

# REPETITION & OMISSION

An exclusive 7-page excerpt from Norman Solomon's new book  
**War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll  
of Its Military Machine**

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Issue 248

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

August 2023



**MIGRATION AND THE SHADOW OF WAR** | ANDREA MAZZERINO  
**WHERE RAINBOWS WEAR DANCING SHOES** | DOUGIE WALLACE  
**KEEPING ZELENSKY'S PHONY WAR ALIVE** | MARTIN JAY

**"A powerful, necessary indictment of efforts to disguise the human toll of American foreign policy."**

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

# WAR MADE INVISIBLE

Read this searing new exposé of how the U.S. military, with the help of news media, conceals its perpetual war

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"Cutting through this manufactured 'fog of war,' Norman Solomon eloquently casts sunlight, the best disinfectant, on the propaganda that fuels perpetual war. *War Made Invisible* is essential reading in these increasingly perilous times."

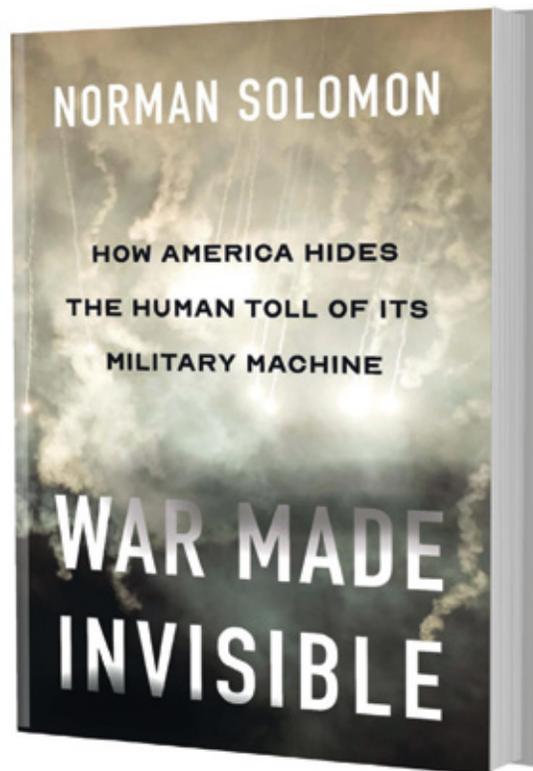
—**Amy Goodman**, *Democracy Now!*

"With an immense and rare humanity, Solomon insists that we awaken from the slumber of denial and distraction and confront the carnage of the U.S.'s never-ending military onslaughts. A staggeringly important intervention."

—**Naomi Klein**, author of *The Shock Doctrine*

"Solomon exposes how media lies, distortions, and misdirections represent the abandonment of journalism's promise to connect human beings to one another."

—**Janine Jackson**, program director, Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting



"The great African writer Chinua Achebe recounts an African proverb that holds that 'until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.' In Norman Solomon's gripping and painful study of what the hunter seeks to make invisible, the lions have found their historian, who scrupulously dismantles the deceit of the hunters and records what is all too visible to the lions."

—**Noam Chomsky**



thenewpress.com

# INSIDE

## INSIGHTS

5. Keeping Welensky's phoney war alive  
**Martin Jay**
7. Nato and Asia: An accident waiting to happen  
**Binoy Kampmark**
9. Why Capitalism is just a giant scam  
**Caitlin Johnstone**
10. We Are All Fried  
**Greg Koenderman**
11. Higher military spend will save democracy?  
**W.J. Astore**
12. A good year's pay for a good day's work  
**Sam Pizzigati**
13. Hurwitt's Eye  
**Mark Hurwitt**

## ColdType

7 Lewis Street, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada L7G 1E3.

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editor@coldtype.net.

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Death sentence for nature – Page 14

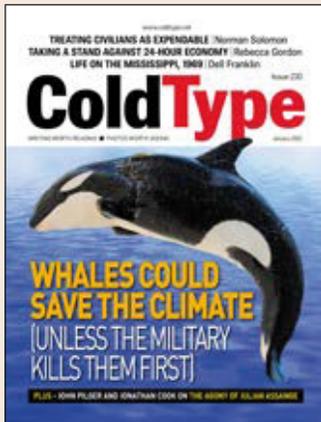
## ISSUES

14. Death sentence for people and ecosystems  
**David Cromwell**
17. UN or NATO – which is the biggest warmaker?  
**Vijay Prashad**
20. Thinking about thinking  
**George Monbiot**
22. Lost at sea: Migration and the shadow of war  
**Andrea Mazzarino**
26. Media abandon Assange and slit their own throats  
**Chris Hedges**
30. Where rainbows wear dancing shoes  
**Dougie Wallace**
37. **BOOK EXCERPT** – Repetition & Omission  
**Norman Solomon**
44. The hype of nuclear 'renaissance'  
**Joshua Frank**
48. Guns for sale: A season for mercenaries  
**Thalif Deen**

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Issue 230 – January 2022



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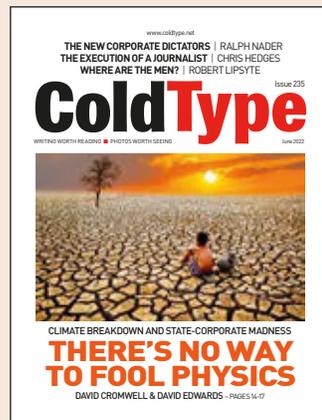
Issue 232 – March 2022



Issue 233 – April 2022



Issue 233 – May 2022



Issue 234 – June 2022



Issue 235 – July 2022



Issue 237 – September 2022



Issue 238 – October 2022



Issue 239 – November 2022



Issue 240 – December 2022



Issue 241 – January 2023

# INSIGHTS

Government of Ukraine



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky: "... not the leader that we might have thought he was; he's not the leader who is going to negotiate peace with Russia, not now, not any time."

The latest issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine had a brief moment of attention beyond its normal limited elitist audience when it asked the question: "Should Ukraine Negotiate With Russia?" It presented the reader with a tome of reading which expanded on this subject and, at first glance, appeared to present a salient perspective on what we should all now accept is an unofficial ceasefire declared by Ukraine after running out of the requisite material needed for war: ammo.

Of course, it wasn't a ceasefire declaration at all. I was humouring you and no one can blame me for this given that the quality of articles published by *Foreign Affairs*.

Martin Jay

## KEEPING ZELENSKY'S PHONEY WAR ALIVE

What absolute garbage these articles were! Broadly speaking, they all revolved around one incumbent theme which is boring at best and delusional at worst: that the US was still a super power and held higher values than Russia and its president.

The mere idea that President Zelensky is even in a position to negotiate a peace treaty is hilarious. But what will have you wetting yourself when you waded into the pantheon of paternalistic claptrap is how the authors fail to acknowledge that the war in Ukraine is slowly being lost by Ukraine and its NATO partners and that it is for Russia to bite the bullet and make a number of concessions before it crawls on its

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# INSIGHTS

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knees to NATO bosses and asks for forgiveness.

The authors make the point that before the West can consider peace talks Russia has to reduce its activities around the world – code for “stop making more friends and allies” – by which point western elites would allow it to return to the “table of responsible nations.”

This delusional narrative, some might argue, is what got the West in the mess it’s in, in the first place as the stellar inability to look at realities on the ground and where the US is in the world today, brought us to \$130-billion of US cash blown on supporting a war which neither the West nor Ukraine can win.

The mere idea that the West holds the high moral ground and that it is for Russia to clean its act up before it can be allowed back in as a guest member to the country club is hilarious.

These responsible nations, we should not forget faked a false flag attack in Sarajevo in the summer of 1995 just so illegal NATO air strikes could “win” the war with Milosevic; these same countries entered Afghanistan and after twenty years of fighting the Taliban had to leave with their tails between their legs after putting the enemy finally in power.

And let’s not forget the US army storming Baghdad and within hours looting Saddam’s gold, or even the oil which is stolen every day from Northern Syria and sold on the open market every day – all assisted by US troops.

Hardly shining examples of morality at its finest. And yet, reading the articles, we are led to believe that not only is the West the only real power which matters, but that there is much to negotiate in

Ukraine and even much more than Russia can do.

The idea of a Korean War armistice is dismissed by our authors who fail to grasp that the fortified line that the Russians have built is holding very well and that, in fact, it will be very hard if not impossible for Russia to even entertain the idea of a brokered peace settlement if Moscow is required to surrender any of the land captured and held.

*Foreign Affairs* authors at least concede though that it is time to talk to Russia and this is the right time, at least so we have to assume that they understand the tenets of warfare which is that you have to have at least twice the number of soldiers the enemy has, be equipped to the teeth and have experienced army officers who can lead from the front if you are to stand any chance of taking any villages which are in Russian hands.

**T**he admission from Biden that Ukraine “is running low on ammo” was clumsy and must have had Pentagon generals throwing their hands in the air.

The problem with this delusional standpoint though is not only that the American elite are completely out of touch with the realities of the war there but that Zelensky in any case is not the leader that we might have thought he was; he’s not the leader who is going to negotiate peace with Russia, not now, not any time. And so the articles and certainly their titles, are stupid as they show the reader immediately how woefully misinformed the writers are and what cocoons of delusion and disinformation are accommodating them.

In the 1970s, when the American

press were free to report on the Vietnam war, a writer called Michael Herr wrote *Dispatches* which alarmed a number of these same elitist types who couldn’t understand why with all the firepower the Americans had they couldn’t at any time of the war consider themselves even vaguely winning.

The only certainty about the war in Ukraine is how the West repeatedly miscalculates and misinforms itself and this article is a very good example of what is wrong with the critical thinking, who is doing such thinking and where everything is heading: a messy, undignified exit like Vietnam, Afghanistan and to some extent Iraq is inevitable and just one look at the NATO photo of Zelensky looking bewildered, alone, lost and confused gives a clue to just how soon this is to happen.

America needs a new Michael Herr to report the dark truth about the war. Only then will these elitist draft dodgers at *Foreign Affairs* get even a grip on reality before they indulge in more of this soiled keyboard folly which they probably call journalism. **CT**

**Martin Jay** is an award-winning British journalist based in Morocco where he is a correspondent for the UK *Daily Mail*. He previously reported on the Arab Spring there for CNN, as well as *Euronews*. From 2012 to 2019 he was based in Beirut where he worked for a number of international media titles including BBC, Al Jazeera, RT, DW, as well as reporting on a freelance basis for the *Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Times* and *TRT World*. This article was first published by *Strategic Culture* online journal – [www.strategic-culture.org](http://www.strategic-culture.org).

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# INSIGHTS

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DOD/US Air Force Master Sgt. Jerry Morrison

NATO ministers of defence and foreign affairs meet in Brussels.

Binoy Kampmark

## NATO AND ASIA: ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN

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Since the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has distinctly strayed from its original purpose. It has become, almost shamelessly, the vessel and handmaiden of US power, while its burgeoning expansion eastwards has done wonders to upend the apple-cart of stability.

From that upending, the alliance started bungling. It engaged, without the authorisation of the UN Security Council, in a 78-day bombing campaign of Yugoslavia – at least what was left of it – ostensibly to protect the lives of Kosovar Albanians. Far from dampening the tinderbox, the Kosovo affair continues to be an explosion in the making.

Members of the alliance also ex-

pendent material, money and personnel in Afghanistan over the course of two decades, propping up a deeply unpopular, corrupt regime in Kabul while failing to stifle the Taliban. As with previous imperial projects, the venture proved to be a catastrophic failure.

In 2011, NATO again was found wanting in its attack on the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. While it was intended to be an exemplar of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine, the intervention served to eventually topple the doomed Colonel Gaddafi, precipitating the de-facto partitioning of Libya and endangering the very civilians the mission was meant to protect. A continent was thereby destabilised. The true beneficiaries proved to be the tapes-

try of warring rebel groups characterised by sectarian impulses and a voracious appetite for human rights abuses and war crimes.

The Ukraine War has been another crude lesson in the failings of the NATO project. The constant teasing and wooing of Kyiv as a potential future member never sat well with Moscow and while much can be made of the Russian invasion, no realistic assessment of the war's origins can excise NATO from playing a deep, compromised role.

The alliance is also proving dissonant among its members. Not all are exactly jumping at the chance of admitting Ukraine. German diplomats have revealed that they will block any current moves to join the alliance. Even that old provoking power, the United States, is not entirely sure whether doors should be open to Kyiv. On CNN, President Joe Biden expressed the view that he did not “think it’s ready for membership of NATO.” To qualify, Ukraine would have to meet

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# INSIGHTS

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a number of “qualifications” from “democratisation to a whole range of other issues.” While hardly proving very alert during the interview (at one point, he confused Ukraine with Russia) he did draw the logical conclusion that bringing Kyiv into an alliance of obligatory collective defence during current hostilities would automatically put NATO at war with Moscow.

With such a spotty, blood speckled record marked by stumbles and bungles, any suggestions of further engagement by the alliance in other areas of the globe should be treated with abundant wariness. The latest talk of further Asian engagement should also be greeted with a sense of dread. According to a July 7 statement, “The Indo-Pacific is important for the Alliance, given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. Moreover, NATO and its partners in the region share a common goal of working together to strengthen the rules-based international order.” With these views, conflict lurks.

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The form of that engagement is being suggested by such ideas as opening a liaison office in Japan, intended as the first outpost in Asia. It repeats the attendance format of the Madrid summit held in 2022. That new format – featuring the presence of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, or the AP4, should have induced much head scratching. But the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Washington’s beady eyes in Canberra, celebrated this “shift to taking a truly global approach to strategic competition”.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg is also much in favour of such competition, warning member states of Beijing’s ambitions. “We should not make the same mistake with China and other authoritarian regimes,” he suggested, alluding to a dangerous and flawed comparison between Ukraine and Taiwan. “What is happening in Europe today could happen in Asia tomorrow.”

One of the prominent headscratchers at this erroneous reasoning is French President Emmanuel Macron. Taking issue with setting up the Japan liaison office, Macron has expressed opposition to such expansion by an alliance which, at least in terms of treaty obligations, has a strict geographical limit. In the words of an Elysée Palace official, “As far as the office is concerned, the Japanese authorities themselves have told us that they are not extremely attached to it.” With a headmaster’s tone, the official went on to give journalists an elementary lesson. “NATO means North Atlantic Treaty Organization.” The centrality of Articles 5 and 6 of the alliance

were “geographic” in nature.

In 2021, Macron made it clear that NATO’s increasingly obsessed approach with China as a dangerous belligerent entailed a confusion of goals. “NATO is a military organisation, the issue of our relationship with China isn’t just a military issue. NATO is an organisation that concerns the North Atlantic, China has little to do with the North Atlantic.”

Such views have also pleased former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, whose waspish ire has also been trained on the NATO Secretary-General. In his latest statement, Stoltenberg was condemned as “the supreme fool” of “the international stage”. “Stoltenberg by instinct and policy, is simply an accident on its way to happen”. In thinking that “China should be superintended by the West and strategically circumscribed”, the NATO official had overlooked the obvious point that the country “represents twenty percent of humanity and now possesses the largest economy in the world ... and has no record for attacking other states, unlike the United States, whose bidding Stoltenberg is happy to do”.

The record of this ceramic breaking bloc speaks for itself. In its post-Cold War visage, the alliance has undermined its own mission to foster stability, becoming Washington’s axe, spear and spade. Where NATO goes, war is most likely. Countries of the Indo-Pacific, take note. **CT**

**Binoy Kampmark** was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

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# INSIGHTS

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Caitlin Johnstone

## WHY CAPITALISM IS JUST A GIANT SCAM

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One of the most formative moments of my life was when I was running a small eco blog called *Earth Mums* in the mid-2000s which focused on consumer solutions to the problem of environmental destruction. Back then I still believed that while capitalism was driving the destruction of our biosphere, it could still be hacked into being part of the solution in some ways.

I got a call from a biofuels startup who saw my work with *Earth Mums* and wanted to hire me to write search engine-friendly articles to draw traffic to their website. I went to their office for a meeting, and while I was waiting I listened to the three partners – real high-octane entrepreneur types – laughing and talking about the various business plates they were spinning.

One of them had apparently just come back from a consulting job for a household cleaning product, which *Earth Mums* had a lot of affection for because it was an environmentally friendly compound that you could

buy for less than a dollar a bag.

“Don’t tell me, lemme guess: you told ’em to double the price?” asked one of the partners.

“I told ’em to quadruple it!” said the consultant guy.

I found it incredibly sleazy how they were making a product that could actually help make households a kinder to the environment less accessible while presenting themselves as eco warriors who want to save the planet. I told them



I charge way more than I knew they’d ever pay me for the job and got the hell out of there, but lo and behold I did see the product’s shoot up in price fourfold shortly thereafter.

It left me so deflated and disheartened I wound up shutting down *Earth Mums*. I could see that

these guys and people like them were going to turn consumer ecological responsibility into this trendy elite thing priced way out of range for normal people, and that’s exactly what ended up happening. It wasn’t long before I saw the arrival of eco chic and Whole Foods and Tesla and the rest of this whole new luxury market designed to let rich people feel good about themselves while the world burns and create the illusion that we can profiteer our way out of our problems.

It was just such an in-your-face illustration of the problem. The cleaner wasn’t improved in quality, didn’t become harder to make or more difficult to obtain, the supply and demand remained the same; the price was changed because the market would bear it. The hidden hand of the market was not going to magically restore the product to its “correct” value; the value of such products was going to be determined by the narrative manipulations of entrepreneurs, consultants, marketeers and ad-men.

“Let the market decide” really means let the manipulators decide, because the markets are dominated by those who excel at manipulating. We’re taught that letting the market decide means letting supply and demand take its natural course, as though we’re talking about ocean tides or seasons or something, but in reality both supply and demand are manipulated constantly with extreme aggression. Manipulating the sup-

# INSIGHTS

WE ARE ALL FRIED 🔪🗑️

Gregg Koenderman



ply of diamonds. Manipulating the supply of housing. Manipulating the supply of oil. Manipulating people into wanting things they'd never thought to want before through advertising. Manipulating women into feeling bad about their bodies so they'll buy your beauty products. Manipulating people into paying \$2,000 for a \$20 bag using branding. Manipulating people into buying mouthwash by inventing the word "halitosis" and convincing them to be worried about it.

Capitalism gives us a civilisation that is dominated by trickery.

Those who get to the top are those who succeed in tricking as many people as possible. Tricking them into paying more. Tricking them into buying your product and not someone else's. Tricking people who actually produce something of value into making you their middle man who gets paid despite producing nothing. Tricking competitors into making the wrong move. Tricking people into asking their doctor about your extremely lucrative pharmaceutical product. Tricking people into buying or selling certain stocks or cryptocurrencies or

NFTs. Tricking people by using the legal system and your team of lawyers who understand it better than normal people do. Tricking people into letting you privatise their own drinking water and then selling it back to them in bottles.

It's a scam competition. Whoever scams the best wins. How can you save the planet from destruction by human behaviour when all of human behaviour is driven by a bizarre scam competition? And the biggest scam of all is the narrative

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# INSIGHTS

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that this system is totally working and is entirely sustainable. That's the overarching scam holding all the other scams together.

Proponents of capitalism often decry socialism as a coercive system that people are forced to participate in, but what the hell do you call this? Did any of us sign up to be thrown into the middle of a giant unending scam competition? What if I don't want to spend my whole life being subjected to people's attempts to trick me? What if I don't want to live in a society where everyone's trying to trick and scam each other instead of collaborating toward the greater good of our world? Guess what? I don't consent to any of that.

Whenever you talk about the destructiveness and depravity of capitalism online you'll get people saying "Hurr hurr, and yet here you are participating in capitalism" as if that's an own goal instead of the exact problem that's being discussed. Yes! Yes I am coerced into participating in a capitalist society in order to pay the bills and stay alive. That's the problem I'm trying to address here. It's like prisoners complaining about the prison system and being called hypocrites because they are in prison.

I'm convinced that this is a huge factor in the mental health crises our society is experiencing today. We're trapped in this system where we're constantly being psychologically pummelled with an endless barrage of messaging trying to make us think and feel and desire and loathe specific things for no other reason than because it will make someone money. How can mental health prevail in a civilisation where everyone's mind is continuously being yanked this way

and that by mass-scale psychological manipulation? Capitalism poisons our minds as much as it poisons our air and our water.

It's already so, so bad and it's set to get so, so much worse, and we're so, so far from any real changes in our political status quo looking anywhere remotely achievable. All we

can do is keep drawing attention to this in as many ways as we can, and hoping enough people open their eyes and start to see what's needed. **CT**

*Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her website is [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com).*

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W.J. Astore

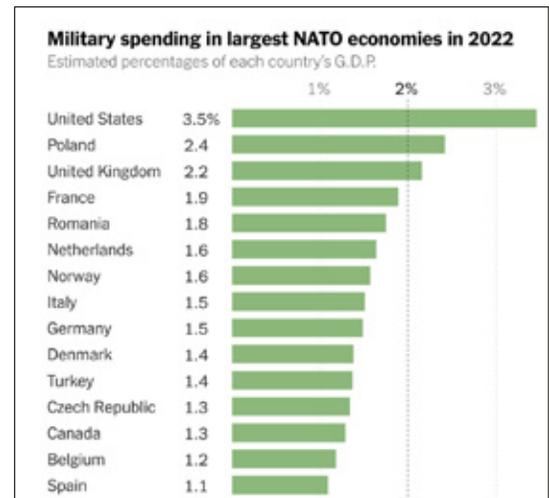
## HIGHER MILITARY SPENDING WILL SAVE DEMOCRACY?

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**O**ne morning last month, I got a story in my *New York Times* email feed on "A Turning Point in Military Spending." The article celebrated the greater willingness of NATO members as well as countries like Japan to spend more on military weaponry, which, according to the "liberal" NYT, will help to preserve democracy. Interestingly, even as NATO members have started to spend more, the Pentagon is still demanding yet higher budgets, abetted by Congress. I thought if NATO spent more, the USA could finally spend less?

No matter. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the hyping of what used to be called the "Yellow Peril," today read "China," is ensuring record military spending in the USA as yearly Pentagon budgets approach \$900-billion. That figure does not include the roughly



Just look at all those cheap Spaniards. They have good stuff because of Captain America. Freeloaders! (NYT Chart, 7/12/23)

\$120-billion or more in aid already provided to Ukraine in its war with Russia. And since the Biden administration's commitment to Ukraine remains open-ended, you can add scores of billion more to that sum if the war persists into the fall and winter.

Here's an excerpt from the *New York Times* piece that I found espe-

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# INSIGHTS

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cially humorous in a grim way:

“[Admittedly,] The additional money that countries spend on defense is money they cannot spend on roads, child care, cancer research, refugee resettlement, public parks or clean energy, my colleague Patricia points out. One reason Macron has insisted on raising France’s retirement age despite widespread protests, analysts believe, is a need to leave more money for the military.

“But the situation [in Europe of spending more on butter than guns] over the past few decades feels unsustainable. Some of the world’s richest countries were able to spend so much on social programs partly because another country – the US – was paying for their defense. Those other countries, sensing a more threatening world, are now once again promising to pull their weight. They still need to demonstrate that they’ll follow through this time.”

**Y**es, Europe could continue to invest in better roads, cleaner energy, and the like, but now it’s time to buckle down and build more weapons. Stop freeloading, Europe! Dammit, pull your weight! You’ve had better and cheaper health care than Americans, stellar educational systems, child care benefits galore, all sorts of social programs we Americans can only dream of, but that’s because we’ve been paying

for it! Captain America’s shield has been protecting you on the cheap! Time to pay up, you Germans, you French, you Italians, and especially you cheap Spaniards.

As the NYT article says: NATO allies need to “follow through this time” on strengthening their militaries. Because strong militaries produce democracy. And European “investments” in arms will ensure more equitable burden sharing in funding stronger cages and higher barriers to deter a rampaging Russian bear.

Again, you Americans out there,

that doesn’t mean we can spend less on “defense.” What it means is that the US can “pivot to Asia” and spend more on weaponry to “deter” China. Because as many neocons say, the real threat is Xi, not Putin.

We have met the enemy, and he is us. That’s an old saying you won’t see in the “liberal” NYT. **CT**

**William J. Astore**, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and history professor, is a senior fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network (EMN). He blogs at [www.bracingviews.com](http://www.bracingviews.com).

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Sam Pizzigati

## A GOOD YEAR'S PAY FOR A GOOD DAY'S WORK

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**T**he just-released Good Jobs First analysis – *Power Outrage: Will Heavily Subsidized Battery Factories Generate Substandard Jobs?* – examines a little-known provision in the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act that may end up costing US taxpayers more than \$200-billion over the next decade, a sum above and beyond the \$13-billion that state and local governments have promised as battery incentives.

Lawmakers see all those billions of tax dollars as a generator of good

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wages, but nothing in the battery subsidy fine-print mandates – or even incentivises – decent worker paychecks. Ford Motor, for instance, will be eligible for \$6.7-billion in federal subsidies for its new \$3.5-billion battery plant in Michigan, and state and local officials have already handed Ford \$1.7-billion for that plant.

How does that math play out for real-life workers?

“The company has promised to create 2,500 new jobs that it says will pay an average annual wage of just \$45,000 a year,” Good Jobs First points out, “while reaping subsidies of \$3.4-million per job.”

The Good Jobs First study offers a variety of policy proposals “to set the country’s emerging EV-battery industrial complex on the path to ‘high road’ employment,” steps ranging from requiring subsidy recipients to pay wages that at least match the local market rate to including contract provisions that “claw back” tax-dollar subsidies should companies fail to deliver the jobs they’ve promised.

Will steps like these be enough to ensure that the benefits of the transition to electric vehicles get “justly shared,” as the Good Jobs First report puts it, “with the workers and communities building America’s fossil-free economy”? Not unless we also take steps that meaningfully discourage any attempts by top corporate execs to grab much more than their “fair share” of federal tax dollars.

How could we do that discouraging? We could include in every government contract and subsidy provisions that deny

public tax dollars to firms that compensate their top execs at over 25 or 50 times the compensation that goes to their workers.

A bit of historical perspective: Back in the mid-20th-century, few corporate chiefs pocketed over 20 times the annual compensation of their average workers. CEOs at major US corporations, the Economic Policy Institute reported last fall, are now averaging nearly 400 times worker annual pay.

If we shifted gears and only extended taxpayer-funded contracts and subsidies to corporations that limited their CEO pay to no more than 25 or 50 times worker pay, top execs at companies that get our tax dollars would have an ever-present incentive to raise

their worker pay, not squeeze it.

Two municipalities, Portland and San Francisco, have already taken steps in that direction. State and federal lawmakers have introduced similar proposals, as this Inequality.org CEO-Worker Pay Resource Guide details.

We clearly can create a more equal United States. Corporate paychecks could lead the way. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Twitter: Contact him at [@Too\\_Much\\_Online](#).

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## HURWITT’S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



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David Cromwell

# DEATH SENTENCE FOR PEOPLE AND ECOSYSTEMS

The climate emergency, governments and the public enemy

**O**n a trip to Japan in 2014, approaching the third anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Noam Chomsky told an audience: “Governments regard their own citizens as their main enemy.”

What he meant was that states do not wish their own populations to know and understand the details of government policies, for fear of provoking an adverse public reaction that would limit or derail the state’s ability to do whatever it wants.

Chomsky cited the example of the Iraqi city of Fallujah that was twice brutally attacked by overwhelming US firepower in the Iraq war, including white phosphorus munitions. US forces left behind huge numbers of dead and a toxic legacy of deadly radiation that caused considerably raised levels of birth defects and cancer. But: “The US government denies it [culpability for these war crimes].”

Likewise, added Chomsky: “In 1961, the United States began chemical warfare in Vietnam, South Vietnam, chemical warfare to destroy crops and livestock. That went on for seven years. The level of poison – they used the most extreme carcinogen known: dioxin. And this went on for years. There’s enormous effects in South Vietnam. There are children today being born in Saigon hospitals, deformed children, and horrible deformations. Government refuses

to investigate. They’ve investigated effects on American soldiers, but not on the South Vietnamese. And there’s almost no study of it, except for independent citizens’ groups.”

Governments protect themselves by concealing such damning information, meanwhile even surveilling their own citizens. As Chomsky noted: “That’s why you have state secret laws. Citizens are not supposed to know what their government is doing to them. Just to give one final example, when Edward Snowden’s revelations [about surveillance of US citizens by the US National Security Agency] appeared, the head of US intelligence, James Clapper, testified before Congress that no telephone communications of Americans are being monitored. It was an outlandish lie. Lying to Congress is a felony; should go to jail for years. Not a word. Governments are supposed to lie to their citizens.”

Then again, as the US journalist IF Stone observed: “All governments lie.” A truth that he reiterated when he wrote: “Every government is run by liars and nothing they say should be believed.”

**C**homsky emphasised the warning about state spying on citizens in another interview: “Governments should not have this capacity. But governments will use whatever tech-

nology is available to them to combat their primary enemy – which is their own population.”

As was revealed by Snowden, this state surveillance has been carried out via ‘direct access’ to systems run by tech giants, including Microsoft, Apple and Google.

Chomsky added: “They [governments and corporations] take whatever is available, and in no time it is being used against us, the population. Governments are not representative. They have their own power, serving segments of the population that are dominant and rich.”

The notion that governments – and corporations – fear the general population might seem strange. But it is encapsulated in the famous verse from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem, *The Masque of Anarchy*:

*“Rise, like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number!  
Shake your chains to earth like  
dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on  
you: Ye are many—they are few!”*

Shelley wrote the poem, subtitled *Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester*, on hearing of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819. Eighteen people were killed by cavalry charging into a crowd of around 60,000 people who had gathered to demand parliamentary reform.

In recent years, Jeremy Corbyn



famously quoted this verse on several occasions, including at Glastonbury in 2017; in particular, the stirring final line, “*Ye are many – they are few!*”

To protect their own self-image of strength and impregnability, it is vital that governments and corporations conceal their fear of public power. Just occasionally, however, it slips out. Thus, a recent gathering of global elites at the five-star Savoy hotel in London was warned of ‘pitchforks and torches’ unless inequality is tackled.

The image of huge crowds of peasants swarming the strongholds of the super-rich might sound like a scene from *The Simpsons*. But ‘progressive advisers’ told the wealthy Savoy conference attendees that: “There was a ‘real risk of actual insurrection’ and ‘civil disruption’ if

the yawning inequality gap between rich and poor was allowed to widen as a result of energy and food price hikes hitting squeezed households.”

Julia Davies, a founding member of Patriotic Millionaires UK, a group of super-rich people calling for the introduction of a wealth tax, warned that global poverty and the climate emergency were going to get “so much worse” unless the wealthy did more to help poorer citizens.

She continued: “Everyone can say it is somebody else’s responsibility. But it is the wealthiest in society who are the people who can actually really do something about it.”

The implication here is that it is incumbent upon the rich to save the rest of us. Salvation will not, and cannot, come from the unwashed multitudes below. This was put in more palatable terms when another contributor

advocated “a clear methodology for investing philanthropic capital.” So, essentially an improved form of charity is being proposed; not a fundamental restructuring of class and economic power that would deliver true justice.

As we have pointed out before, there is no threat of such justice happening under a likely future Labour government led by Sir Keir Starmer, seemingly the establishment’s favoured choice for maintaining the status quo.

Jonathan Cook summed it up succinctly: “Starmer has overseen the rush by the party back into the arms of the establishment. He has ostentatiously embraced patriotism and the flag.

“He demands lockstep support for NATO. Labour policy is once again in thrall to big business, and against

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strikes by workers. And, since the death of the Queen, Starmer has sought to bow as low as possible before the new king without toppling over.”

After Just Stop Oil protests had temporarily interrupted two tennis matches at Wimbledon, Starmer was quick to condemn them: “I can’t wait for them to stop their antics, frankly. You know, they’re interrupting iconic sporting events that are part of our history, tradition and massively looked forward to across the nation. I absolutely condemn the way they go about their tactics.”

The Leader of His Majesty’s Most Loyal Opposition added: “And I have to say it’s riddled with an arrogance that only they have the sort of right to force their argument on other people in this way.”

Presumably, if Starmer had been around during the women’s emancipation movement, he would have condemned the actions of suffragette Emily Davison for hindering the progress of the king’s horse at Epsom racecourse.

Similarly, when the wedding of George Osborne, the Tory architect of ‘austerity’ which contributed to 335,000 excess deaths, was interrupted by an orange-confetti-wielding woman, Labour’s shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves was swift out of the blocks: “I have got no time for Just Stop Oil. To be honest, I think it is a bit pathetic and quite tedious disrupting tennis, snooker, other people’s weddings.” (Just Stop Oil said they had nothing to do with the Osborne wedding confetti, but praised the woman’s actions.)

The campaign group added: “Perhaps the press could focus on something more important now? Like the current government’s plans to licence over 100 new oil and gas projects, which will result in excess deaths the likes of which we have never seen. Or the fact that the UN Secretary General has said that

## Mandelson hailed Starmer as “a strong and assertive leader” and praised him for having “seen off the Corbynites, the anti Semites and the rest”

‘climate change is out of control’ as we’ve just seen the hottest average temperatures since records began. Or the fact that Canadian wildfires have now burned down an area the size of Portugal....We are in catastrophically dangerous territory...”

Like Tony Blair in the 1990s, Starmer has been cosy up to media mogul Rupert Murdoch, according to a largely welcoming account in the *Observer*. Starmer is being urged in an even more neoliberal direction by Peter Mandelson, the Machiavelian Labour lurker. Mandelson had been a big player in Blair’s general election victories in 1997, 2001 and 2005. In January, Mandelson hailed Starmer as “a strong and assertive leader” and praised him for having “seen off the Corbynites, the anti Semites and the rest.”

As for Starmer trying to curry favour with Murdoch, Mark Seddon, Director of the Centre for United Nations Studies at the University of Buckingham, warned via Twitter: “This may impress the *Observer*, but it certainly doesn’t those of us who saw all of this before with Blair’s grovelling to Murdoch. History repeats itself, first as a tragedy, second as a farce.”

He added: “When I became editor of *Tribune* I went to meet him [Starmer]. I thought he was shallow and lacked any hinterland. My opinion of him has only got worse in the intervening years.”

Indeed, Starmer is the epitome of a shallow, fake politician. The major exception to Starmer’s fakery is his genuine commitment to be a safe pair of hands for established power. Further evidence, if it were needed, was his reaction to a polite protest by two young climate activists standing behind him as he gave a speech earlier this month. Holding up a banner, they said: “No more u-turns, we need a Green New Deal now.”

Their clear message was that society needs to take serious action immediately in the face of the climate emergency. Starmer’s response was farcical: “We did that last month.”

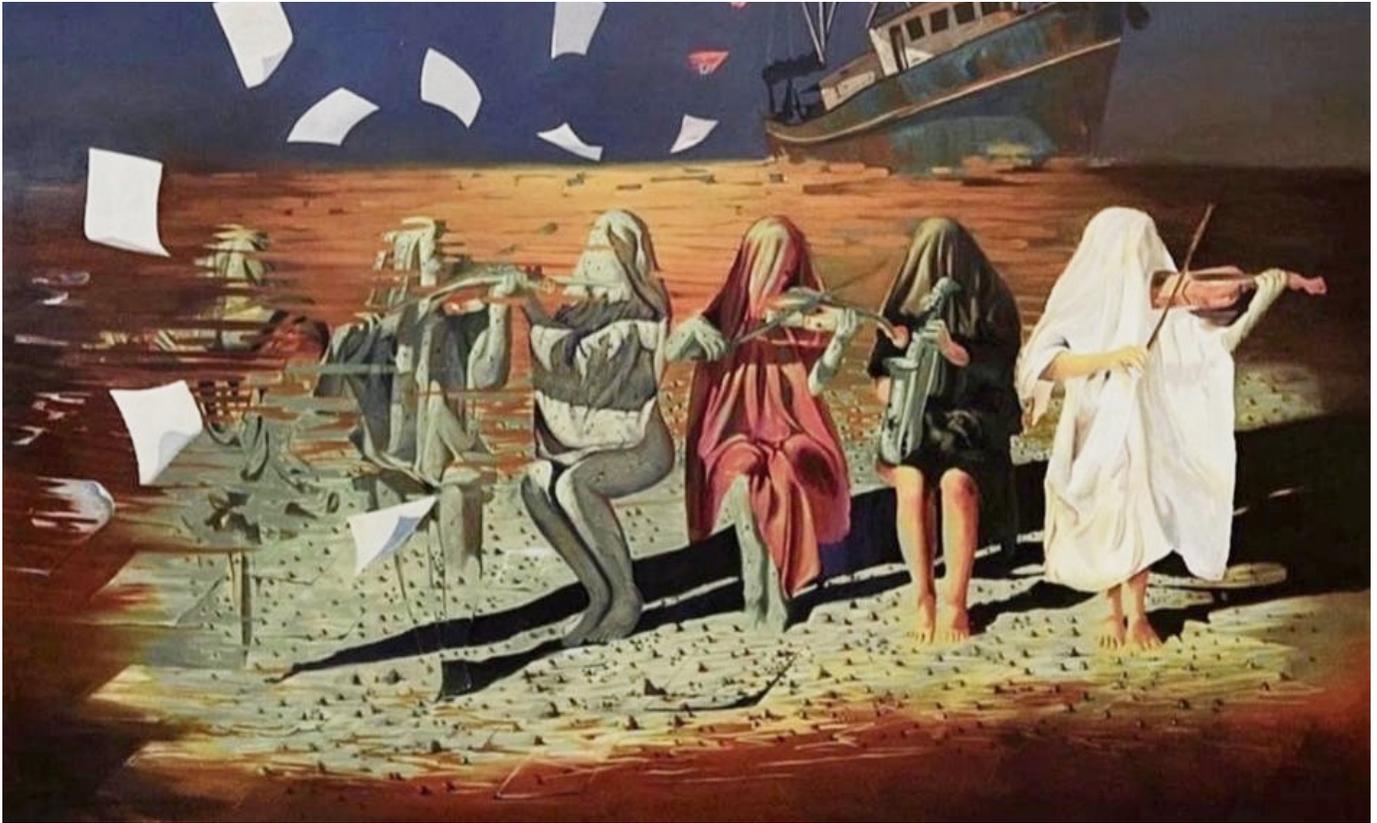
Did what last month? Claiming that he would block new North Sea oil and gas exploration might sound like a decent, minimal first step to addressing the climate crisis. But coming from a politician who serially breaks promises, it is hardly convincing. Indeed, Starmer is already ‘in retreat’ as he has been at pains to reassure oil company Equinor that he would not block the Rosebank oil and gas field west of Shetland, expected to produce 300 million barrels of oil, if he becomes Prime Minister.

Starmer has sought to reassure fossil fuel CEOs in recent weeks: “Let me be clear: those who think we should simply end domestic oil and gas production in Britain are wrong. Under Labour’s plans, they will play a crucial part in our energy mix for decades to come.”

When asked by one of the climate protesters at Starmer’s speech which side he was on, the Labour leader gave a response that would not ruffle any Big Business feathers: “We are on the side of economic growth.”

Starmer promised the protesters he would speak with them afterwards. He didn’t. Unsurprisingly, it was yet another broken promise. **CT**

**David Cromwell** is co-editor of *Medialens* – [www.medialens.com](http://www.medialens.com) – the UK media watchdog.



Bassim Al Shaker, Iraq, "Symphony of Death 1," 2019.

Vijay Prashad

# UN OR NATO – WHICH IS THE BIGGEST WARMAKER?

The communique from the recent summit in Vilnius underlined Ukraine's path to the Western military alliance and sharpened NATO's self-defined universalism

**T**he North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's communique released after the first day of its annual summit earlier this month claimed that "NATO is a defensive alliance," a statement encapsulating why many struggle to grasp its essence.

A look at the latest military spending figures shows, to the contrary, that NATO countries, and countries closely allied to NATO, account for

nearly three-quarters of the total annual global expenditure on weapons.

Many of these countries possess state-of-the-art weapons systems, which are qualitatively more destructive than those held by the militaries of most non-NATO countries.

Over the past quarter century, NATO has used its military might to destroy several states, such as Afghanistan (2001) and Libya (2011), shattering societies with the raw

muscle of its aggressive alliance. It ended Yugoslavia (1999) as a unified state. It is difficult, given this record, to sustain the view that NATO is a "defensive alliance."

Currently, NATO has 31 member states, the most recent addition being Finland, which joined in April. Its membership has more than doubled since its 12 founding members (all European and North American nations that had been part of the war

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against the Axis powers) signed its founding Washington or the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4, 1949.

It is telling that one of these original members – Portugal – remained under a fascist dictatorship at the time, known as Estado Novo (in place from 1933 until 1974).

Article 10 of the treaty declares that NATO members – “by unanimous agreement” – can “invite any other European state” to join the military alliance. Based on that principle, NATO welcomed Greece and Turkey (1952), West Germany (1955) and Spain (1982), expanding its membership at the time to include 16 countries.

The disintegration of the USSR and communist states in Eastern Europe – the purported threat that compelled the need for NATO to begin with – did not put an end to the need for the alliance.

Instead, NATO’s increasing membership has doubled down on its ambition to use its military power, through Article 5, to subdue anyone who challenges the “Atlantic Alliance.”

The “Atlantic Alliance,” a phrase that is part of NATO’s name, was part of a wider network of military treaties secured by the US against the USSR and, after October 1949, against the People’s Republic of China.

This network included the Manila Pact of September 1954, which created the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), and the Baghdad Pact of February 1955, which created the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO).

Turkey and Pakistan signed a military agreement in April 1954, which brought them together in an alliance against the USSR and anchored this network through NATO’s southernmost member (Turkey) and SEATO’s westernmost member (Pakistan).

The US signed a military deal with

## **NATO has become an instrument to blunt the global majority’s desire for sovereignty and dignity – two key anti-colonial concepts**

each of the members of CENTO and SEATO and ensured that it had a seat at the table in these structures.

At the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru reacted strongly to the creation of these military alliances, which exported tensions between the US and the USSR across Asia. The concept of NATO, he said, “has extended itself in two ways”: first, NATO “has gone far away from the Atlantic and has reached other oceans and seas” and, second, “NATO today is one of the most powerful protectors of colonialism.”

As an example, Nehru pointed to Goa, which was still held by fascist Portugal and whose grip had been validated by NATO members – an act, Nehru said, of “gross impertinence.” This characterisation of NATO as a global belligerent and defender of colonialism remains, with some modifications.

SEATO was disbanded in 1977, partly due to the defeat of the US in Vietnam, and CENTO was shuttered in 1979, after the Iranian Revolution that year.

US military strategy shifted its focus, from wielding these kinds of pacts, to establishing a direct military presence with the founding of US Central Command in 1983 and the revitalisation of the US Pacific Command that same year.

The US expanded the power of its own global military footprint including its ability to strike anywhere on the planet due to its military bases

and armed flotillas (which were no longer restricted once the 1930 Second London Naval Treaty expired in 1939).

Although NATO has always had global ambitions, the alliance was given material reality through the US military’s force projection and its creation of new structures that tied allied states into its orbit (with programmes such as “Partnership for Peace,” set up in 1994, and concepts such as “global NATO partner” and “non-NATO ally,” as exemplified by Japan and South Korea).

In its 1991 “Strategic Concept,” NATO wrote that it would “contribute to global stability and peace by providing forces for United Nations missions,” realised with deadly force in Yugoslavia (1999), Afghanistan (2003) and Libya (2011). By the Riga Summit (2006), NATO was confident that it operated “from Afghanistan to the Balkans and from the Mediterranean Sea to Darfur.”

Nehru’s focus on colonialism might seem anachronistic now, but in fact, NATO has become an instrument to blunt the global majority’s desire for sovereignty and dignity – two key anti-colonial concepts. Any popular project that exerts these two concepts finds itself at the end of a NATO weapons system.

The collapse of the USSR and the Eastern European communist state system transformed Europe’s reality. NATO quickly ignored the “ironclad guarantees” offered by US Secretary of State James Baker to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow on Feb. 9, 1990 that NATO’s “forces would not move eastward” of the German border.

Several states that bordered the NATO zone suffered greatly in the immediate period of the fall of the Berlin Wall, with economies in the doldrums as privatisation eclipsed the possibility for their populations to live with dignity.

Many states in Eastern Europe, desperate to enter the European Union that least promised access to the common market, understood that entry into NATO was the price of admission.

In 1999, Czechia, Hungary and Poland joined NATO, followed in 2004 by the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Eager for investments and markets, by 2004 many of these countries waltzed into the Atlantic Alliance of NATO and the EU.

NATO continued to expand, absorbing Albania and Croatia in 2009, Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia in 2020.

However, the breakdown of some US banks, the waning attraction of the US as the market of last resort, and the entry of the Atlantic world into a relentless economic depression after 2007 changed the context.

No longer were Atlantic states reliable as investors or as markets. After 2008, infrastructure investment in the EU declined by 75 percent due to reduced public spending and the European Investment Bank warned that government investment would hit a 25-year low.

The arrival of Chinese investment and the possibility of integration with the Chinese economy began to reorient many economies, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, away from the Atlantic.

In 2012, the first summit among China and Central and Eastern European countries (China-CEEC summit) was held in Warsaw, with 16 countries in the region participating. The process eventually drew in 15 NATO members, including Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2021.

In 2022, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania withdrew from the initiative.

## The arrival of Chinese investment and the possibility of integration with the Chinese economy began to reorient many economies away from Europe

In March 2015, six then-EU member states – France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Sweden, and the UK – joined the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Four years later, Italy became the first G7 country to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Two-thirds of EU member states are now part of the BRI, and the EU concluded the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment in 2020.

These manoeuvres towards China threatened to weaken the Atlantic Alliance, with the US describing China as a “strategic competitor” in its 2018 “National Defense Strategy” – a phrase indicative of its shifting focus on the so-called threat of China. Nonetheless, as recently as November 2019, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that “there [are] no plans, no proposal, no intention to move NATO into, for instance, the South China Sea.”

However, by 2020, the mood had changed: a mere seven months later, Stoltenberg said, “NATO does not see China as the new enemy or an adversary. But what we see is that the rise of China is fundamentally changing the global balance of power.”

NATO’s response has been to work with its partners – including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea – “to address... the security consequences of the rise of China,” Stoltenberg continued.

The talk of a global NATO and an Asian NATO is front and centre in these deliberations, with

Stoltenberg stating in Vilnius that the idea of a liaison office in Japan is “on the table.”

The war in Ukraine provided new life to the Atlantic Alliance, driving several hesitant European countries – such as Sweden – into its ranks. Yet, even among people living within NATO countries there are groups who are sceptical of the alliance’s aims, with the Vilnius summit marked by anti-NATO protests.

The Vilnius Summit Communiqué underlined Ukraine’s path into NATO and sharpened NATO’s self-defined universalism. The communiqué declares, for instance, that China challenges “our interests, security, and values,” with the word “our” claiming to represent not only NATO countries but the entire international order.

Slowly, NATO is positioning itself as a substitute for the U., suggesting that it – and not the actual international community – is the arbiter and guardian of the world’s “interests, security, and values.”

This view is contested by the vast majority of the world’s peoples, seven-billion of whom do not even reside in NATO’s member countries (whose total population is less than one-billion). Those billions wonder why it is that NATO wants to supplant the United Nations.. **CT**

*Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter. He is an editor of LeftWord Books and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He has written many books, the latest on which are *Struggle Makes Us Human: Learning from Movements for Socialism* and, with Noam Chomsky, *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the Fragility of US Power*. This article is from *Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research*.*

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George Monbiot

# THINKING ABOUT THINKING

How can education rise to the massive challenges young people will face as Artificial Intelligence explodes into the jobs market?

“From one day to the next, our profession was wiped out. We woke up and discovered our skills were redundant.” This is what two successful graphic designers told me about the impact of AI. The old promise – creative workers would be better protected than others from mechanisation – imploded overnight. If visual artists can be replaced by machines, who is safe?

There’s no talk of a “just transition” for graphic designers, or the other professions about to be destroyed. And while there’s plenty of talk about how education might change, little has been done to equip students for a world whose conditions shift so fast. It’s not just at work that young people will confront sudden changes of state. They are also likely to witness cascading environmental breakdown and the collapse of certain human-made systems.

Why are we so unprepared? Why do we manage our lives so badly? Why are we so adept at material innovation, but so inept at creating a society in which everyone can thrive? Why do we rush to bail out the banks but stand and gawp while Earth systems collapse? Why do we permit psychopaths to govern us? Why do blatant lies spread like wildfire? Why are we better at navigating work relationships than intimate ones? What is lacking in our

education that leaves such chasms in our lives?

The word education partly derives from the Latin *educere*: to lead out. Too often it leads us in: into old ways of thinking, into dying professions, into the planet-eating system called business as usual. Too seldom does it lead us out of our cognitive and emotional loops, out of conformity with a political and economic system that’s killing US

I don’t claim to have definitive answers. But I believe certain principles would help. One is that rigidity is lethal. Any aspect of an education system that locks pupils in to fixed patterns of thought and action will enhance their vulnerability to rapid and massive change. For instance, there could be no worse preparation for life than England’s Standard Assessment Tests, which dominate year 6 teaching. If the testimony of other parents I know is representative, SATs are a crushing experience for the majority of pupils, snuffing out enthusiasm, forcing them down a narrow, fenced track and demanding rigidity just as their minds are seeking to blossom and expand.

The extreme demands, throughout our schooling, of tests and exams reduce the scope of our thinking. The exam system creates

artificial borders, fiercely patrolled, between academic subjects. There are no such boundaries in nature. If our interdisciplinary thinking is weak, if we keep failing to see the bigger picture, it is partly because we have been trained so brutally to compartmentalise.

Education, to the greatest extent possible, should be joyful and delightful, not only because joy and delight are essential to our wellbeing, but also because we are more likely to withstand major change if we see acquiring new knowledge and skills as a fascinating challenge, not a looming threat.

There are arguments for and against a national curriculum. It’s a leveller, ensuring everyone is exposed to common standards of literacy and numeracy. It provides a defence against crank teachings such as creationism and Holocaust denial. It permits continuity when teachers leave their jobs, and a clear knowledge path from year to year. But it is highly susceptible to the crank teachings of politicians, such as the Westminster government’s insistence on drilling young children in abstruse grammatical rules, and its ridiculous tick-lists of sequential learning tasks.

When we are taught broadly the same things in broadly the same way, we lose the resilience diversity affords. What the teachers I speak

to regret most is the lack of time. The intense combined demands of the curriculum and the testing regime leave almost no time to respond to opportunities and events, or for children to develop their own interests. One teacher remarked that if a pterodactyl landed on the school roof, the children would be told to ignore it so they could finish their allotted task.

If we are to retain a national curriculum, there are certain topics it should surely cover. For instance, many students will complete their education without ever being taught the principles of complex systems. Yet everything of importance to us (the brain, body, society, ecosystems, the atmosphere, oceans, finance, the economy ... ) is a complex system. Complex systems operate on radically different principles from either simple systems or complicated systems (such as car engines). When we don't understand these

principles, their behaviour takes us by surprise. The two existential threats I would place at the top of my list, ranked by a combination of likelihood, impact and imminence, are environmental breakdown and global food system collapse. Both involve complex systems being pushed beyond their critical thresholds.

Instead of enforcing boundaries between subjects, a curriculum should break them down. This is what the International Baccalaureate does. I believe this option should be available in every school.

Above all, our ability to adapt to massive change depends on what practitioners call "metacognition" and "meta-skills". Metacognition means thinking about thinking. In a brilliant essay for the *Journal of Academic Perspectives*, Natasha Robson argues that while metacognition is implicit in current teaching – "show your working", "justify your arguments" – it should be explicit and sustained. Schoolchildren should be taught to understand how

thinking works, from neuroscience to cultural conditioning; how to observe and interrogate

their thought processes; and how and why they might become vulnerable to disinformation and exploitation. Self-awareness could turn out to be the most important topic of all.

Meta-skills are the overarching aptitudes – such as self-development, social intelligence, openness, resilience and creativity – that help us acquire the new competencies that sudden change demands. Like metacognition, meta-skills can be taught. Unfortunately, some public bodies are trapped in the bleak and narrow instrumentalism we need to transcend. For example, after identifying empathy as a crucial meta-skill, a manual by Skills Develop-

ment Scotland reports that: "Empathy has been identified as a key differentiator for business success, with companies such as Facebook, Google and Unilever being recognised as excelling in this area." I've seldom read a more depressing sentence.

Schooling alone will not be enough to lead us out of the many crises and disasters we now face. Those who are adult today must take responsibility for confronting them. But it should at least lend us a torch. **CT**

*George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)*



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Andrea Mazzarino

# LOST AT SEA: MIGRATION AND THE SHADOW OF WAR

How the story of a migrant boat disaster escaped our attention while we were consumed with the ill-fated journey of a doomed billionaire's mini-submarine

Seeking news coverage about the *Adriana*, the boat crowded with some 700 people migrating to Europe to seek a better life that sank in mid-June off the coast of Greece, I googled “migrant ship” and got 483,000 search results in one second. Most of the people aboard the *Adriana* had drowned in the Mediterranean, among them about 100 children.

I did a similar search for the *Titan* submersible which disappeared the same week in the North Atlantic. That kludged-together pseudo-submarine was taking four wealthy men and the 19-year-old son of one of them to view the ruins of the famed passenger ship, the *Titanic*. They all died when the *Titan* imploded shortly after it dove. That Google search came up with 79.3 million search results in less than half a second.

*Guardian* journalist Arwa Mahdawi wrote a powerful column about the different kinds of attention those two boats received. As she astutely pointed out, we in the anglophone world could hardly help but follow the story of the *Oceangate* submersible's ill-fated journey. After all, it was the lead news story of the week everywhere and commanded the attention of three national militaries (to the tune of tens of millions of dollars) for at least five days.

The *Adriana* was quite another story. As Mahdawi pointed out, the Greek Coast Guard seemed preoccupied with whether the migrants on that boat even “wanted” help, ignoring the fact that many of those aboard the small trawler were children trapped in the ship's hull and that it was visibly in danger.

On the other hand, few, she pointed out, questioned whether the men in the submersible wanted help – even though its hull was ludicrously bolted shut from the outside prior to departure, making rescue especially unlikely. Glued to the coverage like many Americans, I certainly didn't think they should be ignored, since every life matters.

But why do people care so much about rich men who paid \$250,000 apiece to make what any skilled observer would have told them was a treacherous journey, but not hundreds of migrants determined to better their families' lives, even if they had to risk life itself to reach European shores? Part of the answer, I suspect, lies in the very different reasons those two groups of travellers set out on their journeys and the kinds of things we value in a world long shaped by Western military power.

I suspect that we Americans are

easily drawn to whatever seems vaguely military in nature, even a “submersible” (rather than a submarine) whose rescue efforts marshalled the resources and expertise of so many US and allied naval forces. We found it anything but boring to learn about US Navy underwater rescue ships and how low you can drop before pressure is likely to capsize a boat. The submersible story, in fact, spun down so many military-style rabbit holes that it was easy to forget what even inspired it.

I'm a Navy spouse and my family, which includes my partner, our two young kids, and various pets, has been moving from one military installation to another over the past decade. In the various communities where we've lived, during gatherings with new friends and extended family, the overwhelming interest in my spouse's career is obvious.

Typical questions have included: “What's a submarine's hull made out of?” “How deep can you go?” “What's the plan if you sink?” “What kind of camo do you wear?” And an unforgettable (to me at least) comment from one of our kids: “That blue camo makes you guys look like blueberries. Do you really want to hide if you fall in the water? What if you need to be rescued?”

Meanwhile, my career as a therapist for military and refugee com-



Above: The *Adriatica* was crowded with 700 refugees when it sank off the coast of Greece.

Left: The *Titan* imploded while taking sightseers to the ruins of the *Titanic*.

munities and as a co-founder of Brown University's Costs of War Project, which might offer a strange antiwar complement to my spouse's world, seldom even makes it into the conversation.

Aside from the power and mystery our military evokes with its fancy equipment, I think many Americans love to express interest in it because it seems like the embodiment of civic virtue at a time when otherwise we can agree on ever less. In fact, after 20 years of America's war on terror in response to the September 11, 2001, attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, references to our military are remarkably widespread (if you're paying attention).

In our militarised culture, we seize on the cosmetic parts like the nature of submarines because they're easier to talk about than the kind of suffering our military has actually caused across a remarkably wide stretch of the planet in this century. Most of us will take fancy toys like subs over exhausted service members, bloodied civilians, and frightened, malnourished migrants all too often fleeing the damage of our war on terror.

We live in an era marked by mass migration, which has increased over the past five decades. In fact, more people are now living in a country other than where they were born than at any other time in the last half-century.

Among the major reasons people leave their homes as migrants are certainly the search for education and job opportunities, but never forget those fleeing from armed conflict and political persecution. And of course, another deeply related and more significant reason is climate change and the ever more frequent and intense natural disasters like flooding and drought that it

causes or intensifies.

The migrants on the *Adriana* had left Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Palestine, and Pakistan for a variety of reasons. Some of the Pakistani men, for instance, were seeking jobs that would allow them to house and feed their desperate families. One Syrian teenager, who ended up drowning, had left the war-torn city of Kobani, hoping to someday enter medical school in Germany – a dream that was unlikely to be realised where he lived due to bombed-out schools and hospitals.

In my mind's eye, however, a very specific shadow loomed over so many of their individual stories: America's forever wars, the series of military operations that began with our 2001 invasion of Afghanistan (which ended up involving us in air strikes and other military activities in neighbouring Pakistan as well) and the similarly disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003. It would, in the end, metastasise into fighting, training foreign militaries, and intelligence operations in some 85 countries, including each of the countries the *Adriana's* passengers hailed from. All in all, the Costs of War Project estimates that the war on terror has led to the displacement of at least 38-million people, many of whom fled for their lives as fighting consumed their worlds.

**T**he route taken by the *Adriana* through the central Mediterranean Sea is a particularly common one for refugees fleeing armed conflict and its aftermath. It's also the most deadly route in the world for migrants – and getting deadlier by the year. Before the *Adriana* went down, the number of fatalities during the first three months of 2023 had already reached its highest point in six years, at 441 people. And during the first half of this year alone, according

## One Syrian father who drowned had been heading for Germany, hoping to help his three-year-old son, who had leukaemia

to UNICEF, at least 289 children have drowned trying to reach Europe.

If there's one thing I've learned – even if on a distinctly small scale – as a therapist in military and refugee communities, it's this: a painful history almost invariably precedes anyone's decision to embark on a journey as dangerous as those the migrants of that ill-fated ship undertook. Though I'm sure many on it would not have said that they were fleeing “war,” it's hard to disentangle this country's war on terror from the reasons so many of them made their journeys.

One Syrian father who drowned had been heading for Germany, hoping to help his three-year-old son, who had leukaemia and needed a treatment unavailable in his devastated country, an area that the US invasion of Iraq first threw into chaos and where war has now deprived millions of healthcare. Of course, it hardly need be noted that his death only ensures his family's further impoverishment and his son's possible death from cancer, not to mention what could happen if he and his mom were forced to make a similar journey to Europe to get care.

As many as 350 migrants on the *Adriana* were from Pakistan where the US had been funding and fighting a counterinsurgency war – via drones and air strikes – against Islamist militant groups since 2004. The war on terror has both directly and indirectly upended and destroyed many lives in Pakistan in this century. That includes tens of

thousands of deaths from air strikes, but also the effects of a refugee influx from neighbouring Afghanistan that stretched the country's already limited resources, not to speak of the deterioration of its tourism industry and diminished international investments. All in all, Pakistan has lost more than \$150-billion dollars over the past 20 years in that fashion while, for ordinary Pakistanis, the costs of living in an ever more devastated country have only increased. Not surprisingly, the number of jobs per capita decreased.

**O**ne young man on the migrant ship was travelling to Europe to seek a job so that he could support his extended family. He had sold 26 buffalo – his main source of income – to pay for the journey and was among the 104 people who were finally rescued by the Greek Coast Guard. After that rescue, he was forced to return to Libya where he had no clear plan for how to make it home. Unlike most of the other Pakistanis on the *Adriana*, he managed to escape with his life, but his is not necessarily a happy ending. As Zeeshan Usmani, Pakistani activist and founder of the antiwar website Pakistan Body Count, points out, “After you've sacrificed so much in search of a better life, you'd likely rather drown than return home. You've given all you have.”

We certainly learned much about the heady conversations between the *Titan's* OceanGate CEO, his staff, and certain estranged colleagues before that submersible embarked on its ill-fated journey, and then about the dim lighting and primitive conditions inside the boat. Barely probed in media coverage of the *Adriana*, however, was what it was like for those migrants to make the trip itself.

What particularly caught my attention was the place from which

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they left on their journey to hell and back – Libya. After all, that country has quite a grim history to be the debarkation point for so many migrants. A US-led invasion in 2011 toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi, leaving the country’s remote beaches even less policed than they had been, while Libya itself was divided between two competing governments and a collection of affiliated militias.

In such a chaotic setting, as you might imagine, conditions for migrants transiting through Libya have only continued to deteriorate. Many are kept in warehouses by local authorities for weeks, even months, sometimes without basic needs like blankets and drinking water. Some are even sold into slavery to local residents and those lucky enough to move on toward European shores have to deal with smugglers whose motives and practices, as the Adriana’s story reminds us, are anything but positive (and sometimes terrorising).

**O**nward, to the sea itself: When, some 13 hours after the first migrants called for help, the Greek Coast Guard finally responded, it sent a single ship with a crew that included four armed and masked men. The Guard alleges that many of the migrants refused help, waving the men away. Whether or not this was the case, I can imagine their fears that the Greeks, if not smugglers, might at least be allied with them. They also might have feared that the Guard would set them and their children, however young,

## Many refugees are kept in warehouses by local authorities for weeks, even months, sometimes without blankets and drinking water

on rafts to continue drifting at sea, as had happened recently with other migrant ships approached by the Greeks.

If that sounds far-fetched to you, then consider how you would feel if you’d been adrift at sea, hungry, thirsty, and fearful for your life, when men in another boat armed and wearing masks approached you, further rocking a boat that was already threatening to capsize. My guess is: not good.

It would be far-fetched to count people like the migrants on the Adriana as “war deaths.” But framing many of their deaths as in some sense war-related should force us to pay attention to ways in which fighting in or around their countries of origin might have impacted their fates. Paying attention to war’s costs would, however, force us Westerners to confront the blood on our hands, as we not only supported (or at least ignored) this country’s wars sufficiently to let them continue for so long, while also backing politicians in both the US and Europe who did relatively little (or far worse) to address the refugee crises that emerged as a result.

To take language used by the Costs of War Project’s Stephanie

Savell in her work on what the project calls “indirect war deaths,” migrants like the drowned Syrian teenager seeking an education in Europe could be considered “doubly uncounted” war deaths because they weren’t killed in battle and, as in his case and others like it, their bodies will not be recovered from the Mediterranean’s depths.

When we see stories like his, I think we should all go deeper in our questioning of just what happened, in part by retracing those migrants’ steps to where they began and trying to imagine why they left on such arduous, dangerous journeys. Start with war-gutted economies in countries where millions find slim hope of the kind of decent life that you or I are likely to take for granted, including having a job, a home, health care, and safety from armed violence.

I’ll bet that if you do ask more questions, those migrants will start to seem not just easier to relate to but like the planet’s true adventurers on this planet – and not those billionaires who paid \$250,000 apiece for what even I could have told you was an unlikely shot at making it to the ocean floor alive. **CT**

**Andrea Mazzarino** co-founded *Brown University’s Costs of War Project*. She has held various clinical, research, and advocacy positions, including at a *Veterans Affairs PTSD Outpatient Clinic*, with *Human Rights Watch*, and at a *community mental health agency*. This article was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).

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Chris Hedges

# MEDIA ABANDON ASSANGE & SLIT THEIR OWN THROATS

The failure by journalists to mount a campaign to free Julian Assange, or expose the vicious smear campaign against him, is one more catastrophic and self-defeating blunder by the news media

**T**he persecution of Julian Assange, along with the climate of fear, wholesale government surveillance and use of the Espionage Act to prosecute whistleblowers, has emasculated investigative journalism.

The press has not only failed to mount a sustained campaign to support Julian, whose extradition appears imminent, but no longer attempts to shine a light into the inner workings of power. This failure is not only inexcusable, but ominous

The US government, especially the military and agencies such as the CIA, the FBI, the NSA and Homeland Security, have no intention of stopping with Julian, who faces 170 years in prison if found guilty of violating 17 counts of the Espionage Act.

They are cementing into place mechanisms of draconian state censorship, some features of which were exposed by Matt Taibbi in the *Twitter Files*, to construct a dystopian corporate totalitarianism.

The US and the UK brazenly violated a series of judicial norms and diplomatic protocols to keep Julian trapped for seven years in the Ecuadorian embassy after he had

been granted political asylum by Ecuador.

The CIA, through the Spanish security firm UC Global, made recordings of Julian's meetings with his attorneys, which alone should invalidate the extradition case.

Julian has been held for more than four years in the notorious Belmarsh high-security prison since the British Metropolitan Police dragged him out of the embassy on April 11, 2019. The embassy is supposed to be the sovereign territory of Ecuador. Julian has not been sentenced in this case for a crime.

He is charged under the Espionage Act, although he is not a US citizen and WikiLeaks is not a US-based publication.

**T**he UK courts, which have engaged in what can only be described as a show trial, appear ready to turn him over to the US once his final appeal, as we expect, is rejected. This could happen in a matter of days or weeks.

Last month, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Stella Assange, an attorney who is married to Julian; Matt

Kennard, co-founder and chief investigator of *Declassified UK*, and I examined the collapse of the press, especially with regard to Julian's case.

"I feel like I'm living in 1984," Matt said. "This is a journalist who revealed more crimes of the world's superpower than anyone in history. He's sitting in a maximum-security prison in London. The state that wants to bring him over to that country to put him in prison for the rest of his life is on record as spying on his privileged conversations with his lawyers. They're on record plotting to assassinate him.

"Any of those things, if you told someone from a different time 'Yeah this is what happened and he was sent anyway and not only that, but the media didn't cover it at all.' It's really scary. If they can do that to Assange, if civil society can drop the ball and the media can drop the ball, they can do that to any of US."

When Julian and WikiLeaks released the secret diplomatic cables and Iraq War logs, which exposed numerous US war crimes, including torture and the murder of civilians, corruption, diplomatic scandals, lies and spying by the US government, the commercial me-



TAKING IT TO THE STREETS: Free Assange poster adorns a lamppost.

dia had no choice but to report the information. Julian and WikiLeaks shamed them into doing their job.

But, even as they worked with Julian, organisations such as the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* were determined to destroy him. He threatened their journalistic model and exposed their accommodation

with the centres of power.

“They hated him,” Matt said of the mainstream media reporters and editors. “They went to war with him immediately after those releases. I was working for the *Financial Times* in Washington in late 2010 when those releases happened. The reaction of the office at the *Fi-*

*nancial Times* was one of the major reasons I got disillusioned with the mainstream media.”

Julian went from being a journalistic colleague to a pariah as soon as the information he provided to these news organisations was published. He endured, in the words of Nils Melzer, at the time the UN special rapporteur on torture, “a relentless and unrestrained campaign of public mobbing, intimidation and defamation.” These attacks included “collective ridicule, insults and humiliation, to open instigation of violence and even repeated calls for his assassination.”

Julian was branded a hacker, although all the information he published was leaked to him by others. He was smeared as a sexual predator and a Russian spy, called a narcissist and accused of being unhygienic and slovenly. The ceaseless character assassination, amplified by a hostile media, saw him abandoned by many who had regarded him a hero.

“Once he had been dehumanised through isolation, ridicule and shame, just like the witches we used to burn at the stake, it was easy to deprive him of his most fundamental rights without provoking public outrage worldwide,” Melzer concluded.

**T**he *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El Pais* and *Der Spiegel*, all of which published WikiLeaks documents provided by Julian, published a joint open letter on Nov. 28, 2022, calling on the US government “to end its prosecution of Julian Assange for publishing secrets.”

But the demonisation of Julian, which these publications helped to foster, had already been accomplished.

“It was pretty much an immediate shift,” Stella recalled.

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“While the media partners knew that Julian still had explosive material that still had to be released, they were partners. As soon as they had what they thought they wanted from him, they turned around and attacked him. You have to put yourself in the moment where the press was in 2010 when these stories broke. They were struggling for a financial model to survive. They hadn’t really adapted to the age of the internet. You had Julian coming in with a completely new model of journalism.”

There followed a WikiLeaks-isation of US media outlets such as the *New York Times*, which adopted the innovations pioneered by WikiLeaks, including providing secure channels for whistleblowers to leak documents.

“Julian was a superstar,” Stella said. “He came from outside the ‘old boys’ network. He talked about how these revelations should lead to reform and how the Collateral Murder video reveals that this is a war crime.”

Julian was outraged when he saw the heavy redactions of the information he exposed in newspapers such as the *Guardian*. He criticised these publications for self-censoring to placate their advertisers and the powerful.

He exposed these news organizations, as Stella said, “for their own hypocrisy, for their own poor journalism.”

“I find it very ironic that you have all this talk of misinformation, that’s just cover for censorship,” Stella said.

“There are all these new organisations that are subsidised to find misinformation. It’s just a means to control the narrative. If this whole disinformation age really took truth seriously, then all of these disinformation organisations would hold WikiLeaks up as the example, right? Julian’s model of journalism

## Media claims of objectivity and neutrality are a mechanism to prevent journalism from being used to challenge injustices or reform corrupt institutions

was what he called scientific journalism. It should be verifiable. You can write up an analysis of a news item, but you have to show what you’re basing it on. The cables are the perfect example of this. You write up an analysis of something that happened and you reference the cables and whatever else you’re basing your news story on.”

“This was a completely new model of journalism,” she continued. “It is one [that] journalists who understood themselves as gatekeepers hated. They didn’t like the WikiLeaks model. WikiLeaks was completely reader-funded. Its readers were global and responding enthusiastically. That’s why PayPal, MasterCard, Visa and Bank of America started the banking blockade in December 2010. This has become a standardised model of censorship to demonetise, to cut channels off from their readership and their supporters. The very first time this was done was in 2010 against WikiLeaks within two or three days of the US State Department cables being published.”

While Visa cut off WikiLeaks, Stella noted, it continued to process donations to the Ku Klux Klan.

Julian’s “message was journalism can lead to reform, it can lead to justice, it can help victims, it can be used in court and it has been used in court in the European Court of Human Rights, even at the UK Supreme

Court in the Chagos case here,” she said.

“It has been used as evidence. This is a completely new approach to journalism. WikiLeaks is bigger than journalism because it’s authentic, official documents. It’s putting internal history into the public record at the disposal of the public and victims of state-sponsored crime. For the first time we were able to use these documents to seek justice, for example, in the case of the German citizen, Khalid El-Masri, who was abducted and tortured by the CIA. He was able to use WikiLeaks cables at the European Court of Human Rights when he sued Macedonia for the rendition. It was a completely new approach. It brought journalism to its maximum potential.”

The claims of objectivity and neutrality propagated by the mainstream media are a mechanism to prevent journalism from being used to challenge injustices or reform corrupt institutions.

“It’s completely alien, the idea that you might use journalism as a tool to better the world and inform people of what’s happening,” Matt said. “For them it’s a career. It’s a status symbol. I never had a crisis of conscience because I never wanted to be a journalist if I couldn’t do that.”

“For people who come out of university or journalism school, where do you go?” he asked. “People get mortgages. They have kids. They want to have a normal life...You enter the system. You slowly get all your rough edges shorn off. You become part of the uniformity of thought. I saw it explicitly at the *Financial Times*.”

“It’s a very insidious system,” Matt went on.

“Journalists can say to themselves ‘I can write what I like,’ but obviously they can’t. I think it’s quite interesting starting *Declassified* with Mark Curtis in the sense

that journalists don't know how to react to US We have a complete blackout in the mainstream media."

"There has been something really sinister that has happened in the last 20 years, particularly at the *Guardian*," he said. "The *Guardian* is just state-affiliated media. The early WikiLeaks releases in 2010 were done with the *Guardian*. I remember 2010 when those releases were happening with the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*. I'd read the same cables being covered in the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* and I'd always thought 'Wow, we're lucky to have the *Guardian* because the *New York Times* were taking a much more pro-US pro-government position.' That's now flipped. I'd much prefer to read the *New York Times* covering this stuff. And I'm not saying it's perfect. Neither of them were perfect, but there was a difference. I think what's happened is clever state repression."

The D-notice committee, he explained, is composed of journalists and state security officials in the UK who meet every six months. They discuss what journalists can and can't publish. The committee sends out regular advisories.

**T**he *Guardian* ignored advisories not to publish the revelations of illegal mass surveillance released by Edward Snowden. Finally, under intense pressure, including threats by the government to shut the paper down, the *Guardian* agreed to permit two Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) officials to oversee the destruction of the hard drives and memory devices that contained material provided by Snowden.

The GCHQ officials on July 20, 2013, filmed three *Guardian* editors as they destroyed laptops with angle grinders and drills. The dep-

## When you have laws and a societal-wide psyche that you cannot question power, when they tell you what is in your interest, that's fascism

uty editor of the *Guardian*, Paul Johnson – who was in the basement during the destruction of the laptops – was appointed to the D-notice committee. He served at the D-notice committee for four years. In his last committee meeting Johnson was thanked for "re-establishing links" between the committee and the *Guardian*. The paper's adversarial reporting, by then, had been neutralised.

"The state realised after the war in Iraq that they needed to clamp down on the freedom in the British media," Matt said.

"The *Daily Mirror* under Piers Morgan...I don't know if anyone remembers back in 2003, and I know he is a controversial character and he's hated by a lot of people, including me, but he was editor at the *Daily Mirror*. It was a rare opening of what a mainstream tabloid newspaper can do if it's doing proper journalism against the war, an illegal war.

"He had headlines made out of oil company logos. He did Bush and Blair with blood all over their hands, amazing stuff, every day for months. He had John Pilger on the front page, stuff you would never see now. There was a major street movement against the war. The state thought 'Shit, this is not good, we've gotta clamp down.'"

This triggered the government campaign to neuter the press.

"I wouldn't say we have a functioning media in terms of the newspapers," he said.

"This is not just about Assange," Matt continued.

**T**his is about all of our futures, the future for our kids and our grandkids. The things we hold dear, democracy, freedom of speech, free press, they're very, very fragile, much more fragile than we realize. That's been exposed by Assange. If they get Assange, the levies will break. It's not like they're going to stop. That's not how power works. They don't pick off one person and say we're going to hold off now. They'll use those tools to go after anyone who wants to expose them."

"If you're working in an environment in London where there's a journalist imprisoned for exposing war crimes, maybe not consciously but somewhere you [know you] shouldn't do that," Matt said. "You shouldn't question power. You shouldn't question people who are committing crimes secretly because you don't know what's going to happen..."

The UK government is trying to introduce laws which make it explicit that you can't publish [their crimes]. They want to formalise what they've done to Assange and make it a crime to reveal war crimes and other things. When you have laws and a societal-wide psyche that you cannot question power, when they tell you what is in your interest, that's fascism." **CT**

**Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for 15 years for the *New York Times*, where he served as the Middle East bureau chief and Balkan bureau chief for the paper. He is the host of show "The Chris Hedges Report." This column is from *Scheerpost*, for which Chris Hedges writes a regular column.**



Dougie Wallace

# WHERE RAINBOWS WEAR DANCING SHOES

Our photographer took a trip down Old Compton Street, in London's Soho, on July 1 for the celebration of the most Pride-tastic day in the city's history



**AS THE SUN SETS** on Old Compton Street in Soho, on July 1, the 2023 Pride London extravaganza ramps up to a raucous and triumphant conclusion. The colourful floats slowly disperse and vibrant groups of partygoers drift onto surrounding streets, gaudy participants drawn together in another joyful celebration. Soho's warm neon lights transform the city's most daring cosmopolitan area into a twinkling night-time celebration of joy and emotion.

Dance parties erupt spontaneously, and the atmosphere becomes ever more electrifying. A cacophony of sound pulsates through the air as the city's LGBTQ+ community acknowledges its struggles and triumphs.

The boisterous bonhomie spills into the welcoming comfort of the cafes, bars and clubs that line Old Compton Street, where the festivities will continue until the morning's wee hours.

Yes, the party is almost over, but its sweet memory will endure, sustaining passions for another year.

And, as the flamboyant party animals depart, buoyed by a renewed spirit of nostalgia, hope and anticipation, they reveal to all observers the real essence of Pride – an ongoing quest for personal equality and freedom, not only for the LGBTQ+ community, but for us all. **CT**





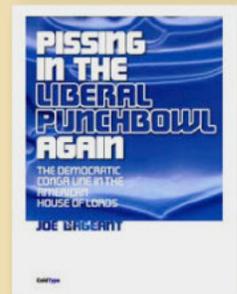
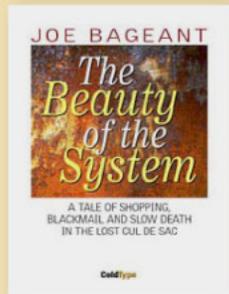
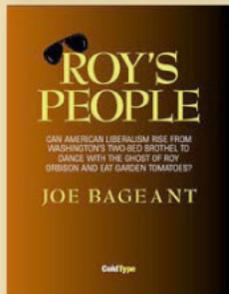
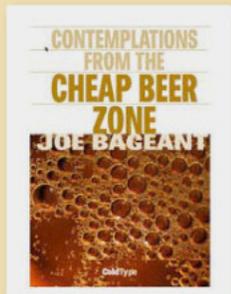
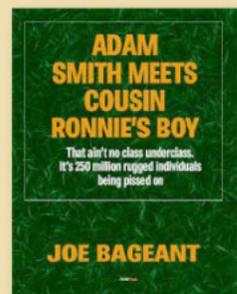
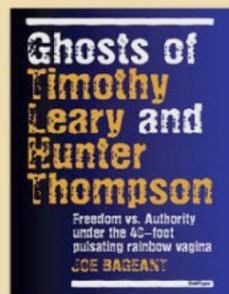
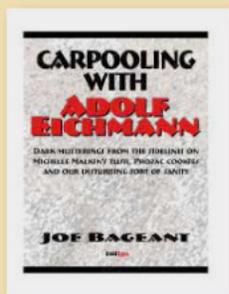
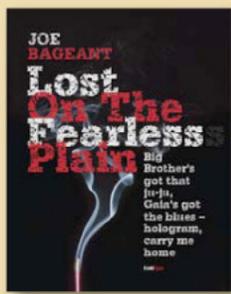
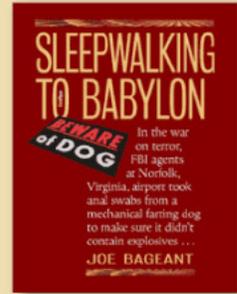
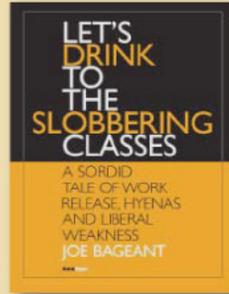
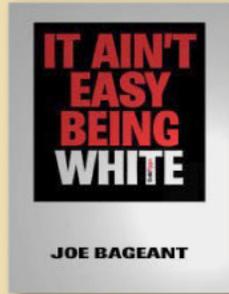
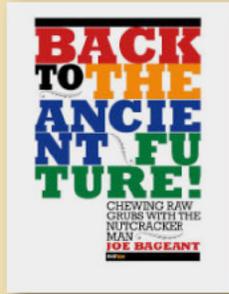
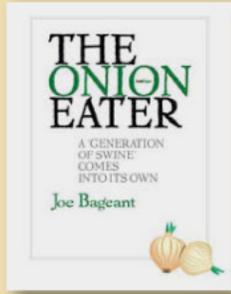
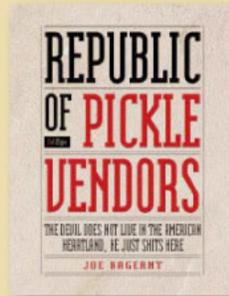
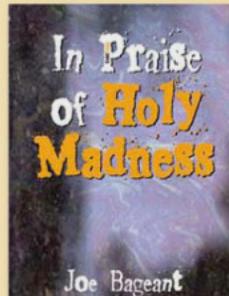
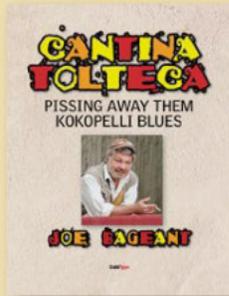
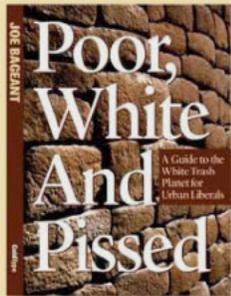
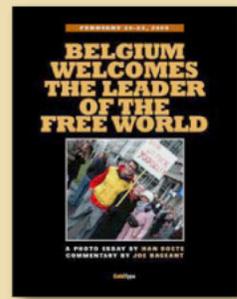
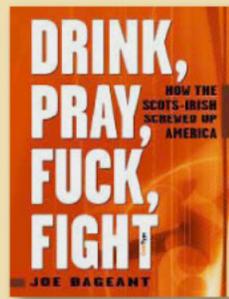
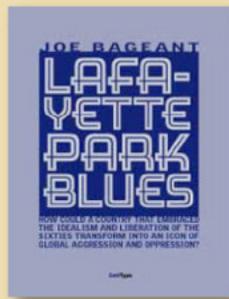
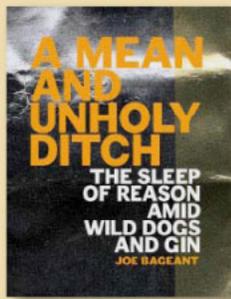


**Dougie Wallace** is a London-based street photographer. He has published six photobooks, the latest of which, *East Ended*, was recently published by Dewi Lewis – [www.dewilewis.com](http://www.dewilewis.com).

● See more of Wallace's work at: [www.dougiewallace.com](http://www.dougiewallace.com)  
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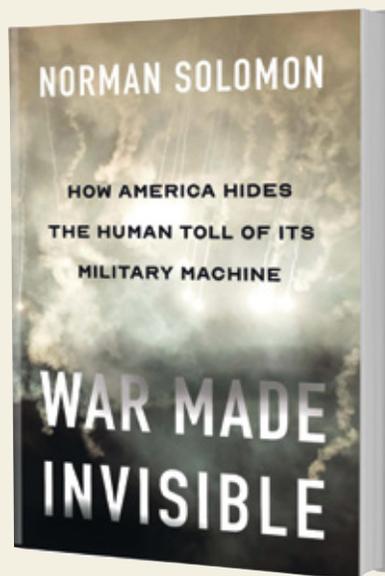
An excerpt from  
**WAR MADE INVISIBLE**  
How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine  
by Norman Solomon

CHAPTER ONE

# Repetition & Omission

**T**he essence of propaganda is repetition. The frequencies of certain assumptions blend into a kind of white noise, with little chance for contrary sounds to be heard or considered. In the United States, the dominant media discourse and standard political rhetoric about the country's military role in the world are like that.

Consider the phrase “defense spending.” We’ve heard it countless times. It seems natural. And yes, there is an agency called the Department of Defense (until 1947, the War Department). But an agency’s official name doesn’t make it true. The ubiquitous use of phrases like “defense budget” and “defense spending” – virtually always written with a lowercase “d” – equates US military operations with defense. But there’s a very different side of the story.



How many times have you heard someone on television, or read an article in a big media outlet, saying anything like “Wait a minute. Why are we referring to the Pentagon budget as ‘defense’ spending? In the real world, the United States spends more money on its military than the next ten countries all together. And most of those countries are military allies.” Or, how often have you heard a network anchor mention that the US government currently has 750 military bases operating in foreign countries and territories, compared to no more than three dozen for Russia and five for China? The author of the landmark book *Base Nation*, American University professor David Vine, co-wrote a 2021 report pointing out that “the United States has at least three times as many overseas bases as all other countries combined.” The repetition of phrases like “defense spending” is

# The militarism that propels nonstop US warfare is systemic, but the topic of systemic militarism gets little public attention

matched by the omission of such inconvenient facts.

When a limited range of information and worldviews is repeated endlessly, that's what dominates the media echo chambers. Meanwhile, the power of omissions – what's hardly ever mentioned – is huge. Protracted silences can be extremely influential.

Key themes, rarely challenged, have continually touted US military might as indispensable for the world. Early in his presidency, Joe Biden was ringing a familiar bell when he declared that America was “ready to lead the world” and “sit at the head of the table.”

The militarism that propels nonstop US warfare is systemic, but the topic of systemic militarism gets little public attention. Ballooning Pentagon budgets are sacrosanct. While there can be heated disagreement about how, where, and when the United States should engage in war, the prerogative of military intervention is scarcely questioned in the mass media.

Even when conventional wisdom ends up concluding that a war was unwise, the consequences for journalists who promoted it are essentially nil. Reporters and pundits who enthusiastically supported the Iraq invasion were not impeded in their careers as a result. Many advanced professionally. In medialand, being pro-war means never having to say you're sorry. Journalists who have gone with the war program are ill positioned to throw stones from their glass houses later on; the same holds true for media outlets.

Strong challenges to the status quo of US militarism rarely get into mainstream media. News outlets might provide a significant array of views on many subjects, but there are special constraints on coverage of the Pentagon and its warfare. Exceptions can certainly be found in reporting and commentary on foreign policy and war. But what's exceptional and rare has little impact compared to what's ordinary and routine. Outliers can't compete with drumbeats.

The interwoven media and political establishments stay within what are mutually seen as the bounds of serious discussion. That is especially true

of basic war choices. Members of Congress and top officials in the executive branch are acutely sensitive to the reporting and commentary in major media, which in turn are guided by the range of debate at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. The right of the United States to militarily intervene in various countries is rarely questioned. Nor do the dominant political and media elites express much concern about the consequences for people living in countries where the United States is making war.

**O**missions – what we don't see and hear – might be the most pernicious messages of all.

When routinely included in media, some types of images and themes are magnetic, drawing our attention and whatever thoughts go with it. At the opposite pole, what's omitted pushes thoughts away, providing tacit cues as to what isn't worth knowing or seriously considering.

In media frames, the routine exclusion of people harmed by US warfare conveys that they don't really matter much. Because we rarely see images of their suffering or hear their voices or encounter empathetic words about them, the implicit messaging comes through loud and clear. The silence ends up speaking at high volume: Those people hardly exist. They are others. They are not our concern. They don't particularly matter, while our country is causing their misery.

Opponents of war often contend that antiwar sentiment would grow if news media were to clearly show war's devastating effects. To the shame of major US media outlets, such coverage has been sparse to the point of standard journalistic malpractice in relation to American warfare. The impeding factors include self-censorship, desires for career advancement, and concerns about job security, amid pressures from nationalism, commercialism, and professional conformity.

Contrary to myth, televised coverage of bloodshed in Vietnam wasn't a pivotal factor in turning the public against the war. Actually, very little footage of the suffering and death got on the air. After the last US troops left Vietnam in 1973, *TV Guide* published a series of articles by investigative journalist Edward Jay Epstein, who did an in-depth analysis of all the news coverage by ABC, CBS, and NBC

## **WAR MADE INVISIBLE**

**How America Hides the Human Toll  
of Its Military Machine**

**Norman Solomon**

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## The huge gaps between what happens to people in war zones and what we get from mainline American media are long-standing



**NOT APPROPRIATE FOR TV AUDIENCES:** A battle casualty of the 1st Battalion 4th Marines is brought to a helicopter for evacuation after a skirmish in Phu Bai during the Vietnam war.

during eleven years of war. In the first half of that period, he found, “producers of the NBC and ABC Evening News programs said that they ordered editors to delete excessively grisly or detailed shots because they were not appropriate for a news program shown at dinnertime.” The president of CBS News, Fred Friendly, said that the networks’ policies “helped shield the audience from the true horror of the war.” As it continued, what did get onto American TV screens hardly swayed the nation.

When communications professor Daniel Hallin methodically went through kinescopes of the three networks’ coverage, he found the rough equivalent of Rorschach inkblots: “Vietnam news was ambiguous and contradictory enough, especially after the beginning of 1968, that both hawks and doves could easily have found material to support their own views of the war.”

Yet news reporting certainly guides public out-

looks. And it mixes with realms of punditry, politics, culture, and entertainment to sustain the continuity of a warfare state. The huge gaps between what actually happens to people in war zones and what we get from the mainline American media are long-standing. Those gaps numb the public and usually protect the political establishment from facing an antiwar upsurge at home. Well-intentioned journalists are confined in a career milieu that filters out the essence of war.

Even when the carnage was at its height in Vietnam, war correspondent Michael Herr later wrote in his book *Dispatches*, the US media “never found a way to report meaningfully about death, which of course was really what it was all about. The most repulsive, transparent gropes for sanctity in the midst of the killing received serious treatment in the papers and on the air.” He added that “the jargon of Progress got blown into your head like bul-

## Peace activists yearned for realistic images in news outlets to help turn the militaristic tide

lets” – and after wading through the deluge of war-related news stories, “the suffering was somehow unimpressive.”

Dynamics varied with later US military interventions, from the quick lightning strikes into Grenada and Panama in the 1980s to the long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. American media coverage was not monolithic, and as the internet emerged it provided other pathways for information. The secret “Collateral Murder” video from Iraq, officially filmed one day in July 2007 and made public by WikiLeaks in 2010, got to millions of people online. Yet mainstream news outlets still dominated the content and tenor of war coverage reaching the vast bulk of the US population. On the whole, media coverage did little to convey, visually or descriptively, much less viscerally, what war “was all about.”

No wonder, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan kept going, peace activists yearned for realistic images in news outlets to help turn the militaristic tide. But the barriers in place have included the big flaws in illusions that a media technology could, as the cliché goes, bring war into your living room. The inherent limits of an inanimate device conveying the terrifying chaos of warfare are enough to refute the idea. “What do we see,” media analyst Mark Crispin Miller asked in 1988, “when we sit at home and watch a war? Do we experience an actual event?”

In fact, that “experience” is fundamentally absurd. Most obviously, there is the incongruity of scale, the radical disjunction of locations. While a war is among the biggest things that can ever happen to a nation or people, devastating families, blasting away the roofs and walls, we see it compressed and miniaturized on a sturdy little piece of furniture, which stands and shines at the very center of our household. And TV contains warfare in subtler ways. While it may confront us with the facts of death, bereavement, mutilation, it immediately cancels out the memory of that suffering, replacing its own pictures of despair with a commercial – upbeat and inexhaustibly bright.

Even when glimpses and voices of war horrors break through to cause some emotional comprehension among viewers, readers, and listeners, the context of that breakthrough can point conclusions in any number of directions. The moral of

the news story and the imagery does not occur in a vacuum. The meaning of the suffering and the belief in the best response to it will be bounded by perceived context; when a photo shows a relative weeping over a bloodied corpse, or when video shows a serviceman carrying a wounded comrade toward a helicopter, the picture might be powerful – but the conceptual frame around it will largely determine the most powerful received message. If the viewer believes that the US war effort is a just and heroic cause, seeing such images of anguish and sacrifice might reinforce a belief in the need to win the war and support America’s brave warriors in the process.

“There are many uses of the innumerable opportunities a modern life supplies for regarding – at a distance, through the medium of photography – other people’s pain,” Susan Sontag observed. “Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen.” Writing in the fraught era after the October 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, Sontag noted trending outlooks: “In the current political mood, the friendliest to the military in decades, the pictures of wretched hollow-eyed GIs that once seemed subversive of militarism and imperialism may seem inspirational. Their revised subject: ordinary American young men doing their unpleasant, ennobling duty.”

**E**gged on by rhetoric from political leaders in Washington, news outlets stoke hero worship of US soldiers engaged in warfare. Glorifying them for serving their country is accepted as a media duty. The US troops and their commanding officers loom large, while the people they kill and wound have no stature. This pseudo-journalistic fidelity to the nation’s armed forces and their missions, usually implicit, rises to the unabashed surface at times of military mobilization.

During the 1991 Gulf War, the accolades were unequivocal from the outset. Avuncular CBS journalist Charles Osgood called the bombing of Iraq “a marvel”; his network colleague Jim Stewart helped set the tone by extolling “two days of almost picture-perfect assaults.” The network’s anchor Dan Rather

## “We have a number of correspondents in bed with our troops across the region”

saw no need to hide his enthusiasm from viewers as he shook hands with the First Marine Division’s commander and said, “Again, General, congratulations on a job wonderfully done!” Rather was simply harmonizing with the media chorus while voicing avid support for the massive bombing that was central to the Gulf War, dubbed “Desert Storm” by the Pentagon, a brand – almost hinting at an act of God – frequently and cheerfully parroted by US news media, as though the Pentagon had harnessed a force of nature.

And so, trademarked Desert Storm, the carnage was mass entertainment back home, with unpleasant aspects tastefully omitted. As Sontag wrote, the US military promoted

images of the techno war: the sky above the dying, filled with light-traces of missiles and shells – images that illustrated America’s absolute military superiority over its enemy. American television viewers weren’t allowed to see footage acquired by NBC (which the network then declined to run) of what that superiority could wreak: the fate of thousands of Iraqi conscripts who, having fled Kuwait City at the end of the war, on February 27, were carpet bombed with explosives, napalm, radioactive DU (depleted uranium) rounds, and cluster bombs as they headed north, in convoys and on foot, on the road to Basra, Iraq – a slaughter notoriously described by one American officer as a “turkey shoot.”

The media embrace of the upbeat branding and wild fervor for the Gulf War was hardly reduced by grisly photos that showed the remains of Iraqi children who died when an errant American missile struck a Baghdad shelter and killed 408 civilians. Most of the people who died from the attack were burned alive. Days later, NBC’s *Today Show* co-host Katie Couric informed viewers that Operation Desert Storm “was virtually flawless.” Meanwhile, critics of the war were persona non grata in televisionland. A study by Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting found that during the war only one of 878 on-air sources who appeared on ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly newscasts represented a national peace organization. On the TV networks, with rare exceptions, war victims were not to be seen and war opponents were not heard.

I’ve thought many times about a moment in mid-December 2002 when I was visiting a water treatment plant badly damaged by US bombing of Baghdad during the Gulf War a dozen years earlier. Ever since then, strict sanctions had prevented Iraq from importing vital pumps for such plants on the banks of the Tigris River, and the sanctions also blocked efforts to import chlorine for disinfecting the unsanitary water. The Iraqi guide taking me and a few other foreigners around calmly explained technical matters, until someone asked her about the impending likelihood of a US invasion. Our guide’s voice began to tremble. In response, a young American visitor tried to offer comfort, saying: “You’re strong.”

“No,” she responded emphatically. “Not strong.” Tears were in her eyes. Moments later she added, “We are tired.”

What the Pentagon and US news media were glad to call “shock and awe” came three months later. The spectacular bombing of Baghdad resulted in effusive coverage. One TV network reporter exclaimed to viewers: “Last night a tremendous light show here, just a tremendous light show.” With unintended irony, NBC’s Tom Brokaw called it a “breathtaking display of firepower.”

The Pentagon announced that it had hospitably “embedded” 750 journalists, who produced media messaging that continually prompted the American public to identify with the bombers rather than with the people who were being bombed. In perceptual effect, the journalists became part of the invading apparatus. And it was through the eyes of the invaders that so much of the reporting was done. As Fox News star Shepard Smith said with perhaps a slip of the tongue, “We have a number of correspondents in bed with our troops across the region.” On ABC, anchor Peter Jennings explained that a colleague was “very deeply embedded in a personal way with the Marines he is traveling with.” Fox reporter Rick Leventhal later recalled, “We had guys around us with guns and they were intent on keeping us alive because, they said, ‘You guys are making us stars back home and we need to protect you.’” Of course, neither Iraqi soldiers nor civilians were being made stars on US networks.

As bombs and missiles continued to explode,

## “Oil was not the only goal of the Iraq War, but it was certainly the central one”

few mainline journalists or pundits expressed misgivings. Affirmative news coverage was standard operating procedure. The prevalent outlook accepted without question the absolute right of the United States to bomb Baghdad, a city of five million people, the same approximate human scale as the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Philadelphia, or Houston.

A venerable dynamic was at work, evoking national pride among the superpower’s citizens. The quest to justify military action – as some kind of retaliation or preemptive measure – could be implemented in the most emphatic way possible: with the destructive use of overpowering military force.

Four decades earlier, Wayne Morse, a former professor of international law, was one of only two senators to vote against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which opened the bloody floodgates to the Vietnam War in August 1964. That same year, Morse used his raspy voice to insistently declare: “I don’t know why we think, just because we’re mighty, that we have the right to try to substitute might for right. And that’s the American policy in Southeast Asia – just as unsound when we do it as when Russia does it.” Yet the temptation to equate military and moral triumphs can be irresistible, as if defeated nations – and the people living there – tell no tales that really matter.

The presumption of high moral ground can require not seeing – or at least not admitting – the base results of actions perpetrated from on high. Reliance on impunity is in sync with preferences for the invisibility of human consequences. If, as a leader, I assume the right to terrorize and kill some people, I might prefer not to see the grisly results – and I would not want the public to see them – especially if those results are not in keeping with my self-image or the image that I want to project for myself and my nation.

**T**o victors go spoils, only they must not be called spoils. Top US officials categorically rejected assertions that war in Iraq would have anything to do with that country’s vast oil reserves. In Washington, government spokespeople were eager to frame oil as a means of establishing Iraqi self-reliance along with limiting Uncle Sam’s out-of-pocket expenses. “Iraq is a very wealthy country,” said the chair of the Pentagon’s

Defense Policy Board, Richard Perle, eight months before the invasion. “Enormous oil reserves. They can finance, largely finance the reconstruction of their own country.” In the fall of 2003, six months after the invasion, Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke of the need for an equitable return on beneficent services rendered, saying, “Since the United States and its coalition partners have invested a great deal of political capital, as well as financial resources, as well as the lives of our young men and women – and we have a large force there now – we can’t be expected to suddenly just step aside.”

But some officials became more forthright. Here’s a sampling of belatedly candid statements, all from 2007:

“Of course it’s about oil, we can’t really deny that.”  
– General John Abizaid, former head of US Central Command and Military Operations in Iraq

“I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.”

– Former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan, writing in his memoir

“People say we’re not fighting for oil. Of course we are.”

– Then senator and future Defense secretary  
Chuck Hagel

On the tenth anniversary of the invasion, oil expert Antonia Juhasz concluded: “Yes, the Iraq War was a war for oil, and it was a war with winners: Big Oil. ... Before the 2003 invasion, Iraq’s domestic oil industry was fully nationalized and closed to Western oil companies. A decade of war later, it is largely privatized and utterly dominated by foreign firms. From ExxonMobil and Chevron to BP and Shell, the West’s largest oil companies have set up shop in Iraq. So have a slew of American oil service companies, including Halliburton, the Texas-based firm Dick Cheney ran before becoming George W. Bush’s running mate in 2000.”

Juhasz added that “oil was not the only goal of the Iraq War, but it was certainly the central one.”

However, candor about oil as a key goal of the Iraq War could only get in the way of PR window dressing for the war effort. To keep the whole house of dis-

# During this century, the Pentagon has killed far more civilians than al Qaeda and other terrorist groups have

sembling cards from falling apart, the touchstone of messaging remained the need to root out terrorism.

America's public discourse is absolutely clear, with moral condemnation of terrorists using crude explosive devices. The practices of strapping on a suicide belt or loading a car with explosives and then blowing people up are presumed to be the diametric opposite of killing people from the air with the Pentagon's sophisticated technology; one action is beyond reprehensible, another is patriotic service. Potential cognitive dissonance is headed off at the pass with the exculpatory assumption that the situations are entirely different – after all, the terrorist tries to kill innocent people while the US military tries not to. In American media and politics, the distinction is self-evident and axiomatic. But from the vantage point of civilians on the receiving end of the Pentagon's destructive capacities, such distinctions are apt to make no difference.

Authorities want us to believe that the Defense Department carefully spares civilian lives. Yet, during this century, the Pentagon has killed far more civilians than al Qaeda and other terrorist groups have. Without in the slightest absolving those terrorists for their crimes, that reality should give us cause to ponder and reevaluate the standard Manichean autopilot of American thought. A parallel reality also debunks many pretensions about the effectiveness of the “war on terror.” During its first twenty years, journalist Nick Turse noted in 2022, “the number of terrorist groups threatening Americans and American interests has, according to the US State Department, more than doubled.”

Supporters of the invasion of Iraq tried to justify it as integral to the US fight against terrorism, although Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11 or al Qaeda. (The invasion actually created the conditions that fostered the formation of terrorist groups such as ISIS.) Regardless, as the occupation dragged on with unanticipated numbers of US troops among the dead and wounded, more commentators back home began to say that the invasion had been an enormous foreign policy mistake. The word “blunder” was often used, as though the main importance of the mass slaughter and devastation was a bad move on a geopolitical chessboard. It was mainly about US. When losses were emphasized, they were singularly American: lives, billions

of dollars, and strategic leverage in the region.

**D**uring fifty years after the Vietnam War, the United States grew accustomed to asserting the right and power to make war in a variety of distant countries. Major interventions of the 1980s were confined to the Western Hemisphere – the tiny island of Grenada and then Panama – but those two invasions turned out to be opening acts in a rejuvenating quest for geopolitical dominance. “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all,” President George H.W. Bush gloated at the end of the Gulf War in 1991, as if public aversion to war making had been a shameful impediment to American glory. Eight years later, President Bill Clinton lauded the USA's leadership in the NATO air war on Yugoslavia. By the turn of the century, political elites and mass media had celebrated an unbroken string of US military triumphs for two decades.

Those decades before 9/11 prefigured the “war on terror.” Afterward, the customary wartime features of media boosterism and political bombast went from intermittent to chronic. While the United States was obviously at war in Afghanistan and then Iraq, Libya, and Syria, warfare elsewhere was apt to be a complete mystery for most citizens, even while Pentagon budgets kept climbing. What all that warfare was really doing to Americans got scant attention from media or entrenched politicians, while the actual impacts on people living in the battleground countries were scarcely blips on news screens. Media echo chambers assumed the good intentions if not always the competence of US leaders in the ongoing war that had been vowed against far-flung terrorism. As years went by, a new normal of war footing took hold and tightened its grip on the United States, without any foreseeable end point or need for fresh justification. **CT**

**Norman Solomon** is the national director of *RootsAction.org* and the executive director of the *Institute for Public Accuracy*.

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Joshua Frank

# THE HYPE OF NUCLEAR 'RENAISSANCE'

The forever dangers of small modular reactors ... any country that acquires a nuclear reactor automatically enhances its ability to make nuclear weapons

If you didn't know better, you'd think Lloyd Marbet was a dairy farmer or maybe a retired shop teacher. His beard is thick, soft, and gray, his hair pulled back in a small ponytail. In his mid-seventies, he still towers over nearly everyone. His handshake is firm, but there's nothing menacing about him. He lumbers around like a wise, old hobbling tortoise.

We're standing in the deco lobby of the historic Kiggins Theater in downtown Vancouver, Washington, about to view a screening of *Atomic Bamboozle*, a remarkable new documentary by filmmaker Jan Haaken that examines the latest push for atomic power and a nuclear "renaissance" in the Pacific Northwest.

Lloyd, a Vietnam veteran, is something of an environmental folk hero in these parts, having led the early 1990s effort to shut down Oregon's infamous Trojan Nuclear Plant. He's also one of the unassuming stars of a film that highlights his critical role in that successful Trojan take-down and his continued opposition to nuclear technology.

I've always considered Lloyd an optimist, but this evening I sense a bit of trepidation.

"It concerns me greatly that this fight isn't over yet," he tells me in his deep baritone. He's been at this for years and now helps direct the

Oregon Conservancy Foundation, which promotes renewable energy, even as he continues to oppose nuclear power. "We learned a lot from Trojan, but that was a long time ago and this is a new era, and many people aren't aware of the history of nuclear power and the anti-nuclear movement."

The new push for atomic energy in the Pacific Northwest isn't just coming from the well-funded nuclear industry, their boosters at the Department of Energy, or billionaires like Bill Gates. It's also echoing in the mainstream environmental movement among those who increasingly view the technology as a potential climate saviour.

In a recent interview with ABC News, Bill Gates couldn't have been more candid about why he's embraced the technology of so-called small modular nuclear reactors, or SMRs. "Nuclear energy, if we do it right, will help us solve our climate goals," he claimed. As it happens, he's also invested heavily in an "advanced" nuclear power start-up company, TerraPower, based up in Bellevue, Washington, which is hoping to build a small 345-megawatt atomic power reactor in rural Kemmerer, Wyoming.

The nuclear industry is banking on a revival and placing its bets on SMRs like those proposed by the Portland, Oregon-based NuScale Power Corporation, whose novel 60-megawatt SMR design was approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in 2022. While the underlying physics is the same as all nuclear power plants, SMRs are easier to build and safer to run than the previous generation of nuclear facilities – or so go the claims of those looking to profit from them.

NuScale's design acceptance was a first in this country where 21 SMRs are now in the development stage. Such facilities are being billed as innovative alternatives to the hulking commercial reactors that average one gigawatt of power output per year and take decades and billions of dollars to construct. If SMRs can be brought online quickly, their sponsors claim, they will help mitigate carbon emissions because nuclear power is a zero-emissions energy source.

Never mind that it's not, since nuclear power plants produce significant greenhouse gas emissions from uranium mining to plant construction to waste disposal. Life cycle analyses of carbon emissions from different energy sources find that, when every stage is taken into account, nuclear energy actually



Lloyd Marget, a Vietnam veteran, is something of an environmental folk hero in these parts, having led the early 1990s effort to shut down Oregon's infamous Trojan Nuclear Plant.

has a carbon footprint similar to, if not larger than, natural gas plants, almost double that of wind energy, and significantly more than solar power.

“SMRs are no longer an abstract concept,” Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy Kathryn Huff, a leading nuclear advocate who has the ear of the Biden administration, insisted. “They are real and they are ready for deployment thanks to the hard work of NuScale, the university community, our national labs, industry partners, and the NRC. This is innovation at its finest and we are just getting started here in the US!”

**E**ven though Huff claims that SMRs are “ready for deployment,” that’s hardly the case. NuScale’s initial SMR design, under development

in Idaho, won’t actually be operable until at least 2029 after clearing more NRC regulatory hurdles. The scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are already calling for fossil-fuel use to be cut by two-thirds over the next 10 years to transition away from carbon-intensive energy, a schedule that, if kept, such small reactors won’t be able to speed up.

And keep in mind that the seemingly prohibitive costs of the SMRs are a distinct problem. NuScale’s original estimate of \$55-\$58 per megawatt-hour for a proposed project in Utah – already higher than wind and solar which come in at around \$50 per megawatt-hour – has recently skyrocketed to \$89 per megawatt-hour. And that’s after a \$4-billion investment in such energy by US taxpayers, which will cover 43 percent of the cost of the construc-

tion of such plants. This is based on strikingly rosy, if not unrealistic, projections. After all, nuclear power in the US currently averages around \$373 per megawatt-hour.

And as the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis put it: “[N]o one should fool themselves into believing this will be the last cost increase for the NuScale/UAMPS SMR. The project still needs to go through additional design, licensing by the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, construction, and pre-operational testing. The experience of other reactors has repeatedly shown that further significant cost increases and substantial schedule delays should be anticipated at any stages of project development.”

Here in the Pacific Northwest, NuScale faces an additional obstacle that couldn’t be more impor-

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tant: What will it do with all the noxious waste such SMRs are certain to produce? In 1980, Oregon voters overwhelmingly passed Measure 7, a landmark ballot initiative that halted the construction of new nuclear power plants until the federal government established a permanent site to store spent nuclear fuel and other high-level radioactive waste. Also included in Measure 7 was a provision that made all new Oregon nuclear plants subject to voter approval. Forty-three years later, no such repository for nuclear waste exists anywhere in the United States, which has prompted corporate lobbyists for the nuclear industry to push several bills that would essentially repeal that Oregon law.

NuScale, no fan of Measure 7, has decided to circumvent it by building its SMRs across the Columbia River in Washington, a state with fewer restrictions. There, Clark County is, in its own fashion, beckoning the industry by putting \$200,000 into a feasibility study to see if SMRs could “benefit the region.”

There’s another reason NuScale is eyeing the Columbia River corridor: its plants will need water. Like all commercial nuclear facilities, SMRs must be kept cool so they don’t overheat and melt down, creating little Chernobyls. In fact, being “light-water” reactors, the company’s SMRs will require a continuous water supply to operate correctly.

Like other nuclear reactors, SMRs will utilise fission to make heat, which in turn will be used to generate electricity. In the process, they will also produce a striking amount of waste, which may be even more challenging to deal with than the waste from traditional reactors. At the moment, NuScale hopes to store the nasty stuff alongside the gunk that the Trojan Nuclear Plant produces in big dry casks by the Columbia River in Oregon, near the Pacific Ocean.

## Though no longer operating, Trojan remains a big risk as it sits near an area, where an earthquake is expected someday to drown the region

As with all the waste housed at various nuclear sites nationwide, Trojan’s casks are anything but a permanent solution to the problem of such waste. After all, plutonium garbage will be radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years. Typically enough, even though it’s no longer operating, Trojan still remains a significant risk as it sits near the Cascadia Subduction Zone, where a “megathrust” earthquake is expected someday to violently shake the region and drown it in a gigantic flood of seawater. If that were to happen, much of Oregon’s coastline would be devastated, including the casks holding Trojan’s deadly rubbish. The last big quake of this sort hit the area more than 300 years ago, but it’s just a matter of time before another Big One strikes — undoubtedly, while the radioactive waste in those dry casks is still life-threatening.

Nuclear expert M. V. Ramana, a soft-spoken but authoritative voice in Jan Haaken’s Atomic Bamboozle documentary, put it this way to me:

“The industry’s plans for SMR waste are no different from their plans for radioactive waste from older reactors, which is to say that they want to find some suitable location and a community that is willing to accept the risk of future contamination and bury the waste underground.

“But there is a catch [with SMR’s waste]. Some of these proposed SMR designs use fuel with materials that are chemically difficult to deal with.

The sodium-cooled reactor design proposed by Bill Gates would have to figure out how to manage the sodium. Because sodium does not behave well in the presence of water and all repositories face the possibility of water seeping into them, the radioactive waste generated by such designs would have to be processed to remove the sodium. This is unlike the fleet of reactors [currently in operation].”

Other troubles exist, too, explains Ramana. One, in particular, is deeply concerning: the waste from SMRs, like the waste produced in all nuclear plants, could lead to the proliferation of yet more atomic weaponry.

**A**s the pro-military Atlantic Council explained in a 2019 report on the deep ties between nuclear power and nuclear weapons in this country:

“The civilian nuclear power sector plays a crucial role in supporting US national security goals. The connectivity of the civilian and military nuclear value chain — including shared equipment, services, and human capital — has created a mutually reinforcing feedback loop, wherein a robust civilian nuclear industry supports the nuclear elements of the national security establishment.”

In fact, governments globally, from France to Pakistan, the United States to China, have a strategic incentive to keep tabs on their nuclear energy sectors, not just for potential accidents but because nuclear waste can be utilised in making nuclear weapons.

Spent fuel, or the waste that’s left over from the fission process, comes out scalding hot and highly radioactive. It must be quickly cooled in pools of water to avoid the possibility of a radioactive meltdown. Since the US has no repository for spent fuel, all this waste has to stay put — first in pools for at least a year or

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more and then in dry casks where air must be constantly circulated to keep the spent fuel from causing mayhem.

The United States already has a troubling and complicated nuclear-waste problem, which worsens by the day. Annually, the US produces 88,000 metric tons of spent fuel from its commercial nuclear reactors. With the present push to build more plants, including SMRs, spent fuel will only be on the rise. Worse yet, as Ramana points out, SMRs are going to produce more of this incendiary waste per unit of electricity because they will prove less efficient than larger reactors. And therein lies the problem, not just because the amount of radioactive waste the country doesn't truly know how to deal with will increase, but because more waste means more fuel for nukes.

As Ramana explains: "When uranium fuel is irradiated in a reactor, the uranium-238 isotope absorbs neutrons and [transmutes] into plutonium-239. This plutonium is in the spent fuel that is discharged by the reactor but can be separated from the rest of the uranium and other chemicals in the irradiated fuel through a chemical process called reprocessing. Once it is separated, plutonium can be used in nuclear weapons. Even though there are

## I instantly sensed the shock felt by movie-goers who had no idea nuclear power was priming for a comeback in the Northwest

technical differences between different kinds of nuclear reactors, all reactors, including SMRs, can be used to make nuclear weapons materials... Any country that acquires a nuclear reactor automatically enhances its ability to make nuclear weapons. Whether it does so or not is a matter of choice."

Ramana is concerned for good reason. France, as he points out, has Europe's largest arsenal of nuclear warheads, and its atomic weapons industry is deeply tied to its "peaceful" nuclear energy production. "Without civilian nuclear energy there is no military use of this technology – and without military use there is no civilian nuclear energy," admitted French President Emmanuel Macron in 2019. No surprise then, that France is investing billions in SMR technology. After all, many SMR designs require enriched uranium and plutonium to operate, and the facilities that pro-

duce materials for SMRs can also be reconfigured to produce fuel for nuclear weapons. Put another way, the more countries that possess this technology, the more that will have the ability to manufacture atomic bombs.

As the credits rolled on *Atomic Bamboozle*, I glanced around the packed theatre. I instantly sensed the shock felt by movie-goers who had no idea nuclear power was priming for a comeback in the Northwest. Lloyd Marbet, arms crossed, was seated at the back of the theater, looking calmer than most. Still, I knew he was eager to lead the fight to stop SMRs from reaching the shores of the nearby Columbia River and would infuse a younger generation with a passion to resist the nuclear-industrial complex he's been challenging for decades.

"Can you believe we're fighting this shit all over again?" he asked me later with his usual sense of urgency and outrage. "We've beat them before and you can damn well bet we'll do it again." **CT**

*Joshua Frank is an award-winning California-based journalist and co-editor of CounterPunch. He is the author of the new book Atomic Days: The Untold Story of the Most Toxic Place in America (Haymarket Books).*

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Thalif Deen

# GUNS FOR SALE: A SEASON FOR MERCENARIES

Business is booming – alongside death and destruction – as private armies rush to cash in on political turmoil in Africa and Middle East

Just after a band of mercenaries tried to oust the government in the Maldives back in 1988, I asked a Maldivian diplomat, using a familiar military catchphrase, about the strength of his country’s “standing army.”

“Standing army?” the diplomat asked with mock surprise, and remarked perhaps half-jokingly, “We don’t even have a sitting army.”

With a population of about 250,000, the Maldives was perhaps one of the few countries with no fighter planes, combat helicopters, warships, missiles, or battle tanks – an open invitation for mercenaries and freelance military adventurers.

As a result, the island’s fragile defences attracted a rash of mercenaries and bounty hunters who tried to take over the country twice – once in 1979, and again in 1988.

Although both attempts failed, the Indian Ocean island refused to drop its defences. It not only initiated a proposal seeking a UN security umbrella to protect the world’s militarily vulnerable mini states but also backed an international convention to outlaw mercenaries, namely the 1989 “International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries.”

In the US, a mercenary is called a “soldier of fortune,” which is also

the title of a widely circulated magazine, and subtitled the *Journal of Professional Adventurers*.

The adventures – and misadventures – of mercenaries were also portrayed in several Hollywood movies, including *The Dogs of War*, *Tears of the Sun*, *The Wild Geese*, *The Expendables*, and *Blood Diamond*, among others.

When the Russian Wagner Group hit the front pages of newspapers worldwide, it was described as a private mercenary group fighting in Ukraine.

The *New York Times* said on June 30 the Wagner Group provided security to African presidents, propped up dictators, violently suppressed rebel uprisings, and was accused of torture, murder of civilians, and other abuses.

But the failed coup attempt by Wagner threatened, for a moment, the very existence of the group. A military adviser to an African president, dependent on mercenaries, implicitly linked the name Wagner to the German composer Richard Wagner.

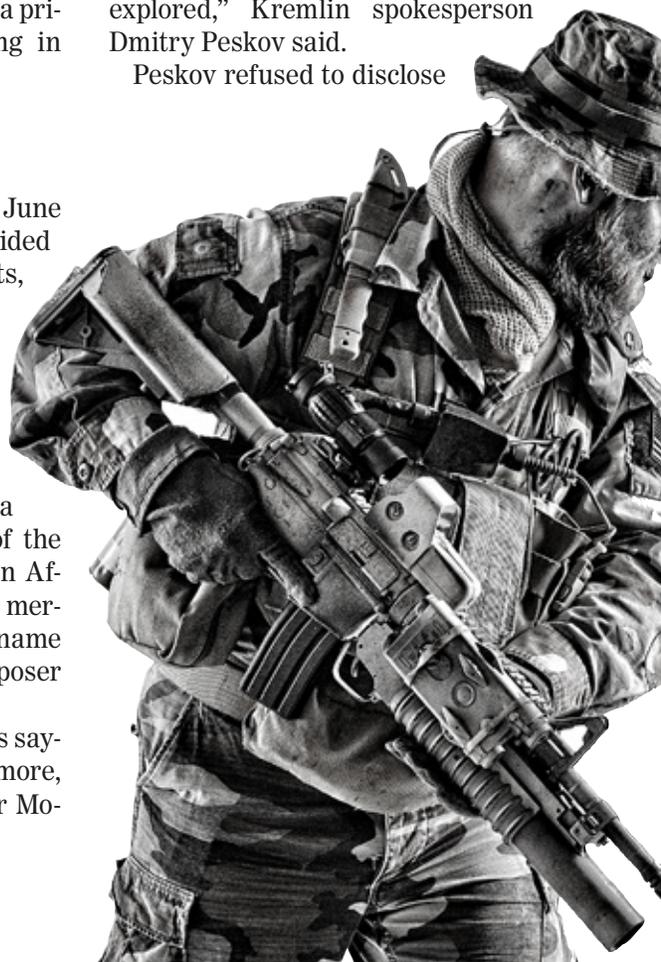
And the official was quoted as saying “If it is not Wagner anymore, they can send us Beethoven or Mo-

zart, it doesn’t matter. We’ll take them.”

A July 14 report on CNN quoted a Kremlin source as saying the Wagner group, which led a failed insurrection against Russian President Vladimir Putin in June, was never a legal entity and its legal status needs further consideration.

“Such a legal entity as PMC Wagner does not exist and never existed. This is a legal issue that needs to be explored,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

Peskov refused to disclose



any further details on the meeting between Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin and Putin, which reportedly took place several days after the aborted rebellion in June.

Besides Ukraine, mercenaries have been fighting in Central Africa, Mali, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya. In Syria, there was a paramilitary group called Slavonic Corps providing security to President Bashar Assad battling a civil war – and later by the Wagner Group.

And in Mali, there were over 1,500 mercenaries fighting armed groups threatening to overthrow the government.

Ironically, the US which once used the Blackwater Security Consulting Group during the American occupation of Iraq, has imposed sanctions on several African nations deploying mercenaries.

Antony J. Blinken, US secretary of state, said in early July that the United States is imposing sanctions on several entities in the Central African Republic (CAR) for their connection to the transnational criminal organisation known as the Wagner Group and “for their involvement in activities that undermine democratic processes and institutions in the CAR through illicit trade in the country’s natural resources.

“We are also designating one Russian national who has served as a Wagner executive in Mali. Wagner has used its operations in Mali both to obtain revenue for the group and its owner, Yevgeniy Prigozhin, as well as to procure weapons and equipment to further its involvement in hostilities in Ukraine.”

The United States has also issued a new business risk advisory focused on the gold industry across sub-Saharan Africa.

Specifically, the advisory highlights “how illicit actors such as Wagner exploit this resource to gain revenue and sow conflict, corrup-

tion, and other harms throughout the region.”

Death and destruction have followed in Wagner’s wake everywhere it has operated, and the United States will continue to take actions to hold it accountable, said Blinken.

**D**r Stephen Zunes, professor of politics and international studies at the University of San Francisco, told IPS it is certainly good that the United States is finally taking leadership in opposing the use of mercenaries.

The Iraq war – which then-Senator Joe Biden strongly supported – relied heavily on the use of mercenaries from the Blackwater group. Similarly, during the Cold War, the CIA used mercenaries to support its military objectives in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

“Whether such actions targeting the Wagner Group is indicative of an actual shift in US policy or simply a means of punishing a pro-Russian organisation remains to be seen,” he said.

Dr Simon Adams, president and CEO of the Center for Victims of Torture, told IPS that, throughout history, big powers have often used mercenaries. From trying to hold back anticolonial struggles to the horrors of the Cold War in Latin America or Africa, there is nothing new in that.

“But I think the big change is that the international community has become more intolerant of these guns-for-hire and privatised armies who believe that they can operate outside of international humanitarian law, and are often rampant abusers of human rights,” he pointed out. And it is much harder these days for their state sponsors to deny responsibility for their actions, he said.

The Wagner Group has been im-

plicated in numerous atrocities in Ukraine, Central African Republic, and a number of other places, he added.

“They deserve all the opprobrium that has been heaped upon them. The challenge now is not just to sanction them, and to try to hold the main war criminals accountable under international law.”

The bigger challenge is to ensure that no other big state or major power engages in these same nefarious practices the next time it suits their own partisan interests to do so, said Dr Adams.

Meanwhile, according to an article in the *National Defense University Press*, private force has become big business, and global in scope. No one truly knows how many billions of dollars slosh around this illicit market.

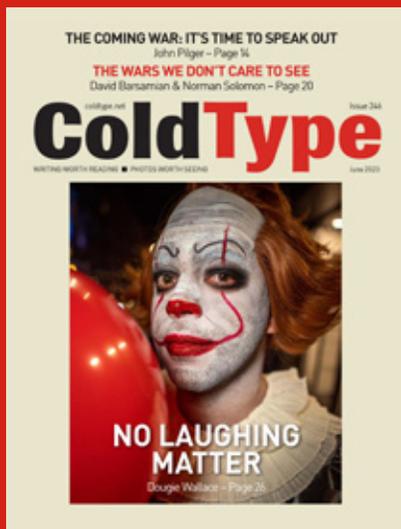
“All we know is that business is booming. Recent years have seen major mercenary activity in Yemen, Nigeria, Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq. Many of these for-profit warriors outclass local militaries, and a few can even stand up to America’s most elite forces, as the battle in Syria shows.”

The Middle East is awash in mercenaries. Kurdistan is a haven for soldiers of fortune looking for work with the Kurdish militia, oil companies defending their oil fields, or those who want terrorists dead, according to the article.

“Some are just adventure seekers, while others are American veterans who found civilian life meaningless. The capital of Kurdistan, Irbil, has become an unofficial marketplace of mercenary services, reminiscent of the Tatooine bar in the movie *Star Wars* – full of smugglers and guns for hire.” **CT**

**Thalif Deen** reports for IPS UN Bureau Report / Globetrotter – [www.independentmedia.institute.org](http://www.independentmedia.institute.org)

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