mostly hooey. James Reese, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and disabled veteran, is the only named founder with the open secret of being Eric Prince, the man who enlisted in the Army to be part of something brutish and came out knowing nothing more. TigerSwan gives them a chance to use their training, only this time with real pay, against unarmed peace-ful demonstrators. Sheehan told us TigerSwan has APCs and aircraft and a camp in North Carolina comparable in size to an army base. (As I write this I wonder about the demographics of TigerSwan. Like how many are white, and how many are members of the majority of our population.) Sheehan spoke also about our government’s official secret army, called the CIA. He said the CIA should be abolished. The CIA came into existence in 1947 with the Cold War, and should have gone out with the end of it. Sheehan, though, went on to say something like that will happen as long as we have two political parties who represent the same people; bankers, corporate board members, and oil. When Roosevelt introduced the New Deal the Democratic Party genuinely represented the issues of the working class. After the Second World War, when the United States manufactured everything the world needed and money poured in, the Democrats slowly became just another sold-out political party. Bill and Hilary Clinton and States as we know it will no longer exist within a decade or, at most, two.

The difference here is that Sheehan says the Democratic Party could be retaken and he told us how: Thirty five congressional districts are sure to be won by Democrats. “The incumbent candidate could fall down and die and she’d win.” In these districts we should work to enter progressive candidates for the 2020 election. In a primary the progressive candidates would either take the seat or force the incumbent to change his or her ways, thus rededicating the Democratic Party to the values it espoused when it spoke for the people during the New Deal. Sheehan advised everyone at the dinner to find progressive candidates to challenge Democratic incumbents. If we live in a district where there already is a progressive candidate, help organize another congressional district. If we want to help return the Democratic Party to the people, we must go where organizing is needed and do the work. Rather than trekking one person stood in defense of third parties. Another rose to say the previous person was the Green Party congressional candidate in that district. By the fifth refutation, Danny appeared on the verge of impatience. Everyone had the same objection to his message and he gave each of them roughly the same follow-up. He told us third parties had been poisoned long ago. We won’t be able to get 50 percent of the voters to stand behind the candidate of the Working Families Party. But run as a Democrat and also as a Green, or a Socialist, and Congress will take on a new look with new caucuses where a government not beholden to Wall Street can be on the table.

Of the 100 activists at the progressive organizations dinner almost everyone everyone took the same objection to his message and he gave each of them roughly the same follow-up. He told us third parties had been poisoned long ago. We won’t be able to get 50 percent of the voters to stand behind the candidate of the Working Families Party. But run as a Democrat and also as a Green, or a Socialist, and Congress will take on a new look with new caucuses where a government not beholden to Wall Street can be on the table. Of the 100 activists at the progressive organizations dinner almost everyone had the same objection to his message and he gave each of them roughly the same follow-up. He told us third parties had been poisoned long ago. We won’t be able to get 50 percent of the voters to stand behind the candidate of the Working Families Party. But run as a Democrat and also as a Green, or a Socialist, and Congress will take on a new look with new caucuses where a government not beholden to Wall Street can be on the table.

The guest speaker was constitutional attorney Danny Sheehan spoke with such a solid奥巴马 knew how to talk about social justice but they threw in with Wall Street. Sheehan told us the Democratic ticket in 2020 will be Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, a façade of liberalism but both stooges of big business. This is Sheehan’s summation of what became of social-democratic politics in our lifetime. He says it can be fixed. Chris Hedges, the progressive journalist, Princeton lecturer, and author, paints a similar picture of the Democratic Party but comes to a different conclusion. In his new book, The Farewell Tour, Hedges writes, “The ruling elites bought the allegiance of the two main parties by puring … New Deal Democrats and corporate and imperial critics. They imposed obedience to corporate capitalism and globalization within academia and the press.” And he says, “The death spiral seems unstoppable, meaning the United
The first refugees arrived at Fort Chaffee just seven days later, on May 2, on a plane carrying 70 people. Within 22 days, 25,812 refugees were at the base, making it the 11th-largest city in Arkansas.
10 Good Things About 2018
By Medea Benjamin

Yes, you could say I’m trying to put lip- stick on a pig. 2018 was a year of whiplash, a never-ending series of assaults on our environment, immigrants, people of color, Muslims, Jews, the poor, interna- tional law. But there is light at the end of the tunnel, and here are some rousing points of light from 2018, both domestic and international.

1. The election of the progressive new members of Congress, particu- larly women of color such as Alexan- dria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Deb Haaland, Ayanna Pressley and Sharice Davids. Before even taking office they are shaking up the D.C. establish- ment. Think of the energy and for breaking new ground with Democrats now controlling the House, and with an expanded and invigorated Progressive Caucus, we have a chance to drag centrist Democrats into supporting policies that might not be popular with their big-dollar donors but are wildly pop- ular with the American people.

2. 2018 was a year of awe-inspiring youth activism. The Parkland school shooting two days after Valentine’s Day led to a massive student-led movement for tougher gun laws. Students mobilized in Washington, D.C., at the March for Our Lives and in schools across the country. This was the year that the youth exploded with the Sunrise Movement, a youth movement determined to make cli- mate change an urgent priority for U.S. elected officials with a Green New Deal. And just as the year was coming to an end, a sensational 15-year-old student reached this year to start breaking up the 75-year U.S.-Saudi alliance.

3. A historical turning point was reached this year to start breaking up the 75-year U.S.-Saudi alliance. With three years of relentless Saudi bombing of Yemen leading to the world’s greatest human catastrophe and the barbaric mur- der of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Congress and business lead- ers finally began to question their relation- ship with this retrograde kingdom and its brutal de facto leader Mohammad bin Salman. In an unprecedented vote, the Senate passed a measure to halt U.S. support to the Saudis in Yemen, which is helping promote a negotiated settle- ment. The effort to curb Trump’s sup- port for the Saudi war in Yemen comes at the same time that Trump announced the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria and a halving of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Maybe, just maybe, 2019 will mark the winding down of the disastrous wars that have marked U.S. policy since the 9/11 at- tacks in 2001.

4. Labor organizing has been on the rise, from teachers to high-tech work- ers. The audacious 13-day strike by teachers in West Virginia won a 5 per- cent pay increase and launched a wave of similar actions from Oklahoma to Ari- zona. West Virginia teachers stood with bus drivers, janitors, and school kitchen staff before calling an end to the strike, refusing to take a pay increase until ev- eryone’s demands were met. In the tech industry, Google employees pushed the company to end its contract to help the Pentagon with artificial intelligence that could be used in drone strikes. They also demanded that Google not cooperate with Chinese surveillance. These strikes are pushing the company to break its contract with ICE; Amazon workers want Jeff Bezos to stop supplying facial recog- nition technology to the police.

5. Florida’s restoration of voting rights through Amendment 4, the ballot measure lifting the state’s permanent ban on voting by anyone with a felony con- victions, received overwhelming support from nearly 65 percent of voters. It re- stores voting rights for some 1.4 million people, potentially changing the Flor- da—and national—electoral landscape, since most formerly incarcerated peo- ple vote Democratic and launched a wave of efforts to push the company to break its contract with ICE; Amazon workers want Jeff Bezos to stop supplying facial recog- nition technology to the police.

6. Stopping the Keystone XL pipe- line is a victory for the coalition of environ- mental and Indigenous groups that have been opposing the pipeline for years. Among the opponents is the Cheyenne River tribe. Like Standing Rock in the case of the Dakota pipeline, the Cheyenne River tribe fears a tar sands oil spill from the pipeline would contaminate its wa- ters. President Obama, under tremendous pressure from the grassroots, halted fur- ther work in 2015 but Trump started it up again in 2017. Thanks to legal challenges, in November a federal court blocked any further work until the Trump administra- tion undertakes a serious review of its cli- mate impact. This reprieve gives organiz- ers more time … to organize!

7. Medicare for All has the highest level of public support ever recorded.

8. The election of Andres Manuel Ló- pez Obrador (AMLO) in Mexico is a bright spot in a dismal landscape in Latin America, where right-wing governments are on the rise. Crushing the two old dy- nastic political parties, the PAN and the PRI, AMLO’s Movement for National Re- generation, or Morena, was just founded in 2014. Ruling a nation mired in drugs, violence, and poverty will be tough, but check out the incredible policies he has already put in place! Also, Mexico City elected its first woman mayor, who is also Sephardic Jewish, a leftist, a climate sci- entist, and a Nobel Peace prize winner. Her first act was to disband the riot pol- ice, who have been responsible for much of the political violence in Mexico City.

9. Ethiopia’s new prime minister, 42-year-old Abiy Ahmed, took office in April and immediately went to work ending the 20-year war with Eritrea, releasing thousands of prisoners, allow- ing dissidents to return home and lifting censorship. Then he appointed a cabinet with 50 percent women and the nation’s first female president! His astounding re- forms have won him adoration among millions, but he has been challenged with an assassination attempt by the old guard and ethnic clashes. His message to the na- tion’s 90 ethnic groups remains one that Donald Trump should hear: “Take down the wall, build the bridge.”

10. Armenia experienced a dramatic, people power uprising against corrupt, autocratic rulers, in which one out of every three Armenians participated. The campaign of nonviolent civil disobe- dience was led by a young member of par- liament, Nikol Pashinyan. After initially attacking the protesters, the police later joined them. In April, the massive street protests were so powerful they pushed the prime minister to resign. So you put your candidates and the ruling party to elect the opposition street leader, Pashinyan, as prime minister. In December, the new political bloc went on to trounce the former ruling party 70 per- cent to 5 percent in parliamentary elec- tions. This “velvet revolution,” which unites peace activists and “street democracy” protesters, is an example of the power of peaceful protest focused on human rights, women’s rights, workers’ rights and envi- ronmentalism, succeeded in taking power without shedding a drop of blood!

So there you have it. Despite Trump in the White House and the rise of right- wing movements around the globe, 2018 was a helluva ride.
A call for a more sane more humane border

An Encounter on the U.S./Mexico Border
By John Grant

As gullible North Americans were told of disease-ridden Mexican and Central American rapists, killers and ISIS terrorists invading America from the infernal regions of the western hemisphere, on Nov. 17 and 18, School of the Americas Watch organized a two-day border-straddling demonstration in Ambos Nogales, the term that covers both Nogales, Ariz. (population 20,000) and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico (population 220,000).

Speaking for myself, every Mexican or Central American I ran into, saw on TV or read about as part of the caravan phenomenon was clean and quite nice. Having spent time in Honduras in the 1980s, myself, I’m well aware of the cruel and bloody aftermath of the 2009 coup in Honduras that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton covered over like a cat covering her business. The only difference between them and Trumpism, is that Trump, in this respect, is more honest with his in-your-face, cruel lack of empathy and the arrogance of American exceptionalism. Thanks to our documented historic behavior vis-à-vis Central America, we’ve especially placed poor Hondurans between a rock and a hard place. It has now come to a head with caravans running up against the U.S. border in Tijuana. These tensions are also felt in Ambos Nogales and the obscenely border wall, shown below from the Mexican side.

This is the third year of the Encuentro, which involved up to 500 people from all over the United States and Mexico. As in past years, it was a demonstration that was split between the United States and Mexico. There was a steady flow of migrants and refugees, mostly women and children, moving north from Tijuana and Nogales, the wall made up of 20-foot-tall rusting, square steel poles four inches apart. In the past, one could reach a hand through to a person on the other side or even stick your face through to kiss another, if that was in order. But no more: This year, the U.S. Border Patrol had put up rigid steel.

Encuentro Links Immigration and Increased Militarization
By SOA Watch Staff

At the heart of the School of the Americas Watch Border Encuentro in Nogales, Arizona/Sonora, Nov. 16–18 was increasing awareness of the militarization and expansion of the U.S.-Mexico border throughout Latin America and inside the United States, as well as the criminalization of immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and people of color. The Border Encuentro was a call for active solidarity at a time when all eyes are on the borderlands, and during a moment in which we see the unquestionable connections between the historic legacy of violence of the United States in Latin America, the violent state responses to mass migration, and the criminalization of our communities resisting in the United States.

Beginning on Friday, November 16, hundreds of migrants, refugees, torture survivors, students, members of religious communities, veterans, and human rights activists throughout the region gathered outside of Tucson-based Milkor U.S.A. calling to “Shut it Down!” Milkor is the manufacturer of M32A1 grenade launchers used by the Mexican military special forces. This U.S. company is directly responsible for the sale of arms and machinery that murder and disappear people and further militarize our communities. Immediately following this action, we continued our caravan to Eloy Detention Center for a vigil led by the Phoenix-based immigrant and human rights organization Puente Arizona to call for the release of incarcerated migrants, for an end to profiteering of human suffering, and for the abolition of ICE.

During the vigil at Eloy, we heard moving testimony from Alejandra Pablos, an immigrant rights and reproductive justice activist and two-time detainee at Eloy Detention Center. She, alongside other immigrant rights activists throughout the United States, is being targeted for her activism in defense of her community and for boldly denouncing systems of injustice. Alejandra has been added to a growing list of names of immigrant and human rights defenders being targeted by ICE for deportation. Earlier this week, sheand other social justice activists testified in a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., about the pattern of criminalization of human rights defenders in this country. The vigil at Eloy was powerful because it created a space for us to listen to those most directly affected by the systems that criminalize and dehumanize our brothers and sisters, and to not lose sight of the connections between the policies of displacement in countries of origin and the policies of criminalization, detention and deportation in the United States.

On Saturday, veterans and others took to the streets to march to the militarized U.S./Mexico border wall as a show of solidarity with migrants who have embarked on long and perilous journeys and to denounce U.S. intervention in Latin America. Soon after, hundreds of activists from across the Americas converged at the border wall in ambos Nogales to build a collective analysis around the political movement. Speakers from across borders—the Tohono O’odham community, the Maya Mam community, veterans, human rights defenders and survivors from Mexico and Guatemala, families searching for their disappeared, and activists fighting to de-militarize the border—came together to speak truth to power. It was a day to recognize that borders have not succeeded in separating our connected struggles, and we built and deepened our transnational networks of solidarity and resistance. And because joy is one of the most powerful tools of resistance to oppression, artists held the space at the border wall to resist through music, spoken word, celebration, and dance, as no border can ever contain the human spirit or our right to dream.

On Sunday, as has been a long-held tradition within SOA Watch, we commemorated those whose lives were taken as a result of state violence over several decades, whether in Latin America, or through policies of forced displacement and death across borders. We witnessed the powerful and raw testimony of Taide Elena, grandmother of 16-year-old Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez, who was murdered by Border Patrol Agent Lonnie Swartz on Oct. 10, 2012, in Nogales, Sonora. To date, there has not been a fair trial and the U.S. Border Patrol continues to commit violent crimes with complete impunity. It is clear that the justice system lacks the political will to adequately prosecute state agents for these crimes. We will continue to demand justice for Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez.

We stood together, divided by a dehumanizing border wall, but united in our resolve to dismantle border imperialism and the structures that maintain it. We called out the names of those whose lives have been taken from us, singing “Presente!” to affirm that they are with us, that they are not forgotten, and we will continue to resist U.S. state violence in their name. Non-violent direct action is a meaningful tradition within SOA Watch, we continued on page 18 …
Jesus Would Be Appalled by America's Immigration Policy

By Major Danny Sjursen

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king,
Do you know what I know?
In your palace warm, mighty king,
Do you know what I know?
A child, a child shivers in the cold
Let us bring him silver and gold....

—Lyrics to the Christmas song, “Do You Hear What I Hear?” written by Gloria Shayne Baker and Noel Regney during the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Whether or not you believe Jesus was the literal Son of God—I have doubts myself—two truths remain salient at this time of year: America is, by and large, the most religious (Christian) wealthy country on the planet, and the founder of that religion was, according to its holy book, a refugee. Depending on the gospel you favor, Christ was born on the run from wicked King Herod, spending the first years of his life not in his reputed birthplace, Bethlehem, but in Egypt and/or the small village of Nazareth in the Galilee. Ironic then, isn’t it, that so many Americans lack empathy for a new generation of refugees—many of them victims of U.S. humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations.

The most shocking indictment of U.S. government action comes in Yemen, already the Arab world’s poorest country before the terror bombing and starvation blockade began. Here, the U.S. military is deeply complicit in a Saudi-led, Washington-supported war on the Yemeni people. Without U.S. intelligence, munitions, in-flight refueling and international cover, Saudi Arabia’s villainous regime could never have starved or bombed people, mostly civilians, with such effectiveness.

The results have been nothing less than horrifying: tens of thousands of civilians killed in air strikes, 85,000 children already starved to death, the world’s worst cholera epidemic spreading, and, yes, the creation of more than 3 million refugees. Imagine the popular outcry if those starving faces and bodies were white and Christian. (Side note: Our beloved Jesus was himself rather brown, despite the best efforts of the institutional church to literally whitewash that inconvenient fact.) To its credit, the U.S. Senate has voted, however belatedly, to end U.S. support for that war. Still, don’t expect a change in Washington’s criminal policies any time soon: the president has announced his intention to veto the resolution, and the Senate thus far lacks the votes to override him.

In the Gaza Strip, the most densely populated sliver of the planet earth, Israel has forged the largest all-but-permanent refugee camp in the world—this with the unconditional backing of the United States. Now in its 11th year, the inhuman blockade of Gaza has reduced Palestinians trapped there to a state of complete dependency on humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations. And when the residents have the gall to protest their deplorable (and preventable) conditions, they are indiscriminately mowed down by Israeli Defense Forces. None of this would be possible, again, without the support of Washington’s $3 billion in annual military aid and the reflexive cover of America’s most powerful institutions. The U.S. is willing to take. The $3 billion in aid to Israel this year is $1 billion more than last year.

Our country, which today does most of its teaching with bombs, is complicit in some of the worst humanitarian and refugee crises in the world. And, by and large, it will not receive its victims, refuses to hear them and bars entry to most.

While celebrating the virgin birth of their refugee savior, away from their families, these troops will continue sealing off the border with what the President has called “beautiful” barbed wire, empathy be damned. So much for Lady Liberty’s “tremendous wall to keep the tired, your poor, your huddled masses...”

To return to Americans’ favored theology, let us admit the baby Jesus was born a refugee, and the grown Jesus essentially died one. Beginning his preaching mission, Christ had “nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 2:11; Luke 9:58), and he and his followers counted on the hospitality of ordinary villagers to survive (Mark 6:8–11; Matthew 10:9–11; Luke 9:3). Reflect for just a moment this Christmas on the starving Yemeni children, perennially blockaded Gaza residents and the migrants tear-gassed on America’s southern border or separated from their parents. Think then, as the song says, of the children “shivering in the cold.”

When you do, ask what role America, our government, has played in creating and perpetuating the latest refugee crises. Is the United States living up to the ostensibly ethics of its zealously proclaimed Christianity? The oldest gospel speaks of Jesus telling his transient apostles this: “And if any place will not receive you and refuse to hear you, shake off the dust on your feet when you leave, for a testimony against them” (Mark 6:11).

This author, at least, reads that passage with much discomfort. Our country, which today does most of its teaching with bombs, is complicit in some of the worst humanitarian and refugee crises in the world. And, by and large, it will not receive its victims, refuses to hear them and bars entry to most. That this is so, is, I fear, an unforgivable testimony to us all.

Merry Christmas, America.

Major Danny Sjursen, a Truthdig regular, is a U.S. Army officer and former history instructor at West Point. He served tours with reconnaissance units in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has written a memoir and critical analysis of the Iraq War, Ghost Riders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge. Follow him on Twitter at @SkepticalVet and check out his new podcast Fortress on a Hill, co-hosted with fellow vet Chris “Henri” Henrikson.
British Neutrality: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?

By Edward Morgan

Issues of war and peace especially are so complex and so controversial that there are no easy or definitive answers. No one knows what is going to happen in the future, but it is wise to be prepared for likely eventualities. Based on centuries of history, it is very likely that in any future European war, Britain will be involved and given the likelihood of use of weapons of mass destruction, tens of millions of British citizens could be killed.

We are being told almost daily by NATO and European Union sources that Europe, including Britain, is facing serious security threats from Russia and Middle East terrorists. The reality is that there is no likely threat to Western Europe from Russia. Any threats from Russia to its Eastern European neighbors have been provoked by the United States and NATO threatening Russian sovereignty and its strategic interests by expanding NATO to Russia’s borders. Any terrorist threats to Western Europe are due almost entirely to Western European states participating in unjustified U.S.-led resource wars in the Middle East. If we stop bombing and overthrowing governments in the Middle East and North Africa, there will very likely be no further blowback terrorist attacks on Western Europe.

Most people adopt the attitude that there is nothing individuals can do about international and national matters, but it is vital not to underestimate what you can do on such matters. What many individuals have achieved in setting up Veterans For Peace UK is a good example. VFP UK has now called for Britain to become a neutral state. VFP UK even daring to suggest that Britain should consider being a neutral state will force the media and even government officials to rethink what they are doing. If you do not attempt what seems impossible you will never know what is possible.

Let’s consider what being a neutral state means in terms of international law, and some of the practicalities involved. The 1907 Hague Convention on Neutrality is the foundational document on neutrality. Article 2. Belligerents are forbidden to move troops or convey of either munitions of war or supplies across the territory of a neutral Power.

Article 11. A neutral Power which receives on its territories troops belonging to the belligerent armies shall intern them, as far as possible, at a distance from the theatre of war.

There is also an implied prohibition on neutral states being members of military alliances.

However, a state can declare itself to be neutral in a particular war, and then revert to being a belligerent in other wars. It is therefore far better for a country to adopt a long-term policy of neutrality and better still to have such neutrality enshrined in that country’s constitution, as is the case with Austria, Finland, and Switzerland. In these countries it would require a referendum by the people for its politicians to go to war with another state. The only real exception for neutral states becoming involved in a war would be genuine self-defense in the event of that country being attacked.

In recent years it has been considered acceptable for neutral states to engage in military actions in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations, but this provision has been very seriously abused in cases, such as the overthrow of the Libyan government in 2011, ostensibly in compliance with a U.N. resolution to impose a no-fly zone for so-called humanitarian reasons. This was in gross breach of international laws on neutrality regardless of any U.N. resolutions. The U.N. resolution did not and could not allow NATO and its allies to overthrow the government of Libya, as any such action is a clear breach of the U.N. Charter, yet NATO and its allies did overthrow the Libyan government, and also of course overthrew the Afghan and Iraqi governments and almost did the same in the case of Syria.

The lies that were told to justify these wars included the necessity of dealing with the terrorists who committed the 9/11 attacks on the United States, yet none of the attackers came from Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, or Syria. Fifteen of the 19 were citizens of Saudi Arabia, two were from the United Arab Emirates and one each was from Egypt and Lebanon. Three of these countries, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, are close U.S. allies. We had the lies on Iraq’s nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. British soldiers were killed in Afghanistan and Iraq because of these wars and these lies, and because of the liars who told these lies.

Laws on neutrality are unfortunately very loose. Article 7 of the Hague Convention states: “A neutral Power is not called upon to prevent the export or transport, on behalf of one or other of the belligerents, of arms, munitions of war, or, in general, of anything which can be of use to an army or a fleet.” So even if Britain becomes a neutral state, the military industrial complex can continue to profit on wars. A more active type of neutrality could impose severe restrictions on arms exports.

Let’s consider what neutrality for Britain actually means.

Advantages of British neutrality:

1. It would remove Britain as a primary target in a nuclear war
2. British soldiers (and noncombatant citizens) would no longer be collateral damage when being killed or wounded in totally unjustified wars.
3. The British people would no longer be targeted in blowback attacks by individuals and groups that Britain has been bombing since the end of the Cold War.
4. Britain would have more money to spend on health, education, social housing, etc.
5. Our children and grandchildren would avoid being victims in future wars.
6. Britain could change its overseas policies from destroying the world and killing thousands of innocent people to becoming involved in genuine humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. British neutrality would be Positive or Active Neutrality rather than just self-serving or negative neutrality.
7. Damage to the global environment would be significantly curtailed by the reduction in military activities.
8. The rate of ‘veterans’ suicides would be significantly reduced.
9. British neutrality would help restore the United Nations to its primary role in maintaining international peace. Britain could take the lead in transforming the United Nations into a genuine humanitarian organization.

Disadvantages of British going neutral:

1. Britain may lose its status as a world power.
2. British generals could no longer strut around on the world stage as if they were Julius Caesar showing off all their war campaign medals
3. NATO might fall apart. It makes no sense for Britain to remain in NATO if Britain is leaving the EU.
4. U.S. military bases in the UK would have to be closed down, costing British jobs.
5. Britain’s nuclear power industry might also have to be closed down, because one of the justifications for the continued on next page …
1848 and the Yellow Vests

By David Rovics

The so-called mainstream media that I keep tabs on seems to mainly be painting the gilets jaunes or Yellow Vest movement in France as little more than mindless rioting—anarchy, disorder, hidden Russian influence, and other bad things. The reason they are painting this picture is that they are terrified. The reason they are terrified is because some of the more savvy among them are well aware that this kind of leaderless movement against unfair taxation, corruption, and austerity is exactly the kind of movement that rose up at the beginning of 1848 and led to the formation of the Second Republic in France and big changes in so many other countries, too.

They know that when those they are governing collectively realize that, fundamentally, their interests are not being represented by those that govern them, then governance becomes impossible. French authorities deployed 8,000 riot cops and unprecedented amounts of armor into the streets of Paris last weekend, but the Yellow Vest movement appears only to be growing, as well as spreading to neighboring countries.

The leaderless movement in 1848 also spread throughout France and across national borders, until it enveloped all of Europe. Most of the monarchies of Europe at the time were at least temporarily overthrown by popular revolt, very much including in France, whose previous ruler had been a banker back then, too. The ripple effects of this pan-European popular revolt were felt around the world in different ways, with veterans of the revolts going on to lead further revolts in Australia and elsewhere.

Despite all efforts to vilify the movement, despite the burning banks and charred remains of sports cars in central Paris, as people in yellow vests gather on highways throughout the country to shut it down for another day, all polls indicate the movement is overwhelmingly popular among the French public, unlike their very unpopular banker-turned-president, Macron.

Disaffection with mainstream political parties that have proven themselves unable to meet the challenge of feeding their people throughout Europe and so much of the world has given rise to the growth of parties both right and left that at least appear to be united in their opposition to austerity and their support for the interests of their working-class populations. But this movement is not led by any political party, and the movement’s demands are fundamental in nature, never being just about Macron’s latest regressive tax—that was only the catalyst that got this engine moving. Where the car is going is anybody’s guess.

Popular uprisings are never neat. Revolts are messy in nature. People who are being spat on by arrogant, elitist rulers passing regressive taxes on the working class while removing taxes on the rich and then telling the rabble to tighten their belts to save the climate will react in different ways, not all of them noble. But as one who has personally seen the extremes of the disparities in living standards between the ever more squeezed French working class and the global elite that flaunts their obscene wealth in places like central Paris, my only desire upon seeing these department stores burning is to find a sharp stick and a bag of marshmallows.

If my wife were not currently 8-1/2 months pregnant, I’d be using up my frequent flier miles and taking my French-speaking daughter on a holiday trip to Paris next week. As it is, I’ll just have to settle for getting regular updates from my friends who happen to be lucky enough to be living in France at this historic juncture.

1848

By David Rovics

The famine had affected many people
From Ireland to the shores of the Baltic Sea
The soaring cost of food meant most of your earnings
And the shutting down of industry
No one knows for sure how it began
And spread from state to state
In the mountains and the plains, from Galway to Ukraine
Came the Rising of 1848

A pitchfork is no match for a rifle
But nothing that will give the king a fright
As when he looks out of the window
Sees his castle burning in the night
But that’s what happened in sixty countries
Where landlords encountered such a fate
From Budapest to Sicily life would never be the same
After the Rising of 1848

Marx and Engels wrote a book, spread as quickly as the flames
From which the feudal barons had to flee
From the workers in the cities, from the peasants in the towns
And even from the petit bourgeoisie
United by a common sense of purpose
To throw off the crushing weight
Of the dynastic rule of hereditary Lords
Who owned the Europe of 1848

Tens of thousands died before it all was over
And some say it all ended in defeat
With a landscape transformed, serfdom abolished
Which is why we don’t see history repeat
And the monarchs remembered when peasants with pitchforks
Came to burn down their estate
And most of them decided democracy was better
Than the Rising of 1848

David Rovics is a topical singer/songwriter and anarchist, addressing such issues as the 2003 Iraq War, Palestine, globalization and social justice. His most recent recording is Ballad of a Wobbly.
International activists in Dublin demand that closing of U.S./NATO bases
Conference Confronts Global Militarism

By Roger Harris

For the first time in the history of humanity, the technical means are at hand to eliminate poverty if resources were not diverted to making war. World hunger could be abolished with only a small diversion from military budgets. The only luxuries that so-called middle-class Americans would have to forego would be the Blue Angels air show and drone-bombing wedding parties in the Middle East. Yet, military spending is expanding, and with it global poverty.

On November 16–18, some 300 peace activists representing over 35 countries gathered in Dublin, Ireland, for the first International Conference Against U.S./NATO Military Bases. Participants addressed the tragic paradox of the technical ability to serve humanity and the political proclivity by the ruling circles in the West to do the opposite. Roger Cole of the Irish Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA) identified the two strategies as “The Kind of global warming and global war, both driven by accelerating militarization.”

Ajamu Baraka of the U.S.-based Black Alliance for Peace highlighted the reactionary role of the United States and its allies, which have by far the largest military expenditure in the world. The material basis for the absence of peace and the accelerating proliferation of military bases, in his words, is U.S. imperialism.

Guantánamo was the first of the world network of U.S. foreign military bases, according to keynote speaker Dr. Aleida Guevara from Cuba, daughter of Che. Cuba fought for its sovereignty. Today the United States possesses some 1,000 foreign military bases with troops stationed in over 170 countries. Annette Brownlie of the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) warned of a new Cold War. The recent U.S. National Security Strategy document, focusing on “great power confrontation,” signals open preparations for direct military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

David Webb of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK explained that the United States is the only nation with nuclear weapons based outside its soil. U.S. policy is to develop “usable” nuclear weapons in an enhanced first-strike capacity. Missile defense, he reproued, is the shield for the sword of nuclear weapons. The purpose of missile defense is to protect the aggressor against the inevitable retaliation after a first nuclear strike. Margaret Flowers of Popular Resistance reported that the recent U.S. midterm elections brought in more congressional representatives with military or security state backgrounds. The duopoly of the two U.S. “war parties” is united in supporting an accelerated arms race. Well over half of the U.S. government’s discretionary budget now goes to the military.

Unlike so much liberal and progressive political discourse in the United States, which is obsessed with the personality of President Trump, the international perspective of this conference punctuated that distracting fog and concentrated on the continuity of U.S. militarism, regardless of who sits in the Oval Office.

The session on the environmental and health impacts featured testimony on the toxic effects of military bases in Okinawa, Czech Republic, and Turkey. The U.S. Department of Defense is the world’s largest polluter.

National Coordinator of the Irish Trade Union Federation and Secretary of the People’s Movement, Frank Keoghan, described the transatlantic EU-NATO as a war project with the recent rush to create a single EU army. Ilda Figueiredo from the Portuguese Council for Peace and Cooperation and another activist from France warned that the drive for an EU army would transform NATO military bases into NATO bases and would in effect allow “nuclear bomb sharing.”

Margaret Kimberley of the Black Agenda Report chaired the Africa session. South African Chris Mathlako and Kenyan Ann Atambo discussed the dependency of African states on foreign aid, which is used as a tool to facilitate the occupation of Africa by foreign militaries. Paul Pumphyre of Friends of the Congo described the development of U.S. strategy in Africa, which has used African proxies to allow domination and extraction of valuable resources such as coltan from the continent. The strategy also includes direct occupation by the U.S. military. George W. Bush’s establishment of AFRICOM in 2008, with just a single acknowledged U.S. military base on the continent, was followed by an explosion of some 50 bases and, under Obama, a military presence in every African nation.

The session on Latin America and the Caribbean outlined the immediate threat of military intervention in Venezuela, caught in the crosshairs of U.S. imperialism. Veteran Cuban peace activist Silvio Platero of the Cuban Movement for Peace and Sovereignty of the Peoples (MOVPAZ) condemned the continuing U.S. blockade of Cuba, and the colonial status of Puerto Rico. Speakers from Colombia (now a NATO partner), Argentina, and Brazil reported that their right-wing governments are cooperating militarily with the United States.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Maguire from Ireland made an impassioned plea for all-out support of WikiLeaks whistleblower Julian Assange, “our hero of truth,” lest he die in a U.S. prison.

The conference concluded on a high note of unity among the international peace forces. Conference coordinator Bahman Araz of the World Peace Council closed with a call to first educate and then mobilize. Actions are being planned in Washington, D.C., around the 70th anniversary of NATO on April 4 (see article on page 17). Coincidentally that is the date of the assassination of Martin Luther King and of his famous speech a year before when he presciently admonished that “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government.”

Originally published at popularresistance.com.

Roger Harris is on the board of Task Force on the Americas (taskforceamericas.org), a 33-year-old anti-imperialist human rights organization, and is active with the Campaign to End U.S.-Canadian Sanctions Against Venezuela.
Protests Called for NATO Anniversary in DC

April 4, 2019, will mark the 51st anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the internationally revered leader in struggles against racism, poverty, and war.

And yet, in a grotesque desecration of Rev. King’s lifelong dedication to peace, this is the date that the military leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have chosen to celebrate NATO’s 70th anniversary by holding its annual summit meeting in Washington, D.C. A wide array of antiwar organizations is planning actions in response to this insult to the legacy of Rev. King.

It was exactly one year before he was murdered that Rev. King gave his famous speech opposing the U.S. war in Vietnam, calling the U.S. government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world” and declaring that he could not be silent.

Dr. King’s works linking the three evils of American society—militarism, racism and poverty—and his deeply profound remark that every bomb that falls on other countries is a bomb dropped on our inner cities, reveal the deep relationship between militarism and the social, racial, economic, and environmental injustices that now impoverish whole cities and rural communities and have plagued our society and the world for a long time.

Since its founding, the U.S.-led NATO has been the world’s deadliest military alliance, causing untold suffering and devastation throughout Northern Africa, the Middle East, and beyond. Hundreds of thousands have died in the U.S./NATO wars in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere. Millions are now risking their lives trying to escape the carnage that these wars have brought to their homelands, while workers in the 29 NATO member countries are told they must abandon hard-won social programs in order to meet U.S. demands for even more military spending.

Therefore, almost every organization in the peace movement—the majority that we must act. We must reach out to the broader community and especially the civil rights and Black liberation activists and oppose NATO’s presence in our country.

At the recent conference in Washington, D.C., organized in opposition to Trump’s proposed, then canceled military parade, 100 activists supported a resolution to oppose the NATO meeting. A similar proposal was supported by the 300 people from 35 countries who gathered in Dublin in November to oppose U.S./NATO military bases (see article on page 16). In Dublin, just as in all of that country’s climate change that way. It poured and the thunder roars, we might light a candle for democracy, for freedom, and for truth.

There are no solutions, because these were never “problems” to begin with. The planet, like society, is a garden, which needs tending, watering, care. Let us simply imagine, that despite all the folly and stupidity and ruin of this age, the strongmen and the weak-minded, in those dark and frightening nights when the rain pours and the thunder roars, we might still light a candle for democracy, for freedom, and for truth.

Umair Haque is a writer and economic philosopher.

On April 3, there will be a peace festival advocating the abolition of NATO, the promosing peace, and commemorating of Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech against war and his assassination.

On April 4, Black Alliance for Peace will hold an open meeting, and other rallies are being planned. Join us in DC, March 30–April 4.

For more information on the March 30 march and rally, visit no2nato2019.org.

For more information on the April 3 peace festival, visit worldbeyondwar.org/notonato.
The Battle of Ambos Nogales

The border running through Ambos Nogales is rich with history. This year is the 100th anniversary of two things, the Nov. armistice ending World War I and the 100th anniversary of two things, the reportaging of the Battle of Ambos Nogales.

Ambos Nogales. The battle began with a shoot-out in the customs area between the United States and Mexico, an area now characterized by retinal scans of everybody going north into the United States. We all breezed south with our signs and puppets into Mexico but to return we had to wait an hour-and-half in a line to get our papers checked and our retinas scanned, lest a threat to America slip into our midst. Note: if a lying shot is fired from the U.S. side, it will almost certainly be the one that comes from the U.S. side.

Like many wars, this tiny war began out of confusion. A Mexican carpenter was moving with materials from the U.S. side to Mexico. He had technically passed into Mexico when a U.S. customs agent, figuring he was smuggling materials, ordered him to return to the U.S. side. Mexican customs officials told the man to ignore the U.S. customs agents. At this point, a U.S. Army private raised his Springfield rifle to make the carpenter back up. He apparently let loose a warning shot, which caused the carpenter to quickly drop to the floor. A Mexican agent thought the carpenter had been shot, so he opened fire with his pistol, killing the U.S. Army private. All hell broke loose, and there was a brief shootout. The border from the U.S. side. The Mexicans were on the Mexican side, the number of Mexican personnel involved is unknown, but was acquitted in April. It was 11 p.m.; the shooting was over; and the man was in custody.

Examples of civilian Mexican heroism that have been historically honored include local prostitutes from the red-light district, two of whom were wounded. Of course, there is no human reason why a more dignified border control cannot be conceived and worked out—one that does not rely on violence to the extent the one we have now does. Ending the inhuman, supply-focused failure of the many-decade-old U.S. drug war would be a great place to start. Little seems to have changed since 1918; the U.S. military went into action. Units were sent to secure the high ground around Nogales. Black U.S. buffalo soldiers of the 10th Cavalry entered the fray, waving painted red crosses, a signal that they were left there to minister to the wounded. An account by 10th Cavalry First Sgt. Thomas Jordan reports a soldier being recognized by one of the women. “Sergeant Jackson! Are we all glad to see you!” she exclaimed, according to his account. “Not now, honey,” was apparently the reply.

By the time a cease-fire was declared, two U.S. persons had been killed and 29 wounded; on the Mexican side, the number of wounded was less certain, but at least 125 were killed and some 300 wounded. An investigation laid the blame for the incident on resentment over routine mistreatment of Mexicans by U.S. border agents. It seems little has changed. One Mexican official honored “the many Mexican civilians who laid down their lives in fighting protest against such humiliating and unjust conduct toward them.”

Today’s Border

One hundred years on, in the craziness of 2018, the U.S./Mexico border is an armed camp with more and more guns pointing south and a post-truth U.S. President demonizing our Latin American neighbors. They’re “rapists” and “killers” and they carry rot and diseases that are somehow going to seep across the border and ruin our “precious bodily fluids”—to borrow the ludicrous concern of mad General Jack Ripper from Dr. Strangelove. Of course, the fictional General Ripper’s madness fo- mented the end of the world by triggering the Russian Doomsday Machine.

There is no human reason why a more dignified border control cannot be conceived and worked out—one that does not rely on violence to the extent the one we have now does. Ending the inhuman, supply-focused failure of the many-decade-old U.S. drug war would be a great place to start. Little seems to have changed since 1918; the U.S. military went into action. Units were sent to secure the high ground around Nogales. Black U.S. buffalo soldiers of the 10th Cavalry entered the fray, waving painted red crosses, a signal that they were left there to minister to the wounded. An account by 10th Cavalry First Sgt. Thomas Jordan reports a soldier being recognized by one of the women. “Sergeant Jackson! Are we all glad to see you!” she exclaimed, according to his account. “Not now, honey,” was apparently the reply.

By the time a cease-fire was declared, two U.S. persons had been killed and 29 wounded; on the Mexican side, the number of wounded was less certain, but at least 125 were killed and some 300 wounded. An investigation laid the blame for the incident on resentment over routine mistreatment of Mexicans by U.S. border agents. It seems little has changed. One Mexican official honored “the many Mexican civilians who laid down their lives in fighting protest against such humiliating and unjust conduct toward them.”

The Encuentro may have been relatively small when compared to the immense problem of a U.S. militarized border. But it expressed the right idea: intelligence, love, and respect between U.S. Americans and Latin Americans is the only formula that can solve this worsening problem.

John Grant is a lifetime member of Veterans For Peace. He is a Viet Nam War veteran and has traveled to war zones in Iraq, Central America, and Vietnam. He is correspondent at the online news collective This Can’t Be Happening! thiscantbehappening.net.
Stand with Okinawa

The Henoko base construction is framed by the history of colonization and racism against Okinawans, as well as by our ongoing resistance as we attempt to end the long era of U.S. occupation.

By Mō Yonamine

“Don’t cry here,” an 86-year-old Okinawan grandmother I never met before told me. She stood next to me and took my hand. I had been visiting my family in Okinawa with my four children early in August and had traveled to Henoko, in the northeastern region of our main island, to join the protest against the U.S. military’s relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station from Futenma, located in the center of an urban district, to Camp Schwab, in a more remote coastal region. My teenage daughter, Kiiya, and I had spent the day with a crowd of elders holding protest signs in front of the gates of Camp Schwab. Rows and rows of more than 400 trucks hauling large rocks passed by, ready to outline an ocean area for the new base, equivalent to the size of 383 football fields.

Our beautiful, tropical ecosystem with all its internationally proclaimed and protected biodiversity was to soon be crushed, destroying coral and marine life, despite the overwhelming opposition of indigenous island people. I began to cry as I held up my protest sign.

“Grandma is going to cry when I get home tonight, so I will be crying with you,” she said, squeezing my hand. “Here, we fight together.” We watched as trucks flooded through the gate of the military base where Japanese police had pushed us away moments before. With tears in her eyes she said, “It wouldn’t be strange if we all jumped in front of every one of those trucks, because this is our ocean.”

This is our island.”

Four months have passed since I joined the Okinawan elders back home, and so many have continued to hold sit-ins every week—for some, every day—despite being forcibly removed by Japanese riot police. Meanwhile, the concrete blocks and metal bars have been dropped into the ocean on top of the coral to outline where the base will be constructed.

Governor Takeshi Onaga, who had succeeded in halting the base construction, died from cancer in August, and the Okinawan people elected a new governor, Denny Tamaki, by an overwhelming majority—based on his promise that he would stop the Henoko destruction. More than 75,000 Okinawans showed up in an island-wide protest during typhoon weather to show the world how strongly we oppose this base construction. Yet, the Japanese central government announced that on Dec. 14 they would resume construction of the landfill with sand and concrete. Authorities argued that building a new Henoko base is necessary in order to maintain the U.S.-Japan security alliance, and U.S. government leaders touted the base’s location for regional security.

If the airstrip is built, there will be no reversing the damage to our ocean, our coral, and our sea life.

The Henoko base construction is framed by the history of colonization and racism against Okinawans, as well as by our ongoing resistance, as we attempt to end the long era of U.S. occupation. Okinawa was once an independent kingdom; it was colonized by Japan in the 17th century and during World War 2 became the victim of the bloodiest battle in the history of the Pacific, where more than a third of our people were killed within three months, including members of my family. Ninety-two percent of Okinawans were left homeless.

After WW2, the United States took the land from the Okinawan people, created military bases, and imposed a new constitution on Japan that took away Japan’s right to have an offensive military. Henceforth, the U.S. military would “protect” Japan with bases throughout Japan’s territory. However, three-quarters of all U.S. bases on Japanese territory are on Okinawa, even though Okinawa makes up only 0.6 percent of the total landmass that Japan controls. Okinawa’s main island alone is only 62 miles long, and an average of one mile wide. It is here that 73 years of U.S. base occupation have created environmental destruction and air and noise pollution and exposed survivors and families to the sights and sounds of war. Frequent violent crimes against women and children by U.S. military personnel regularly bring out hundreds of thousands of protesters to demand justice and humanity and the complete removal of U.S. bases.

And the occupation continues. Now, the Japanese central government enforces the construction of yet another base—this one in the ocean itself, in the Henoko region of Okinawa. This new chapter in the ongoing invasion of Okinawa disregards the sovereignty, self-determination, and human rights guaranteed by United Nations resolutions. The Okinawan people have voted overwhelmingly to oppose the base construction since the base was first proposed more than 20 years ago.

The marine habitat of Henoko is second only to the Great Barrier Reef in biodiversity. More than 5,300 species live in Oura Bay, including 262 endangered species like sea turtles and the manatee-like dugong. Already, the Ryukyu Shimpo has reported that two of the closely monitored dugongs are missing, proposing that the noise level of the construction has hindered their ability to graze on seaweed beds.

For me, the Henoko struggle is about honoring my people’s existence and our right to protect our native land. I draw inspiration from the Australian students’ protest to stop the Adani coal company from building coal mines in Queensland, and from the Kanaka Maoli people’s movement to block the destruction of Mauna Kea in Hawai‘i for an 18-story telescope. Okinawa is my home, my ancestral home. To have it destroyed is unfathomable.

Of course, what’s happening in Okinawa is not an isolated outrage. The United States has more than 800 military bases in more than 80 countries across the globe. And each of these places is, or was, people’s home—just like my people in Okinawa. The devastation of Henoko is part of a larger, worldwide U.S. imperialist footprint. What happens in Okinawa matters for sovereignty struggles everywhere. What happens in Okinawa matters for fragile ecosystems everywhere.

A fellow Okinawan-American activist and I have created a hashtag campaign to demand and end to the base construction in Henoko: #standwithokinawa.

In the words of one auntie at the sit-in this past summer, “It hasn’t been the governments or politicians that have stopped this heliport construction over the last five years. It has been ordinary people; volunteers, the elderly, and people who just care about Okinawa. And that’s going to be who changes this now. Ordinary people, many, many, of us together.” We need the world with us. Stand with Okinawa.

Mō Yonamine, an Okinawan native, is a teacher in Portland, Ore., and is an editorial associate of Rethinking Schools. She is part of a network of Zinn Education Project teachers.
by Andrew J. Bacevich

What does President Trump’s recent nomination of retired Army General John Abizaid to become the next U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia signify? Next to nothing—and arguably quite a lot.

Abizaid’s proposed appointment is both a non-event and an opportunity not to be wasted. It means next to nothing in this sense: while once upon a time, American diplomats abroad wielded real clout—Benjamin Franklin and John Quincy Adams offer prominent examples—that time is long past. Should he receive Senate confirmation, Ambassador Abizaid will not actually shape U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia. At most, he will convey policy, if not oil, violent jihadism is Saudi Arabia’s principal export. Indeed, the former funds the latter.

It means nothing—and arguably quite a lot. Abizaid’s proposed appointment is both a non-event and an opportunity not to be wasted. It means next to nothing in this sense: while once upon a time, American diplomats abroad wielded real clout—Benjamin Franklin and John Quincy Adams offer prominent examples—that time is long past. Should he receive Senate confirmation, Ambassador Abizaid will not actually shape U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia. At most, he will convey policy, if not oil, violent jihadism is Saudi Arabia’s principal export. Indeed, the former funds the latter.

Abizaid’s appointment to this post (vacant since Donald Trump became president) could mean quite a lot. It offers an ideal opportunity to take stock of the “Long War.”

Now that phrase “Long War” is one that presidents, national security advisors, defense secretaries, and their minions assiduously avoid. Yet, in military circles, it long ago superseded the Global War on Terrorism as an umbrella term describing what U.S. forces have been doing across the Greater Middle East all these many years. But where, you might wonder, did that dour phrase originate? As it happens, General Abizaid himself coined it back in 2004 when he was still an active-duty four-star and head of U.S. Central Command, the regional headquarters principally charged with waging that conflict. In other words, just a year after the U.S. invaded Iraq and President George W. Bush posed under a White House-produced “Mission Accomplished” banner, with administration officials and their neocconservative boosters looking forward to many more “Iraqi Freedom”-style victories to come, the senior officer presiding over that war went on record to indicate that victory wasn’t going to happen anytime soon. Oops.

Crucially, however, his critique went beyond the question of duration. Abizaid also departed from the administration’s decades, it would pose no bigger problem than Cliven Bundy’s bickering with the Bureau of Land Management.

To put it another way, while the Long War has found U.S. troops fighting the wrong enemy for years on end in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, the nexus of the problem remains Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have provided billions to fund madrassas and mosques, spreading Salafism to the far reaches of the Islamic world. Next to oil, violent jihadism is Saudi Arabia’s principal export. Indeed, the former funds the latter.

Those Saudi efforts have borne fruit of a poisonous character. Recall that Osama bin Laden was a Saudi. So, too, were 15 of the 19 hijackers on September 11, 2001. These facts are not incidental, even if—to expand on Donald Rumsfeld’s famous typology of known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns—Washington treats them as knowns we prefer to pretend we don’t know.

So from the outset, in the conflict that the United States dates from September 2001, oil—the complex principal source of the problem. In the Long War, Saudi Arabia represents what military theorists like to call the center of gravity, defined as “the source of power
Palestinian Activists Stand in Solidarity with Marc Lamont Hill

By Yumna Patel

Munther Amira, 48, is the Coordinator of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) in the occupied West Bank, a collective of grassroots activists dedicated to nonviolent resistance against the Israeli occupation.

Amira is a Palestinian refugee who was born and raised in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem. He has served numerous stints in Israeli prison for his activism. In December 2017, he was arrested while protesting for the release of Ahed Tamimi and her mother from prison and eventually sentenced to six months.

In December, Amira and his fellow activists staged multiple protests and actions in support of Dr. Marc Lamont Hill after he was fired from CNN for a speech he gave at the United Nations in which he criticized the Israeli occupation and the abuse of Palestinian rights.

Mondoweiss’ Yumna Patel spoke to Amira about his support for Dr. Hill and why he believes it is important for Palestinians to stand in solidarity with the activist.

Yumna Patel: What motivated you to stage protests in support of Dr. Marc Lamont Hill?

Munther Amira: He paid a very high price by taking a decision to stand with the Palestinian people. We came and we tried to say thanks to Marc for being with us not as Palestinians. When Marc took a stand for Palestine, he was taking a stand with human rights. Marc stands with the values of humanity in general. The Palestinian cause is a case of people who seek peace, who seek freedom: the freedom to live on their own land.

YP: Why is it important for Palestinians to stand with Dr. Hill?

MA: After we heard he was fired from CNN, we tried to bring awareness to the people here in Palestine, that we have people around the world who are being targeted for supporting us. One of the main issues we are facing as Palestinians is that the mainstream international politicians and media don’t want people to even stand with the Palestinian people.

We must stand in solidarity with him because he was in solidarity with us. We are trying to send a message to the activists who support us, we will not leave you alone. We are trying to send a message from here in Palestine, to CNN and to the Americans in general, that we are fighting together with people all over the world for the values of justice peace and freedom.

YP: Were you surprised by Marc’s speech and how vocal he was in his support for Palestine?

MA: No, we weren’t so surprised, because Marc has come to Palestine before and has spoken out about the occupation. Marc is one of the activists with the Black Lives Matter movement who has worked very hard to create a dialogue between BLM and the Palestinians.

We have received activists from the BLM movement more than once here in Palestine. We are in the same struggle, and have a very strong relationship with BLM activists. We are supporting them like they are supporting us. He was one of the people who worked to connect our movements with each other, to have a good relationship, and to show the people that we are fighting for the same values.

There are so many people around the world supporting us, who have faced serious problems with their work, with their families and friends, and with their governments. Marc was one of these people who stands in a serious way, and because of that he paid this high price—losing one of the platforms and places where he can express himself. I think that journalists and newspapers need to give the space for all people to express themselves, not just people who agree with their political agenda. The only thing that Marc has expressed himself, and he was punished for it.

YP: What message has CNN, whose motto is “Facts First,” sent by firing Dr. Hill?

MA: CNN has never been objective, and now this has solidified that. They don’t care about the facts, especially when it comes to Palestine. And they wouldn’t care about is that we are suffering here in Palestine under occupation. One of the reasons we are standing with Marc is because it’s not easy to have someone with a platform like CNN who speaks about Palestine in a truthful way and does not conform to mainstream pro-Zionist narratives.

CNN is always against the Palestinians, trying to show that we are terrorists, people who just want to die. But he [Dr. Hill] shows the other face of the Palestinians: that we are people seeking peace. This is the only thing we are fighting for, for peace. We are not terrorists, we are people who want to continue living on their land. Firing Marc was a huge loss for CNN. He is one of the few people who is trying to show the real facts on the ground. By firing him, CNN is saying they are not objective, they are against human rights, they are against the freedom of speech for the people, and they stand against the people who want to continue living on their land.

YP: If you could say something to Dr. Hill, what would you say?

MA: We are with you. Thank you for your support for the Palestinian people, and please do not give up. We welcome you to Palestine, to show you how you and others can continue supporting freedom for the Palestinians.

Reprinted with permission from Mondoweiss.

Yumna Patel is a multimedia journalist based in Bethlehem, Palestine.

---

Israeli Conscientious Objector Released after 107 Days

On Dec. 23, the IDF’s Conscience Committee decided to exempt conscientious objector Hillel Garmi, of Yofdfat in northern Israel from military service. Garmi, one of the initiators of the High School Students’ Letter, was released following seven sentences since his first appearance at the Induction Center this July, when he first declared his refusal to serve.

Upon his release Garmi said, “The five months I have spent in prison have been dedicated to the struggle against occupation and siege, to the five million Palestinians who effectively live under the rule of the Israeli government but do not have the chance to elect their own leaders.”

Garmi added: “Throughout the nights and days I spent in prison, I tried to imagine the suffering of the Palestinians undergoing the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, including the lack of drinking water, food and medicine, or that of the Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank, who suffer the theft of their lands, road blockages, arbitrary search and arrest. Some people have told me that my refusal amounts to evading responsibility for the security of the citizens of Israel, but I believe rather that this act is one of taking responsibility for all those affected by my deeds, Israelis and Palestinians, by not joining in the cycle of violence and not hurting any of them, and by convincing others to act likewise.”

Upon entering prison, Garmi said that his decision to refuse was inspired by the actions of Ahmed Abu-Ratima, the Gazan organizer of the Great Return March, and that Abu-Ratima had written him in support of his act.

Conscientious objector Adam Rafaelov (18) of Kiryat Motzkin is currently in prison, having already served 97 days for refusing to join the army.

Garmi and Rafaelov are supported by Mesavot, a political network that writes letters and initiates refusing groups from the last few years to joint action. The network supports conscientious objectors who choose to not enlist in the occupation army, while knowingly acknowledging the gender aspects that the compulsory enlistment brings to Israeli society. The network works in cooperation and assistant from Yesh Gvul Movement.
White Christianity

… continued from page 24

pressed. And the cross is all around us. He writes in “The Cross and the Lynching Tree.”

“The cross is a paradoxical religious symbol because it inverts the world’s value system, proclaiming that hope comes by way of defeat, that suffering and death do not have the last word, that the last shall be first and the first last. Secular intellectuals find this idea absurd, but it is profoundly real in the spiritual life of black folk. For many who were tortured and lynched, the crucified Christ often took the form of a black man who never forgot who he was. He never forgot where he came from. His life was lived to honor his parents and his people. The ferocity of his parents and his people. The ferocity of the blood of blacks in Bearden and elsewhere who saw like poet and novelist Claude McKay, said that what he said that suffering can become a bridge that connects people with one another, blacks with whites and people of all cultures with one another. Suffering is sorrow and joy, tragedy and triumph. It connected blacks with one another and made us stronger. We know anguish and pain and have moved beyond it. The real question is suffering is how to use it. ‘If you can accept the pain that almost kills you,’ says Vivaldo, Baldwin’s character in his novel Another Country, ‘you can use it, you can become better.’

But that’s hard to do,” Eric, another character, responds. ‘I know,’ Vivaldo acknowledges. If you don’t accept the pain, ‘you get stopped with whatever it was that ruined you and you make it happen over and over again and your life has—ceased, really—because you can’t move or change or love anymore.’ But if you accept it, ‘you realize that your suffering does not isolate you,’ Baldwin says in his dialogue with Nikki Giovanni; ‘your suffering is your bridge.’ Singing the blues and the spirituals is using suffering, letting it become your bridge moving forward. ‘For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard,’ Baldwin writes in his short story ‘Sonny’s Blues.’ ‘There isn’t any other tale to tell, and it’s the only light we’ve got in all this darkness.’

‘I would rather be a part of the culture that resisted lynching than the one that lynched,’’ Cone writes at the end of the book. ‘I would rather be the one who suffered wrong than the one who did wrong. The one who suffered wrong is stronger than the one who did wrong. Jesus was stronger than his crucifiers. Blacks are stronger than whites. Black religion is more creative and meaningful and true than white religion. That is why I love black religion, folklore, and the blues. Black culture keeps black people from hating white people. Every Sunday morning, we went to church to exorcise hate—of ourselves and of white racists.”

A longer version of this article was originally published by truedig.org

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Chris Hedges writes a regular column for Truthdig. His most recent book is Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt.

Our Man in Riyadh

… continued from page 20

that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” to the enemy.

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed.

Our Man in Riyadh

… continued from page 20

that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” to the enemy.

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed.

Our Man in Riyadh

… continued from page 20

that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” to the enemy.

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed.

Our Man in Riyadh

… continued from page 20

that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” to the enemy.

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed.

Our Man in Riyadh

… continued from page 20

that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” to the enemy.

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed.

Our Man in Riyadh

… continued from page 20

that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” to the enemy.

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed. The one senior military officer who early on demanded a showdown with one of the world’s most repressive regimes, was bypassed.
Coming Out of the Shadows

Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen
By Jose Antonio Vargas
Harper-Collins, 2018, hardcover, 256 pages

By Andrew Moss

When Jose Antonio Vargas was 16 years old, he discovered that his green card was a fake. Unbeknownst to the grandparents with whom he was living in Mountain View, Calif., the young Filipino immigrant took himself to the Department of Motor Vehicles for a driver’s license, only to be told by the clerk that his card was fraudulent: “This is fake. Don’t come back here again.”

Vargas, who had been sent to the United States by his mother at the age of 12 (with the misplaced hope that he’d be able to follow him) was stunned and disoriented. He soon learned that the “uncle” who accompanied him on the flight from Manila was a smuggler hired by his grandfather, and he found himself as a teenager questioning all his relationships and his capacity for trust. Yet he persevered as one of the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, succeeding in school and eventually he came out in 2011 in a confessional essay he wrote for the New York Times Magazine:

New York Times

Recently Vargas came out with a new book, Dear America: Notes from an Undocumented Citizen, and in it he bears witness to the “homelessness” that he and others experience: not a traditional kind of homelessness, “but [an] unsettled, unmoored psychological state”

He bears witness to the ‘homelessness’ that he and others experience: not a traditional kind of homelessness, “but [an] unsettled, unmoored psychological state that undocumented people: ‘lying, passing, and hiding.’

Vargas writes compellingly, not from a place of abstract ideals but from deeply felt personal experience. When, as a young man, he was awarded an internship at the Washington Post, he felt an old anxiety creep up:

“I always thought I was taking someone else’s spot. I had internalized this anxiety from years of hearing the they’re-taking-our-jobs narrative about ‘illegals.’” Years later, after finding out that he and colleagues from the Post had been awarded a 2008 Pulitzer Prize for breaking news coverage of the 2007 Virginia Tech mass shootings, he found it unbearable to continue hiding his undocumented status, and ultimately finding his way as a journalist, all the while engaging in what he called the common moves of undocumented people: “lying, passing, and hiding.”

Vargas argues that if the politics of immigration are ever to change, the “culture in which immigrants are seen” has to change, and to this end he has dedicated his writing, his documentary-making, and his public appearances to storytelling that can help change the image of immigrants and the understanding of immigration in American life.

Danny Sheehan

… continued from page 9

whether we recognize it or not, believe that we as an individual are the center of the universe. We are solipsistic.

If we are able to admit this, and also admit the world is not a peaceful place, we may be able to admit the cause of the unrest is that we as individuals are not peaceful. With this admission we might see we don’t need to travel far to work on peace. Danny Sheehan told us to work closer to home. He said don’t go to Latin America. Go to Washington. A simpler version than that is don’t go anywhere until you know you won’t explode into road rage, become unsettled because you can’t find a clerk in Home Depot, or cuss when you’re told of the President’s latest provocation. When you understand the best thing you can do about what you heard in the morning news is go out your front door as a peaceful person, go out your front door and organize.

Danny Riley is an Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, a writer, and a member of the San Francisco chapter of Veterans For Peace.
supremacy and racism inherent within the white, liberal Christian church. His brilliance—he was a Greek scholar and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Swiss theologian Karl Barth—enabled him to “turn the white man’s theology against him and make it speak for the liberation of black people.” God’s revelation in America, he understood, “was found among poor black people.” Privileged white Christianity and its theology were “hereby.” He was, until the end of his life, possessed by what the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called “sublime madness.” His insights, he writes, “came to me as if revealed by the spirits of my ancestors long dead but now coming alive to haunt and torment the descendants of the whites who had killed them.”

“When it became clear to me that Jesus was not biologically white and that white scholars actually lied by not telling people who he really was, I stopped trusting anything they said,” he writes in his posthumous memoir, Said I Weren’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian, published in October.

“White supremacy is America’s original sin and liberation is the Bible’s central message,” he writes. “Any theology ceded him, was acutely aware that “there are a lot of brilliant theologians and most are irrelevant and some are evil.”

The stark truth he elucidated unsettled his critics and even some of his admirers, who were forced to face their own complicity in systems of oppression. “People cannot bear very much reality,” T.S. Eliot wrote. And the reality Cone relentlessly exposed was one most white Americans seek to deny.

“Christianity is essentially a religion of liberation,” Cone writes. “The function of theology is that of analyzing the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed community so they can know that their struggle for political, social, and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor is not Christ’s message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology. In a society where people are oppressed because they are black, Christian theology must become Black Theology, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed community and seeking to interpret the divine character of their struggle for liberation.”

The Detroit rebellion of 1967 and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. a year later were turning points in Cone’s life. “I felt that white liberals had killed King, helped by those Negroes who thought he was moving too fast,” he writes. “Even though they didn’t pull the trigger, they had refused to listen to King when he proclaimed God’s judgment on America for failing to deal with the three great evils of our time: poverty, racism, and war. The white liberal media demonized King, accusing him of meddling in America’s foreign affairs by opposing the Vietnam War and blaming him for provoking violence wherever he led a march. White liberals, however, accepted no responsibility for King’s murder, and they refused to understand why Negroes were rioting and burning down their communities.”

“I didn’t want to talk to white people about King’s assassination or about the uprisings in the cities,” he writes of that period in his life. “[I]t was too much of an emotional burden to explain racism to racists, and I had nothing to say to them. I decided to have my say in writing. I’d give them something to read and talk about.” Cone is often described as the father of black liberation theology, although he was also, maybe more important, one of the very few contemporary theologians who understood and championed the radical message of the Gospel. Theological studies are divided into pre-Cone and post-Cone eras. Post-Cone theology has largely been an addendum or reaction to his work, begun with his first book, Black Theology and Black Power, published in 1969. He wrote the book, he says, “as an attack on racism in white churches and an attack on self-loathing in black churches. I was not interested in making an academic point about theology; rather, I was issuing a manifesto against whiteness and for blackness in an effort to liberate Christians from white supremacy.”

Cone never lost his fire. He never sold out to become a feted celebrity.

“I didn’t care what white theologians thought about me,” he writes. “They didn’t give a damn about black people. We were invisible to their writings, not even worthy of mention. Why should I care about what they thought?”

“After more than 50 years of working with, writing about, talking to white theologians, I have to say that most are wasting their time and energy, as far as I am concerned,” he writes, an observation that I, having been forced as a seminary student to plow through the turgid, jargon-filled works of white theologians, can only second. Cone blasted churches, including his own, of little or no value, predictably, personal piety and the prosperity gospel as “the worst place to learn about Christianity.”

His body of work, including his masterpieces “Martin & Malcolm & America” and “The Cross and the Lynching Tree,” is vital for understanding America and the moral failure of the liberal church and white liberal power structure. Cone’s insight is an important means of recognizing and fighting systemic and institutionalized racism, especially in an age of Donald Trump.

“I write on behalf of all those whom the Salvadoran theologian and martyr Ignacio Ellacuria called ‘the crucified peoples of history,’” Cone writes in his memoir. “I write for the forgotten and the abused, the marginalized and the despised. I write for those who are penniless, jobless, landless, all those who have no political or social power. I write for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and those who are marginalized, people who write for immigrants stranded on the U.S. border and for undocumented farmworkers toiling in misery in the nation’s agricultural fields. I write for Palestinian men in the Gaza Strip, on the West Bank, and in East Jerusalem. I write for Muslims and refugees who live under the terror of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. And I write for all people who care about humanity. I believe that until Americans, especially Christians and theologians, can see the cross and the lynching tree together, until we can identify Christ with ‘recrucified’... until we can identify Christ with “recrucified” black bodies hanging from lynching trees, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy.”

The cross, Cone reminded us, is not an abstraction; it is the instrument of death used by the oppressor to crucify the oppressed. —Continued on page 22...