

BLOG ESSAYS TO START DISCUSSIONS ON SYRIA

...ON IMPERIALISM, WAR, AND UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY: 2012-2013

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WAR, MILITARISM, AND RESISTANCE: REVISITING CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Imperialism

I still find compelling the main points about modern imperialism articulated by Lenin in his famous essay on the subject. Reflecting on the transformations of capitalism from its early manufacturing days until the twentieth century he argued that economic concentration had replaced a multiplicity of semi-independent economic actors, manufacturing capital had merged with financial institutions creating a system of monopoly finance capital, and as a consequence the export of capital--what we would call today foreign investment, financial speculation, and the debt system--would replace the export of commodities as the dominant form of economic exchange on a global basis. During some periods capitalist states would divide up the world each extracting wealth of all kinds from its own sphere of influence and during other periods they would engage in competition and even war to pursue profits. Lenin could not foresee a time, from the mid-20th century until now, when resistance would come not only from competing and militarized capitalist states but from masses of people in colonized, neocolonial, and dependent societies.

The Cold War and Post-Cold War International Systems

The latest phase of the system Lenin described was constructed at the end of World War II. The United States emerged from the war as the most powerful nation and used military, economic, political, and cultural tools to enshrine its dominance. This meant building a system to crush the emerging Socialist Bloc, controlling the drive toward independence of former colonies, and shaping the politics of lesser but significant capitalist states. To achieve these difficult goals, the United States began to construct a “permanent war economy.”

By the 1960s, the United States capacity to control the economic and military destiny of the world was severely challenged. The Tet Offensive of January, 1968 represented a metaphoric great divide as U.S. presumptions of hegemony were sorely challenged by a poor but passionate Vietnamese people’s army. From the late 1960s onward the U.S. was challenged not only on the battlefield but in the global economy. Rates of profit of U.S. corporations declined. Industrialization had led to overproduction. Working classes in the United States and other capitalist countries had gained more rights and privileges. Socialist countries were experiencing significant growth spurts. Countries of the Global South began to demand a New International Economic Order that regulated the way

global capitalism worked. In addition, inter-capitalist rivalry grew. On top of all this the price of oil increased markedly.

The response of the global capitalist powers (the G7 countries) to the crisis of capitalism was a dramatic shift in the pursuit of profit from the production of goods and services to what became known as financialization, or financial speculation. The banks Lenin talked about became instrumental. With rising oil prices, oil rich countries awash in new profits, and banks swelling with petrodollars, nations were enticed and forced to borrow to pay for the oil that cost many times more than it had in the recent past. The global debt system was launched. When the United States freed the dollar from the gold standard, currencies themselves became a source of speculation.

The debt system gave international financial institutions and banks the power to impose demands on countries that required loans. Thus, the IMF, the World Bank, regional international banks, and private institutions demanded that the world's countries open their doors to foreign investors, cut their government programs, privatize their economies, and shift to exporting commodities to earn the cash to pay back the bankers. The era of neoliberalism was advanced by globalization, the scientific, technological, and cultural capacity to traverse the globe. No geographic space could maintain autonomy from global capitalism. So a Cold War that was launched by creating a permanent war economy was transformed by financialization, neoliberalism, and globalization. With the shift of work from higher wage capitalist centers to low wage peripheries, deindustrialization became a common feature of the economic landscape.

By the 21st century the system of neoliberal globalization was facilitated by new techniques of empire. Wars which traditionally had been fought between states were now fought within states. The United States established a military presence virtually all across the globe with an estimated 700 to 1,000 military installations in at least 40 countries. Major functions of the globalization of military operations had become privatized so massive U.S. corporations gained even more profits from war-making than they had during the days of the Cold War. The military—public and private—began to engage in assassinations and covert “humanitarian interventions.” And, aided by new technologies, the United States and other capitalist countries, using unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, could make war on enemies without “boots on the ground.” As we have learned, intelligence gathering, spying on people, has immeasurably advanced as well.

To put it succinctly, while imperialism remains generically as it has been throughout history today:

- -Imperialism has become truly global.
- -The military continues to be big business, sucking up at least half of the federal budget.
- -The United States has developed the capacity to fight wars without soldiers on the ground.
- -Empires, particularly the United States empire, kill with impunity.
- -The connections between economic interest and militarism remain central.

- -Ideologies defending 21st century military interventions vary from those neoconservatives who argue that the United States must use its power to maximize our global position to the humanitarian interventionists who claim that the United States acts in the world for good.

Resistance

This narrative is not unfamiliar to us. What is less familiar is the idea that throughout history the forces of domination have been challenged by resistance, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. It is important to note that the drive for U.S. hegemony, for example, has been affected by resistance. A recent articulation of this narrative appears in the writings of Vijay Prashad, who has described the efforts of the newly independent nations of the Global South to achieve political and economic sovereignty. Many of these efforts from the 1950s to the 1970s faltered at the steps of the debt system and neoliberal globalization. But the struggle has continued. In addition, there have been examples of people such as the Cubans and the Vietnamese who, with much pain and suffering, were able to achieve some measure of economic sovereignty and political independence.

21st century movements for change are varied and complicate the efforts of imperialism to achieve its goals. Resistance includes the following:

- -Mercosur, a trade organization that includes Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile, and others waiting for admittance constitutes the third largest trading bloc in the world.
- -The development of collaborative relationships among powerful Global South nations. For example, representatives from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) recently met to chart an independent agenda in global affairs.
- -The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) consists of ten Latin American/Caribbean countries which are launching a program of economic integration and political cooperation.
- -The Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC) is a new grouping of some 33 Western Hemisphere nations, minus the United States and Canada, which will seek to expand regional collaboration.
- -Individual nations, based on their historic resistance to imperialism, such as Cuba, Vietnam, Venezuela, and Bolivia, continue to inspire activists.
- -The United Nations system, considerably weakened from the days of the Cold War, still engages in global mobilizations through its conferences, support for some progressive NGOs, and projects involving education, development, and peacekeeping. Affiliated organized such as the International Labor Organization pursue goals that are sometimes independent of imperial agendas.
- -Global anti-capitalist mobilizations, such as the World Social Forum, have brought together thousands of activists largely from the Global South to discuss the problems faced by workers, women, indigenous people, environmental activists, and others.

- -Perhaps most important at this time is the grassroots mobilizations of millions of people all across the globe demanding economic justice, worker rights, gender equality, environmental justice, and peace. Such mobilizations, while stimulated by local issues, are defined as part of a global movement such as “From Tahrir Square to Madison, Wisconsin.” People worldwide, particularly the young, workers, and women are seeing the common dimensions of struggle against imperialism.

Where Do Left and Progressive Forces Fit?

First, we on the left need to “bring imperialism back in;” that is socialist organizations can through education revisit and revise the theory of imperialism so that it is more serviceable for 21st century socialist movements.

Second, progressives should link war/peace issues to environmental issues, to gender issues, to class issues, and race issues. As Martin Luther King declared in 1967: “I speak of the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home, and death and corruption in Vietnam.”

Third, every socialist and progressive organization should challenge the permanent war economy. Andrew Bacevich pointed out that the framers of the permanent war economy in the 1940s believed that the role of the citizenry was to remain quiescent, pliant, and supportive of the decisions made by the foreign policy establishment. That assumption must be resisted.

Fourth, local and national work should link economic justice, environmental preservation, and peace. These issues are inextricably connected.

Finally, left and progressive groups should respond to specific imperial transgressions by:

- -working to cut military budgets
- -opposing drone warfare
- -saying no to US military aid to Syrian rebels
- -supporting the just demands of the Palestinian people
- -challenging the construction of military bases in Asia
- -demanding an end to subversion in Latin America
- -calling for the release of the Cuban 5
- -insisting on the end of the Cuban blockade.

Wednesday, June 19, 2013

WAIST DEEP IN THE BIG MUDDY, AGAIN!

In 2011 the grassroots revolts that spread all across the Middle East caught the traditional imperial powers in the region--the United States, Great Britain, and France-- by surprise. Even more so, the Middle East theocracies and dictatorships--Saudi Arabia, Tunisia,

Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and others--were threatened by those young people, workers, unemployed, and women, who took to the streets motivated by the vision of another world. The United States watched the street protests hoping against hope that the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt would weather the storm. The Obama administration did not move publicly to aid these regimes to crush the protest but withheld its endorsement of the grassroots democracy movement. The *idea* of popular revolt spread to places all across the globe including Madison, Wisconsin; Santiago, Chile; Athens, Greece; Madrid, Spain; and Quebec, Canada. The Occupy Movements in the United States expanded.

Globally, movements for a 21st century democratization seemed to be replicating 1968.

In this historic context, the imperial powers needed to transform the Middle East narrative from demands for jobs, worker rights, women's rights, and democratization to the more traditional religious and ethnic conflict model of Middle East politics. The United States organized a United Nations/NATO coalition to intervene to encourage rebellion in Libya coupled with a game-changing air war against the Libyan military. The result was the overthrow of the government of Muammar Gaddafi and its replacement by a quarrelsome ungovernable regime rife with ethnic strife. The UN/NATO war on Libya was billed as the next phase of Arab Spring, while actually it imposed religious and ethnic conflict on a relatively stable but authoritarian regime.

The anger over the US encouragement and military intervention in the Libyan civil war was reflected in the killings by Libyan terrorists of CIA operatives in Benghazi, Libya in September, 2012. What intervention in Libya did was to destabilize that society and eliminate its former dictator who was opposed to the growing US military expansion in North Africa. Most important, it took off the front pages and the hearts and minds of youth, the poor, women, and trade unionists the hope of mass movements to bring about democratic change in the region.

US covert and military intervention has shifted now from Libya to Syria. Mobilization against the Bashar al-Assad dictatorship in Syria was applauded by the United States. As the protest escalated into civil war in that country with contestants including secular and religious groups fighting against Assad's army, the United States, Sunni countries of the Arab League, and NATO countries escalated their support to the rebels. Another Libya-style UN/NATO military operation was thwarted by strong opposition from Russia and China and the threat of growing military support for the Syrian regime by Iran.

Part of the ongoing story of Syria is the following:

- 1. The United States launched its diplomatic involvement in the Syrian civil war by insisting that Bashar al-Assad must step down. This precluded any possibility of a diplomatic settlement of the civil war and the eventual dismantling of the Assad regime. Most important, the United States non-negotiable demand made diplomatic collaboration between the United States and Russia all but impossible.

- 2.Support for various rebel factions, diplomatic and presumably covert, has encouraged the escalation of opposition violence which was matched by state violence.
- 3.Rebel factions, ironically, have included groups with profiles that resemble the terrorists who were responsible for the 9/11 murders in the United States and terrorist attacks on various targets in the Middle East and Afghanistan.
- 4.Violence and political instability have begun to spread to Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and have drawn Israel and Iran closer into regional war.
- 5.As the Syrian civil war has escalated it has become a “proxy” war between the United States and Russia *and* Sunni and Shia Muslims.
- 6.In the United States, the civil war in Syria has rekindled the war factions. These include the “neoconservatives” who were responsible for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Using 9/11 and lies about weapons of mass destruction the neoconservatives influenced the Bush administration to pursue their agenda to use United States power to transform the globe in its interests.
- The neoconservatives, advocates of United States military intervention in Syria, are now joined by the “humanitarian interventionists” who in the Clinton Administration supported bombing campaigns in Iraq, Serbia, and Bosnia and live by the ideology that the United States must use its military power to promote human rights around the world.
- It is important to note that recent polling data suggests that only a small percentage of the American people, about 20 percent, give any support to United States involvement in Syria. Most Americans are suffering from declining jobs, income, and social safety nets, and reject the war economy and militarism that has characterized the U.S. role in the world since 1945.
- 7.The escalation of the civil war, the growing military role of the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, NATO, Hezbollah from Lebanon, and Israel has led to nearly 100,000 Syrian deaths and more than a million refugees. As in most international wars, innocent people suffer and die as military decisions are made in government capitals.

The case is clear that increasing the United States military involvement in Syria has negative consequences for the Middle East, international relations, the inspiration of Arab Spring, American politics, and the people of Syria. The hope for a more just and peaceful future requires support for the resumption of the spirit and vision of the original Arab Spring that began in Tunisia and Egypt and spread all across the globe. Otherwise the United States will once again be “waist deep in the big muddy” as in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Thursday, August 15, 2013

COLD WAR IV: FIRST WILSON, THEN TRUMAN, CARTER, AND REAGAN, NOW THE HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONISTS

The Cold War began in 1917 as Woodrow Wilson marshaled money and political allies at home and abroad to isolate, subvert, and finally send troops to overthrow the new Bolshevik Revolution. After 15 years of non-recognition and economic blockade and

seven years looking the other way as the Nazi war machine grew and grew, the United States collaborated with the militarily powerful Soviet Union to defeat fascist armies in Europe and the Far East.

After World War II, Cold War II started. The United States built a massive war machine, the biggest in world history, to challenge the global presence and influence of the Soviet Union. However, by the 1970s, with growing challenges to U.S. global power, the Nixon Administration launched a policy of “détente,” that is, warming of relations with its Cold War adversary.

Detente did not last as President Carter resumed the Cold War in 1979, by sending funds to help anti- government religious fundamentalist guerrillas fight the central government of Afghanistan, at that time allied with the Soviet Union. President Reagan in 1981 returned full-force to the Cold War spending more on defense during his first term, than all that was spent on the military throughout U.S. history. The enormous military expenditures, domestic economic crises, and declining political legitimacy of Soviet Bloc countries led to their collapse. The former Soviet Union broke up in 1991.

Now the Cold War is being resumed with Vladimir Putin’s Russia. The size and name of the enemy country has changed but the key foreign policy decision-makers in Washington have not. Some, the “neo-conservatives” who dominated the Bush foreign policy team, argue that as the most powerful country in the world, the United States must take the opportunity to construct a world order based on political regimes we prefer. If we have the power, they say, use it.

And since the 1990s they have excoriated the other foreign policy faction, the “humanitarian interventionists” who dominated the Clinton presidency of the 1990s and seem to be influencing Obama foreign policy today. For the humanitarian interventionists U.S. foreign policy is not just about using American power. It is also about making the world a better place, at the point of a gun, through global propaganda, using the debt system to require countries receiving aid to change their economies, and sanctimoniously condemning others for not measuring up to U.S. standards of justice.

In the end, these foreign policy elite factions are two sides of a singular coin. They both advocate strong militaries. They both promote U.S. military institutions around the world. They both express criticisms of the shortcomings of others as to democracy, human rights, and so-called free markets and development.

Neither faction understands that the 21st century international system is radically different than the one that existed during the height of the Cold War. The relative power of the United States militarily, economically, and ideologically is declining. New giants, China, India, and Brazil, for example, are encroaching on a once hegemonic international economic and political order. Countries of the Global South, in Latin America particularly, are coalescing around reformist agendas to transform their place in global society. Grassroots movements everywhere are rising up, not only against their own repressive regimes but the entire international system. And the newly emerging great

powers, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have been meeting to discuss transforming global institutions and processes.

The Obama foreign policy team, largely humanitarian interventionists but egged on by neoconservatives in the executive branch and the Congress, believes the U.S. can still influence global policy by condemning competing powers. They claim they are motivated by the good; for example condemnation of Russia's odious homophobic policies. But they really are trying to turn back the clock.

Liberal media support the humanitarian interventionists and frame the narrative of today's U.S./Russian conflict as one between the altruistic former and the dictatorial latter. Putin is driven by his own quest for absolute power at home. As in the cases of prior Cold Wars, according to liberal commentators, Putin supports evil regimes in the world: Iran and Syria for example. In addition, he gleefully gives a home to whistleblower Edward Snowden. And, while America institutionalizes a racist "new Jim Crow" system of criminal justice, commentators appropriately castigate the Russians for their horrific repression of gays and lesbians, and at the same time imply mistakenly that the United States is the standard for human rights.

In short, as in the old days of the Cold Wars from Wilson through Reagan, the renewed narrative, which seems to be moving toward a new Cold War, is about "good guys versus bad guys," not one in which new powers, from the streets to the networks of countries from the Global South are saying "enough is enough" to traditional imperial powers.

Tuesday, April 9, 2013

THE EMPIRE IN DISARRAY: GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

A whole generation of activists has "grown up" conversant with the central place of empire in human history. Children of the Cold War and the "Sixties" generation realized that the United States was the latest of a multiplicity of imperial powers which sought to dominate and control human beings, physical space, natural resources, and human labor power. We learned from the Marxist tradition, radical historians, scholar/activists with historical roots in Africa, and revolutionaries from the Philippines and Vietnam to Southern Africa, to Latin America. But we often concluded that imperialism was hegemonic; that is it was all powerful, beyond challenge.

A "theory of imperialism" for the 21st century should include four interconnected variables that explain empire building and as well as responses to it. First, as an original motivation for empire, economic interests are primary. The most recent imperial power, the United States needed to secure customers for its products, outlets for manufacturing investment opportunities, an open door for financial speculation, and vital natural resources such as oil.

Second, the pursuit of military control parallels and supports the pursuit of economic domination. The United States, beginning in the 1890s, built a two-ocean navy to become a Pacific power, as well as institutionalizing its control of the Western Hemisphere. It

crushed revolutionary ferment in the Philippines during the Spanish, Cuban, American War and began a program of military intervention in Central American and the Caribbean. The “Asian pivot” of the 21st century and continued opposition to the Cuban and Bolivarian revolutions reflect the one hundred year extension of the convergence of economics and militarism in U.S. foreign policy.

Third, as imperial nations flex their muscles on the world stage they need to rationalize exploitation and military brutality to convince others and their own citizens of the humanistic goals they wish to achieve. In short, ideology matters. In the U.S. case “manifest destiny” and the “city on the hill,” that is the dogma that the United States has a special mission as a beacon of hope for the world, have been embedded in the dominant national narrative of the country for 150 years.

However, what has often been missing from the leftwing theoretical calculus is an understanding of resistance. Latin American and African dependency theorists and “bottom-up” historians have argued for a long time that resistance must be part of the understanding of any theory of imperialism. In fact, the imperial system is directly related to the level of resistance the imperial power encounters.

Resistance generates more attempts at economic hegemony, political subversion, the application of military power, and patterns of “humanitarian interventionism” and diplomatic techniques, called “soft power,” to defuse it. But as recent events suggest resistance of various kinds is spreading throughout global society.

The impetus for adding resistance to any understanding of imperialism has many sources including Howard Zinn’s seminal history of popular movements in the United States, “The People’s History of the United States.” Zinn argued convincingly that in each period of American history ruling classes were challenged, shaped, weakened, and in a few cases defeated because of movements of indigenous people, workers, women, people of color, middle class progressives and others who stood up to challenge the status quo.

More recently, Vijay Prashad, author of “The Darker Nations,” compiled a narrative of post-World War II international relations that privileged the resistance from the Global South. World history was as much shaped by anti-colonial movements, the construction of the non-aligned movement, conferences and programs supporting liberation struggles and women’s rights, as it was by big power contestation. The Prashad book was subtitled “A People’s History of the Third World.”

The 21st century has witnessed a variety of forms of resistance to global hegemony and the perpetuation of neo-liberal globalization all across the face of the globe. First, various forms of systemic resistance have emerged. These often emphasize the reconfiguration of nation-states and their relationships that have long been ignored. The two largest economies in the world, China and India, have experienced economic growth rates well in excess of the industrial capitalist countries. China has developed a global export and investment program in Latin America and Africa that exceeds that of the United States and Europe.

In addition, the rising economic powers have begun a process of global institution building to rework the international economic institutions and rules of decision-making on the world stage. On March 26-27, 2013, the BRICS met in Durban, South Africa. While critical of BRICS shortcomings Patrick Bond, Senior Professor of Development Studies and Director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society, in a collection of readings on the subject introduces BRICS with an emphasis on its potential:

In Durban, five heads of state meet to assure the rest of Africa that their countries' corporations are better investors in infrastructure, mining, oil and agriculture than the traditional European and US multinationals. The Brazil-Russia-India-China-SA summit also includes 16 heads of state from Africa, including notorious tyrants. A new 'BRICS bank' will probably be launched. There will be more talk about monetary alternatives to the US dollar.

On the Latin American continent, most residents of the region are mourning the death of Hugo Chavez, the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution. Under Chavez's leadership, inspiration, and support from oil revenues, Venezuela launched the latest round of state resistance to the colossus of the north, the United States.

Along with the world's third largest trade bloc MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela and associate memberships including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru), Latin Americans have participated in the construction of financial institutions and economic assistance programs to challenge the traditional hegemony of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization.

The Bolivarian Revolution also has stimulated political change based on various degrees of grassroots democratization, the construction of workers' cooperatives, and a shift from neo-liberal economic policy to economic populism. With a growing web of participants, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and, of course, Cuba, the tragic loss of Chavez will not mean the end to the Bolivarian Revolution. It might lead to its deepening.

But the story of 21st century resistance is not just about countries, alliances, new economic institutions that mimic the old. Grassroots social movements have been spreading like wild fire all across the face of the globe. The story can begin in many places and at various times: the new social movements of the 1980s; the Zapatistas of the 1990s; the anti-globalization/anti-IMF campaigns going back to the 1960s and continuing off and on until the new century; or repeated mass mobilizations against a Free Trade Agreement for the Americas.

Since 2011, the world has been inspired by Arab Spring, workers' mobilizations all across the industrial heartland of the United States, student strikes in Quebec, the state of California, and in Santiago, Chile. Beginning in 2001 mass organizations from around the

world began to assemble in Porto Alegre, Brazil billing their meeting of some 10,000 strong, the World Social Forum. They did not wish to create a common political program. They wished to launch a global social movement where ideas are shared, issues and demands from the base of societies could be raised, and in general the neo-liberal global agenda reinforced at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland could be challenged.

The World Social Forum has been meeting annually ever since in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the United States. Most recently, the last week in March, 2013, 50,000 people from 5,000 organizations in 127 countries from five continents met in Tunis, the site of the protest that sparked Arab Spring two years ago. Planners wanted to bring mass movements from the Middle East and North Africa into the collective narrative of this global mobilization.

Medea Benjamin, founder of Code Pink, reported that a Tunisian student, when asked whether the Social Forum movement should continue, answered in the affirmative. The student paid homage to the Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who committed suicide and launched Arab Spring. He declared that “for all those who have died struggling for justice, we must continue to learn from each other how to build a world that does not respond to the greed of dictators, bankers or corporations, but to the needs of simple people like Mohamed Bouazizi.”

Tuesday, March 19, 2013

WE NEED TO EXPAND THE IRAQ WAR SYNDROME

In a November/December 2005 Foreign Affairs article, “The Iraq Syndrome,” I argued that there would likely be growing skepticism about the notions that “the United States should take unilateral military action to correct situations or overthrow regimes it considers reprehensible but that present no immediate threat to it, that it can and should forcibly bring democracy to other nations not now so blessed, that it has the duty to rid the world of evil, that having by far the largest defense budget in the world is necessary and broadly beneficial, that international cooperation is of only very limited value, and that Europeans and other well-meaning foreigners are naive and decadent wimps.” Most radically, I went on to suggest that the United States might “become more inclined to seek international cooperation, sometimes even showing signs of humility.” John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome Revisited,” Foreign Affairs, March 28, 2011:

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67681/john-mueller/the-iraq-syndrome-revisited>

David Halberstam reported in his important book, “The Best and the Brightest,” that President Roosevelt directed his State Department to develop a position on what United States foreign policy toward Indochina should be after the World War in Asia was ended. Two choices were possible in 1945: support the Vietnamese national liberation movement that bore the brunt of struggle against Japanese occupation of Indochina or support the French plan to reoccupy the Indochinese states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

As the Cold War escalated the United States rejected Ho Chi Minh's plea for support for independence and began funding the French in their effort to reestablish colonialism in Indochina. When the French were defeated by the Viet Minh forces in 1954, the United States stepped in and fought a murderous war until the collapse of the US South Vietnamese puppet regime in 1975.

Paralleling the struggle for power in Indochina, competing political forces emerged after the World War on the Korean Peninsula. With the Soviet Union and China supporting the North Koreans and the United States supporting a regime created by it in the South a shooting war, a civil war, between Koreans ensued in 1950 which continued until an armistice was established in 1953. That armistice, not peace, continues to this day as a war of words and periodic provocations.

Political scientist John Mueller analyzed polling data concerning the support for U.S. military action in Korea and Vietnam, discovering that in both wars there was a steady and parallel decline in support for them. Working class Americans were the most opposed to both wars at every data point. Why? Because working class men and women were most likely to be drafted to fight and their loved ones the most likely to suffer the pain of soldiers coming home dead, scarred, or disabled.

Polling data from the period since the onset of the Iraq war followed the pattern Mueller found in reference to Korea and Vietnam. In all three cases levels of support for U.S. war making declined as the length of the wars increased and casualties rose. The American people typically gave the Presidents some flexibility when the wars started and the rally round the flag phenomena prevailed. But then resistance grew.

Throughout the period from the end of the Vietnam War until the 1990s, each presidential administration was faced with what foreign policy elites called "the Vietnam Syndrome." This was a pejorative term these elites used to scornfully describe what they correctly believed would be the resistance to foreign military interventions that they periodically wished to initiate.

President Reagan wanted to invade El Salvador to save its dictatorship and to overthrow the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. He would have preferred to send troops to Angola to defend the anti-communist forces of Jonas Savimbi of UNITA. To overcome the resistance to launching what could become another Vietnam quagmire, policymakers had to engage in "low intensity conflict," covert operations that would minimize what the American people could learn about what their government was doing and who it was supporting. Reagan did expand globally and sent troops to tiny Granada, but even Reagan's globalism, militarism, and interventionism was somewhat constrained by the fear of public outrage.

President George Herbert Walker Bush launched a six-month campaign to convince the American people that military action was needed to force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. Despite a weak endorsement of such action by the Congress, the American people supported Gulf War 1 because casualties were small and the war lasted only a month.

During a press conference announcing the Gulf War's end in February, 1991, Bush proclaimed that "at last we licked the Vietnam Syndrome."

Clinton knew better. He limited direct US military action to supporting NATO bombing in the former Yugoslavia in 1995, bombed targets in Iraq in so-called "no-fly zones in 1998," , bombed Serbia in a defense of Kosovo in 1999 and used economic embargoes to weaken so-called "rogue states" throughout his eight years in office.

It was President George Walker Bush who launched long and devastating wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. The Bush administration used the sorrow and anger of the American people after the 9/11 terrorist acts to lie, deceive, aggress, and qualitatively increase the development of a warfare state. As Mueller has suggested an "Iraq Syndrome" had surfaced by 2005 as the lies about that war became public, the war costs were headed toward trillions of dollars in expenditures, and troop deaths and disabilities escalated. And of course an historically repressive society, Iraq, was so destroyed that U.S. troops left it in shambles with hundreds of thousands dead, disabled, and in abject poverty.

As we reflect on the ten-year anniversary of the launching of the Iraq War in March, 2003, the madmen inside the beltway are talking about increasing U.S. military involvement in Syria, not "taking any options off the table" in Iran, and threatening North Korea. Meanwhile the United States is beefing up its military presence in the Pacific to "challenge" rising Chinese power, establishing AFRICOM to respond to "terrorism" on the African continent, and speaking with scorn about the leadership in Latin America of recently deceased Hugo Chavez.

The American people must escalate commitment to its "syndromes" demanding in no uncertain terms an end to United States militarism. Mueller's call for a U.S. foreign policy that emphasizes cooperation over conflict motivated by humility over arrogance is the least the country can do to begin the process of repairing the damage it has done to global society.

Tuesday, August 20, 2013

SIXTY YEARS OF BLOWBACK: IRAN

Chalmers Johnson wrote in 2001 about "blowback" that it "*is a CIA term first used in March 1954 in a recently declassified report on the 1953 operation to overthrow the government of Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran. It is a metaphor for the unintended consequences of the US government's international activities that have been kept secret from the American people. The CIA's fears that there might ultimately be some blowback from its egregious interference in the affairs of Iran were well founded..... This misguided 'covert operation' of the US government helped convince many capable people throughout the Islamic world that the United States was an implacable enemy.*" (*The Nation*, October 15, 2001).

The CIA initiated overthrow of the regime of Mohammed Mossadegh sixty years ago on August 19, 1953 was precipitated by what Melvin Gurtov called “the politics of oil and cold war together.” Because it was the leading oil producer in the Middle East and the fourth largest in the world and it was geographically close to the former Soviet Union, President Eisenhower was prevailed upon to launch the CIA covert war on Iran long encouraged by Great Britain.

The immediate background for the ouster of Mossadegh was Iran’s nationalization of its oil production. Most Iranians were living in poverty in the 1940s as the Iranian government received only ten percent of the royalties on its oil sales on the world market. The discrepancy between Iran’s large production of oil and the limited return it received led Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, a liberal nationalist, to call for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951. Despite opposition from Iran’s small ruling class, the parliament and masses of the Iranian people endorsed the plan to seize control of its oil. Mossadegh became the symbol of Iranian sovereignty.

Ironically, Mossadegh assumed the United States would support Iran’s move toward economic autonomy. But, in Washington, the Iranian leader was viewed as a demagogue, his emerging rival the Shah of Iran (the sitting monarch of Iran) as “more moderate.”

After the nationalization, the British, supported by the United States, boycotted oil produced by the Iranian Oil Company. The British lobbied Washington to launch a military intervention but the Truman Administration feared such an action would work to the advantage of the Iranian Communists, the Tudeh Party.

The boycott led to economic strains in Iran, and Mossadegh compensated for the loss of revenue by increasing taxes on the rich. This generated growing opposition from the tiny ruling class, and they encouraged political instability. In 1953, to rally his people, Mossadegh carried out a plebiscite, a vote on his policies. The Iranian people overwhelmingly endorsed the nationalization of Iranian oil. In addition, Mossadegh initiated efforts to mend political fences with the former Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party.

As a result of the plebiscite, and Mossadegh’s openings to the Left, the United States came around to the British view; Mossadegh had to go. As one U.S. defense department official put it:

“When the crisis came on and the thing was about to collapse, we violated our normal criteria and among other things we did, we provided the army immediately on an emergency basis....The guns that they had in their hands, the trucks that they rode in, the armored cars that they drove through the streets, and the radio communications that permitted their control, were all furnished through the military defense assistance program.... Had it not been for this program, a government unfriendly to the United States probably would now be in power.” (Richard Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution*, 1972).

The Shah, who had fled Iran after the plebiscite, returned when Mossadegh was ousted. A new prime minister was appointed by him who committed Iran to the defense of the “free” world. U.S. military and economic aid was resumed, and Iran joined the CENTO alliance (an alliance of pro-West regional states).

In August, 1954, a new oil consortium was established. Five U.S. oil companies gained control of forty percent of Iranian oil, equal to that of returning British firms. Iran compensated the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company for its losses by paying \$70 million, which Iran received as aid from the United States. The Iranian ruling class was accorded fifty percent of profits from future oil sales. President Eisenhower declared that the events of 1953 and 1954 were ushering in a new era of “economic progress and stability” in Iran and that it was now to be an independent country in “the family of free nations.”

In brief, the United States overthrew a popularly elected and overwhelmingly endorsed regime in Iran. The payoff the United States received, with British acquiescence, was a dramatic increase in access by U.S. oil companies to Iranian oil at the expense of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The overthrow of Mossadegh and the backing of the return of the Shah to full control of the regime led to U.S. support for one of the world’s most repressive and militarized regimes. By the 1970s, 70,000 of the Shah’s opponents were in political prisons. Workers and religious activists rose up against the Shah in 1979, leading to the rapid revolutionary overthrow of his military state.

As Chalmers Johnson suggested many years later, the United States role in the world is still plagued by “blowback.” Masses of people all across the globe, particularly in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and East Asia, regard the United States as the major threat to their economic and political independence. And the covert operation against Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran is one place where such global mistrust began.

Sunday, January 6, 2013

THE UNTOLD STORY IS NOT UNTOLD

Oliver Stone has made an enormous contribution to discussions of the United States role in the world. His films have described the horrific consequences of United States foreign policy for the people of El Salvador and Vietnam, the American political system, and the U.S. soldiers victimized by wars not of their making. While his films, such as *JFK*, raise controversial claims, they have stimulated important public conversations.

This television season, Showtime, a cable channel, is showing a ten-part series written and produced by Stone and his academic collaborator, historian Peter Kuznick. The series, “The Untold History of the United States,” is a brilliant and entertaining narrative of the United States role in the world since the onset of World War II. It warrants broad distribution within educational institutions and among communities of political activists. Because of our ahistorical culture people do not have a sense of the critical decisions that were made fifty or a hundred years ago which have structured the political and economic life of the country ever since.

Critical moments in United States history have channeled the prospects for progressive social change today and tomorrow. From the arrival of colonial armies to the “new world,” to the introduction of slavery to the Western Hemisphere, to revolution against British imperialism, to the civil war and the defeat of post-war reconstruction, the American experience has been shaped by class and race in the context of burgeoning industrial and financial capitalism. The Spanish/Cuban/American war stimulated the rise of the United States as the preeminent empire from the Philippines to the Western Hemisphere.

Most of us have received a sanitized history of these earlier historical moments. In addition, our understanding of the rise of socialist movements in the 1930s in response to the Great Depression and the global fascist threat, the realities of World War II, and the emerging U.S. hegemony after the war which led to the “Cold War” between global capitalism and socialism have been limited as well. Oliver Stone’s ten-part “untold history,” in collaboration with Professor Kuznick, fills in some of the void. Several themes about the onset of the Cold War are particularly important:

First, while the series overemphasizes the role of elites in shaping U.S. history Stone and Kuznick do point out that these elites always perceived the threat workers, radicals, and other rank-and-file activists meant to ruling class dominance. Much of foreign policy was designed to crush revolutionary ferment overseas *and* at home.

Second, in the first two episodes emphasis is placed on the lost opportunity for the left that resulted from the successful efforts of political elites, particularly in the Democratic Party, to force Henry Wallace, President Roosevelt’s third term vice president, and 1948 candidate for president on the Progressive Party ticket, from power. Wallace as Secretary of Agriculture during the New Deal was an economic populist, anti-racist, and pro-union sympathizer and after World War II an advocate for United States/Soviet Union collaboration.

Stone and Kuznick probably exaggerate Wallace as an alternative to the imperial, counter-revolutionary, and racist path the United States took after the war but correctly make it clear that CEOs from massive corporations and banks and political elites from both political parties were committed to crushing those left forces that flowered in the United States in the 1930s and grew in popularity all across the globe. The Soviet Union was one manifestation of global resistance to capitalism that paralleled the spread of massive anti-colonial ferment in the Global South.

Third, the film makers provide overwhelming evidence to show that the defeat of fascism in Europe was largely the result of the massive Soviet military machine. Americans suffered about 290,000 wartime dead and the Soviet Union 27 million. And Stone, who narrated the documentary, suggests that while Joseph Stalin was a cruel dictator, his policies must be understood in the context of the rise of fascism in Europe and the refusal of western powers, particularly Great Britain, France, and the United State, to stand up against it. He correctly portrays Stalin as a nationalist who was prepared to sacrifice all principles, in this case Communist ones, to prepare for and to defend the Soviet Union.

This overriding commitment, Stone implies, carried over into Soviet diplomatic interaction with the rest of Europe and the United States after the war.

Fourth, in great detail Stone and Kuznick make it clear that the United States did not have to use two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki to force the Japanese to surrender in the summer of 1945. The Japanese leadership knew they were soon to be defeated. Many had advocated for surrender by the time of the Potsdam Conference of July, 1945 and American policymakers were aware of it.

President Truman's advisors knew that if the Soviet Union declared war on Japan which the Soviets promised to do by August 8, the enemy would give up. But despite this, the film makers suggest, President Truman tried to use the powerful new weapon against the Japanese before the Soviet Union had a chance to enter the war, and thus be a diplomatic player in Asia after the war. Also, and this was critical, the bomb was designed to send a message to the Soviet Union as well as Japan. The United States in the years ahead would be the dominant military power in the world.

Stone and Kuznick point out that the decisions to drop two atomic bombs on Japan signaled the dawn of a new age. Now weapons of mass destruction would be used to pursue global hegemony. There no longer would be any limits on the possibility of death and destruction derived from world affairs.

In other words, Stone and Kuznick are making the case that at least from the onset of the Cold War to today, U.S. foreign policy has been driven by economic and political interests to dominate the world and has responded violently to a multiplicity of forms of resistance. The locales of struggle changed as would the forms of resistance. But the structure that was put in place after World War II remains the albatross around the necks of those who seek change today and tomorrow.

The series is an indispensable lesson for peace and justice activists today. However, it should be added that the "untold" story has been told before. As a result of the threats of nuclear war in the 1950s, United States policies toward Cuba and Vietnam in the 1960s, and patterns of U.S. covert interventions and violence against peoples on every continent, progressive scholars began to use their methods to uncover this history fifty years ago.

Historians and activists were inspired by the classic text by William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. Williams' work, called then "historical revisionism," inspired other groundbreaking studies of the onset and perpetuation of the Cold War by Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, Gar Alperovitz, Diane Clemens, Lloyd Gardner, Walter LaFeber, Thomas Patterson, and many more. The works on McCarthyism, repression of labor militancy, and mystification in popular culture could fill libraries.

While it is true that documentary films cannot provide footnotes, it is important for viewers to realize that progressive scholars during the depths of the Cold War used their skills to research, teach, and for some, engage in political activism based on their findings.

And finally, if the “untold” story has in fact been told many times, a question that becomes important is why we as a people, even the political activists among us, are not apprised of it. And this leads to analyses of how knowledge has been appropriated in the service of United States foreign and domestic policy.

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

DEFEAT NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL DOCUMENT 68 (NSC 68): THEN
ATTACK NSC 68 LIGHT

After the outbreak of fighting on the Korean peninsula, NSC 68 was accepted throughout the government as the foundation of American foreign policy (U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian).

The third and last presidential debate of the 2012 election season, October 22, 2012, addressed issues of foreign policy and their connections to the United States economy. The debates reflected the idiosyncrasies of American politics, 2012, as well as the enduring features of the United States empire.

As to the candidate’s realization that he needed to “move to the center,” Mitt Romney tried to portray himself as peace-oriented. This approach contradicted the neo-conservative vision of the 17 of 24 key foreign policy aides advising him. These former Bush advisors and associates of the Project for a New American Century or (PNAC), stand for a foreign policy designed to reestablish United States global hegemony. PNAC, formed in the 1990s, in its official positions argued that the United States, as the last remaining superpower, must use that power to remake the world. The PNAC vision combines the ideology of the United States as the “city on the hill” and the “beacon of hope” for the world, with the advocacy of using overwhelming military force to achieve imperial goals.

Romney, contrary to prior statements, endorsed the Obama administration plans for withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. He, like President Obama, supported the Syrian opposition short of U.S. direct military intervention. He called for maintaining sanctions against Iran to force the latter to end its alleged nuclear program while avoiding war. And Romney, like Obama, endorsed challenging China’s trade policy while engaging in constructive diplomacy with the burgeoning new superpower. These and other Romney statements mirrored (for better or worse) the foreign policies of President Obama. The flexible Republican candidate “moved to the center” on foreign policy because of his perceived need to present an image of wisdom and caution to the America voters who oppose a continued presence in Afghanistan, getting directly involved in wars against Syria and Iran, and the wars on “terrorism,” “drugs,” and other crusades.

However, candidate Romney was firm in his commitment to increasing U.S. defense spending over the next decade, while he would cut domestic programs. The Center for

Budget and Policy Priorities reported in September, 2012 that a President Romney would cap total federal spending at 20 percent of GDP by 2016; maintain defense spending at 4 percent of GDP, and rapidly repeal the Affordable Care Act (Richard Kogan and Paul N. Van de Water, "Romney Budget Proposals Would Necessitate Very Large Cuts in Medicaid, Education, Health Research and Other Programs"). President Obama claims that the Romney military project would add two trillion dollars to military spending over the next decade. Even though figures are loosely introduced to debates, it is clear that a Romney presidency would add enormously to naval programs, maintain high levels of troops, and continue drone programs that were expanded during the Obama presidency. In short, military spending would grow in a Romney administration, especially because of ties to the neo-cons and a hawkish Congress which promotes military spending district by district.

The Obama defense budget projected for fiscal year 2013 would total \$525 billion, a 2.5 percent decline from the 2012 budget (if inflation is considered). The basic DOD budget request does not include ongoing war costs, U.S. nuclear weapons systems, homeland security, military assistance, or other elements of security. The DOD recommended cuts in troop strength in the army, marines, and reserves. The National Priorities Project reports that an Obama defense budget would modestly increase from about \$525 billion in 2013 to just less than \$530 billion at the end of a second term.

A Romney administration would unleash the military in terms of expenditures, and, if he listens to his neo-con advisors, worldwide adventures. But, President Obama's defense budget proposals continue the basic parameters of military spending into the future. As the National Priorities pie chart notes, the 2013 proposed federal budget allocates 57 percent of discretionary spending directly to the military, with 6 percent for education, 6 percent for housing and community, 5 percent for veterans benefits, 3 percent for science, 2 percent for labor, 2 percent for transportation, and 1 percent for food and agriculture.

National Security Council Document 68, written in the bleak Cold War winter of 1950 before the onset of the Korean War recommended that military spending should be the number one priority of every president before he/she discussed any other program or activity of government. NSC 68, just a wild proposal that winter became policy after the Korean War started and has for the most part continued ever since, costing American workers trillions of dollars in taxes.

The Romney proposal, based on a vision of reestablishing the United States as the global hegemonic power, is based on the principle articulated in NSC 68. Spend more and more on the military and pay for it by cutting everything else. The Obama budget, while more circumspect and committed to the military contributing "their fair share" to the health and well-being of the nation, maintains the same commitment to prioritizing the military.

The task of the peace movement over the coming months is to first challenge the candidacy of Mitt Romney who is committed to reinstating the principle of NSC 68 and then, if the President is re-elected, to demand that President Obama reject the 60 year

tradition of privileging unnecessary military spending over the basic needs of the American people.

Tuesday, July 17, 2012

GROTESQUE MILITARY SPENDING IS BROADLY OPPOSED

Like a festering cancerous growth that has not been exorcised from the body politic for over sixty years, militarists continue to defend escalating military spending. This time it is former Vice President Dick Cheney visiting Washington to encourage his fellow Republicans in the House of Representatives to stand tall and oppose any cuts in military spending.

Of course, military imperatives have a long history. NATO was formed in 1949 and the United States militarily and financially was its anchor. National Security Document 68 in 1950 called for military spending to be every president's top priority. With subsequent "crises" in Korea, the Persian Gulf, the Caribbean, Indochina, Southern Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan, military spending continued to grow, taking up about half of all discretionary government spending.

Anticipating changes in challenges to U.S. global hegemony, President Carter in 1980 called for the establishment of a "Rapid Deployment Force" which could quickly move into trouble spots to address threats to allied regimes. Such a RDF might have prevented the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, Carter's advisers argued. President Reagan, of course, boosted military spending beyond the costs of the entire historical period before he came into office. And President Clinton, remained committed to being able to fight one and half wars and to be able to engage in "humanitarian interventions."

The Bush Administration began a shift in defense doctrine even before the 9/11 tragedy was used to justify two huge, long, and unwinnable wars. Defense intellectuals warned of an "arc of instability" all along the equator from the northern portion of Latin America, to North Africa, the Persian Gulf and East Asia. With this new threat the military needed to be transformed into a new high speed force to move on a moment's notice to any threatened area; a new high tech RDF.

After 9/11 the Bush Doctrine considered any military action as justified if the U.S. perceived that an enemy, state or non-state actor, might be considering an attack on the United States. The new high tech RDF required literally hundreds of military installations on every continent. Given the new technology, these bases did not have to be mini-cities like the old Cold War military installations of the past. And as Chalmers Johnson, Nick Turse, and others have documented, close to 1,000 military bases were in place before Bush left office.

David Vine, an anthropologist, (“The Lily-Pad Strategy: How the Pentagon Is Quietly Transforming Its Overseas Base Empire and Creating a Dangerous New Way of War,” at TomDispatch.com, July 17, 2012) uses an interesting metaphor, the lily-pad, to describe the latest generation of U.S. global military bases. The metaphor, Vine says, comes from the military who conceptualize bases as lily-pads, where like frogs, troops alight then jump across a pond to attack their prey. Vine describes the ‘lily-pads’ as “small, secretive, inaccessible facilities with limited numbers of troops, spartan amenities, and prepositioned weaponry and supplies.”

He points out that while hundreds of bases in Iraq and Afghanistan are being closed, the lily-pads are expanding. Consequently, the U.S. today still has some kind of military presence in 150 countries on every continent, 11 aircraft carrier task forces, and untold space-based military capabilities. So while the troops are being brought home, unbeknownst to the American people, the U.S. global military presence is growing.

In Vine’s words: “Beyond their military utility, the lily-pads and other forms of power projection are also political and economic tools used to build and maintain alliances and provide privileged U.S. access to overseas markets, resources, and investment opportunities.”

Although this story is not new, Vine suggests that opposition to military doctrine and spending is growing, an opposition that peace activists might use. “... overseas bases have recently begun to generate critical scrutiny across the political spectrum from Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul to Democratic Senator Jon Tester and *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof. With everyone looking for ways to trim the deficit, closing overseas bases offers easy savings. Indeed, increasingly influential types are recognizing that the country simply can’t afford more than 1,000 bases abroad.”

A recent survey sponsored by the Program of Public Consultation, the Stimson Center, and the Center for Public Integrity reinforce the argument Vine is making about military spending. In April, 2012 a representative sample of respondents from Democratic and Republican (Blue and Red) districts were asked their opinions about cutting military spending in 2013. Respondents were given arguments in support of and opposition to such spending before they answered questions. In so-called Blue districts 80 percent of respondents supported defense spending cuts and 74 percent of those in Red districts also supported the cuts. In addition, respondents in Congressional districts which received high levels of defense spending contracts were as supportive of the cuts as those in districts where DOD spending was lower.

The Director of the Program for Public Consultation, Steven Kull said that “The idea that Americans would want to keep total defense spending up so as to preserve local jobs is not supported by the data.”

Perhaps more Americans than one expects are aware of the fact that military spending, as economists have claimed, is a job killer. United For Peace and Justice, advocating active opposition to reversing the military spending cuts agreed to by Congress in 2011, has pointed out that \$1 billion in government spending for the military creates 11,200 jobs, while an equal amount spent for creating clean energy would create 16,800 jobs, and education 26,700 jobs.

Now is a good time for peace activists to expand education about the history of unchallenged military spending, continued military basing all across the globe, the use of high technology and mobile troop formations to intervene everywhere, the consequences of military spending for making the world a more dangerous place, and the costs, not only in lives overseas but to a basic standard of living at home. The survey data indicates that a progressive peace majority might be ready to listen and act.

Sunday, May 13, 2012

NATO: FROM FIGHTING SOCIALISM TO GLOBAL EMPIRE

During World War II an “unnatural alliance” was created between the United States, Great Britain, and the former Soviet Union. What brought the three countries together, the emerging imperial giant, the declining capitalist power, and the first socialist state, was the shared need to defeat fascism in Europe. Rhetorically, the high point of collaboration was reflected in the agreements made at the Yalta Conference, in February, 1945 three months before the German armies were defeated.

At Yalta, the great powers made decisions to facilitate democratization of former Nazi regimes in Eastern Europe, a “temporary” division of Germany for occupation purposes, and a schedule of future Soviet participation in the ongoing war against Japan. Leaders of the three states returned to their respective countries celebrating the “spirit of Yalta,” what would be a post-war world order in which they would work through the new United Nations system to modulate conflict in the world.

Within two years, after conflicts over Iran with the Soviet Union, the Greek Civil War, the replacement of wartime President Franklin Roosevelt with Harry Truman, and growing challenges to corporate rule in the United States by militant labor, Truman declared in March, 1947 that the United States and its allies were going to be engaged in a long-term struggle against the forces of “International Communism.” The post-war vision of cooperation was reframed as a struggle of the “free world” against “tyranny.”

In addition to Truman's ideological crusade, his administration launched an economic program to rebuild parts of Europe, particularly what would become West Germany, as capitalist bastions against the ongoing popularity of Communist parties throughout the region. Along with the significant program of reconstructing capitalism in Europe and linking it by trade, investment, finance, and debt to the United States, the U.S. with its new allies constructed a military alliance that would be ready to fight the Cold War against International Communism.

Representatives of Western European countries met in Brussels in 1948 to establish a program of common defense and one year later with the addition of the United States and Canada, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed. The new NATO charter, inspired largely by a prior Western Hemisphere alliance, the Rio Pact (1947), proclaimed that "an armed attack against one or more of them...shall be considered an attack against them all..." which would lead to an appropriate response. The Charter called for cooperation and military preparedness among the 12 signatories. After the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb and the Korean War started, NATO pushed ahead with the development of a common military command structure with General Eisenhower as the first "Supreme Allied Commander."

After the founding of NATO and its establishment as a military arm of the West, the Truman administration adopted the policy recommendations in National Security Council Document 68 (NSC 68) in 1950 which declared that military spending for the indefinite future would be the number one priority of every presidential administration. As Western European economies reconstructed, Marshall Plan aid programs were shut down and military assistance to Europe was launched. Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952, and fueling the flames of Cold War, West Germany was admitted to NATO in 1955. (This stimulated the Soviet Union to construct its own alliance system, the Warsaw Pact, with countries from Eastern Europe).

During the Cold War NATO continued as the only unified Western military command structure against the "Soviet threat." While forces and funds only represented a portion of the U.S. global military presence, the alliance constituted a "trip wire" signifying to the Soviets that any attack on targets in Western Europe would set off World War III. NATO thus provided the deterrent threat of "massive retaliation" in the face of first-strike attack.

With the collapse of the former Warsaw Pact regimes between 1989 and 1991, the tearing down of the symbolic Berlin Wall in 1989, and finally the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991, the purpose for maintaining a NATO alliance presumably had passed. However, this was not to be.

In the next twenty years after the Soviet collapse, membership in the alliance doubled. New members included most of the former Warsaw Pact countries. The functions and activities of NATO were redefined. NATO programs included air surveillance during the crises accompanying the Gulf War and the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. In 1995, NATO sent 60,000 troops to Bosnia and in 1998-99 it carried out brutal bombing campaigns in Serbia with 38,000 sorties. NATO forces became part of the U.S. led

military coalition that launched the war on Afghanistan in 2001. In 2011 a massive NATO air war on Libya played a critical role in the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime.

An official history of NATO described the changes in its mission: “In 1991 as in 1949, NATO was to be the foundation stone for a larger, pan-European security architecture.” The post-Cold War mission of NATO combines “military might, diplomacy, and post-conflict stabilization.”

The NATO history boldly concludes that the alliance was founded on defense in the 1950s and détente with the Soviet Union in the 1960s. With the collapse of Communism in the 1990s it became a “tool for the stabilization of Eastern Europe and Central Asia through incorporation of new Partners and Allies.” The 21st century vision of NATO has expanded further: “extending peace through the strategic projection of security.” This new mission, the history said, was forced upon NATO because of the failure of nation-states and extremism.

Reviewing this brief history of NATO, observers can reasonably draw different conclusions about NATO’s role in the world than from those who celebrate its world role. First, NATO’s mission to defend Europe from aggression against “International Communism” was completed with the “fall of Communism.” Second, the alliance was regional, that is pertaining to Europe and North America, and now it is global. Third, NATO was about security and defense. Now it is about global transformation. Fourth, as its biggest supporter in terms of troops, supplies and budget (22-25%), NATO is an instrument of United States foreign policy. Fifth, as a creation of Europe and North America, it has become an enforcer of the interests of member countries against, what Vijay Prashad calls, the “darker nations” of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Sixth, NATO has become the 21st century military instrumentality of global imperialism. And finally, there is growing evidence that larger and larger portions of the world’s people have begun to stand up against NATO.

Sunday, May 6, 2012

THE AFGHANISTAN WAR; OUR LONGEST WAR AND BIGGEST FANTASY

On May Day, 2012 President Obama made a secret trip to Afghanistan and spoke to the nation and the troops on the ground about past, present, and future policy. What the speech revealed was a replication of a ten-year fantasy narrative about why we went to war on Afghanistan, what our goals were, and what the future holds in the region for the United States and, most importantly, the Afghan people.

The President announced he was signing an agreement between the two countries which will define “a new kind of relationship” in which Afghans will assume primary responsibility for their security and “we build an equal partnership between two sovereign states.” The future of this relationship will be bright as “the war ends, and a new chapter begins.”

The announcement sounded eerily like the policy of “Vietnamization” which President Nixon put in place in 1969; handing over ground action to the South Vietnamese government while the United States escalated the bombing of targets in North and South Vietnam and invaded neighboring Cambodia. The South Vietnamese government and military were incapable of assuming “primary responsibility” and in the end were overthrown by powerful forces in the countryside.

The President explained that President Bush correctly launched a war on Afghanistan in October, 2001 because the country allowed terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden an al Qaeda “safe-haven” for terrorist planning and attacks, ultimately leading to the tragedy of 9/11. While Bin Laden escaped to Pakistan, the U.S. continued fighting the Taliban who have “waged a brutal insurgency.”

Subsequently, he claimed, using the dehumanized language of violence –prone discourse, the U.S. military has “taken out over 20 of their top leaders” including bin Laden himself. But the war continues. While the United States downsizes its troop commitments policy will include:

- --a transition of the war to our Afghan military allies. Importantly Obama proclaimed that at the NATO summit this month in Chicago, “our coalition will set a goal for Afghan forces to be in the lead for combat operations across the country next year.” However, “international troops will continue to train, advise and assist Afghans, and fight alongside them when needed.”
- --training of Afghan Security Forces, leading to an Afghan force of 352,000 troops which NATO will support to create “a strong and sustainable long-term Afghan force.”
- --increasing US/NATO/Afghan cooperation “including shared commitments to combat terrorism and strengthen democratic institutions.” President Obama declared that these commitments, in the short run involving counter-terrorism and continued training, do not include the building of permanent U.S. bases.
- --pursuing a negotiated peace with the Taliban if they break with al Qaeda, renounce violence and “abide by Afghan laws.”
- --working towards stability in South Asia, including partnering with neighboring Pakistan. The President assured viewers that “America has no designs beyond an end to al Qaeda safe-havens, and respect for Afghan sovereignty.” In short, the central goal of United States policy is to destroy al Qaeda, in the short run to stabilize Afghanistan, and “to finish the job we started in Afghanistan...”

The speech reflects the classic pattern of U.S. military globalization coupled with tortured ahistorical fantasy narratives that have characterized policy since the end of World War II.

The President rationalized a ten-year war on a nation in which terrorists resided because Afghan leaders refused to hand over alleged perpetrators without some evidence of the connection between them and 9/11.

Also, the initial narrative, reflected in the President's speech last week, conflated the al Qaeda terrorists with the so-called Taliban. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s with support from the United States. Some of these Afghan government officials had been recipients of military aid in the 1980s when they fought against the regime in Kabul that was allied with the former Soviet Union.

Neither Bush nor Obama have ever explained to the public who our enemy is. Has al Qaeda been clearly defined? What political, ethnic, and regional constituencies do the Taliban come from? Do we know much about the political forces in Afghanistan the Karzai regime represents?

Is the president correct to suggest that the United States and the Karzai government are winning the hearts and minds of the people outside Kabul, despite consistently negative reports to the contrary in the media?

Along with not being told who the enemy is and why they are the enemy neither Bush nor Obama have described how many of them there are, where they are located, how they are connected in a presumed worldwide network, and most basically how we know that a worldwide network of terrorists really exists. Recently released documents from the bin Laden compound suggest that while he wanted to promote terrorist attacks on the United States there was a communications disconnect between the alleged worldwide terrorist leader and various related organizations around the world.

Mother Jones reported on their website on May 4 devastating statistics concerning the U.S war on Afghanistan since 2001. These included costs for military operations since 2001 of \$443.3 billion; the estimated cost per soldier in country in 2011 of \$694,000; U.S. soldiers killed in action 1,507 and wounded 15,560. Also U.S military spending has doubled since 2000. And between 2004-2012 there have been 296 drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 17 percent of those killed were not affiliated with targeted enemies. And civilians killed in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2011 totaled 12,793.

Former Senator J. William Fulbright, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was interviewed in the Vietnam documentary *Hearts and Minds*, about why he turned against the war in Vietnam in 1965. His friend, President Lyndon Johnson dramatically escalated U.S. military action in Vietnam, with Congressional approval, after the Gulf of Tonkin incident allegedly occurred. Johnson claimed that the North Vietnamese engaged in unprovoked attacks on two U.S. naval vessels in international waters on August 2 and 4, 1964. Johnson used these claims to get Congressional approval of military escalation in Vietnam.

Fulbright said in the documentary that: "We always hesitate in public to use the dirty word lie, but a lie is a lie. It is a misrepresentation of fact. It is supposed to be a criminal act if it's done under oath. Mr. Johnson didn't say it under oath. He just said it. We don't usually have the president under oath."

The war on Afghanistan since October, 2001 has been a lie and U.S troops, the Afghan people, and all those who could have been served by a more just allocation of our national treasure have been victims of this lie.

There are many reasons to support President Obama's reelection. However, the peace movement must increase its attack on U.S. policy toward Afghanistan, as it continues to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Saturday, March 24, 2012

MEASURING TARGETS OF US IMPERIALISM: HISTORY, ECONOMICS, GEOPOLITICS, CULTURE AND IRAN

U.S. Imperialism in the Beginning

Modern imperialism is intimately connected to the globalization of capitalism, the quest for enhanced military capabilities, geopolitical thinking, and ideologies of national and racial superiority. The rise of the United States empire occurred as the industrial revolution spread to North America after the civil war. Farmers began to produce agricultural surpluses requiring overseas customers, factories were built to produce iron, steel, textiles, and food products, railroads were constructed to traverse the North American continent, and financiers created large banks, trusts, and holding companies to parley agricultural and manufacturing profits into huge concentrations of cash. Perhaps the benchmark of the U.S. emergence as an imperial power was the Spanish/Cuban/American war. The U.S. established its hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, replacing the Spanish and challenging the British, and became an Asian power, crushing rebellion and planting its military in the Philippines. The empire has grown, despite resistance, to this day.

While U.S. expansion occurs wherever a vacuum of power exists, and an opportunity to formally or informally control a regime and/or territory, particular countries have had enduring salience for the U.S. Iran is such a country.

Scale of Significance for U.S. Imperialism

To help understand the attention U.S. policy-makers give some countries, it is possible to reflect on what is called here the Scale of Significance for U.S. Imperialism (SSUSI). The SSUSI has three interconnected dimensions that relate to the relative importance policy-makers give to some countries compared to others.

First, as an original motivation for expansion, economic interests are primary. Historically, United States policy has been driven by the need to secure customers for U.S. products, outlets for manufacturing investment opportunities, opportunities for financial speculation, and vital natural resources.

Second, geopolitics and military hegemony matter. Empires require ready access to regions and trouble spots all around the world. When Teddy Roosevelt, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Vice President, and President of the United States, articulated the first warning of the need for global power he spoke of the development of a “two-ocean” navy. The U.S., he said, must become an Atlantic and a Pacific power; thus prioritizing the projection of military power in the Western Hemisphere and Asia. If the achievement of global power was dependent upon resources drawn from everywhere, military and political hegemony in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and parts of Africa also required attention.

Third, as the imperial project grows, certain political regimes and cultures take on particular importance for policy-makers and the American people. Foreign policy elites claim that the U.S. has a special responsibility for them. If these roles are rejected by the targeted country, the experience burns itself into the consciousness of the people. For example, Cuba was seen by U.S. rulers as far back as Thomas Jefferson as soon to be part of the United States. Cuba’s rejection of this presumption of U.S. tutelage has been a scar on the U.S. sense of itself ever since the spread of revolutionary ferment on the island.

The Danger of War With Iran Today

Reflecting on the SSUSI adds to the discussion about current United States foreign policy toward Iran. The history of U.S./Iranian relations has been long and painful. Before the dramatic United States involvement in that country, Iran’s vital oil resource had been under control of the weakening British empire. In 1901 the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now British Petroleum) consolidated control of much of the production, refining, and export of Iranian oil. Local oligarchs received only 16 percent of the oil revenue from the global sale of the oil.

After World War II, with a young monarch Mohammad Reza Shah serving as the Iranian ruler and Iranian masses living in poverty, Iranian nationalists mobilized to seize control of their valuable resource. Upper class nationalist Mohammed Mossadegh became Prime Minister and asserted the power of the parliament over the monarchy. The parliament voted to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

The British government enlisted the United States in 1953 to overthrow the Mossadegh regime using covert operations directed by the CIA. After Mossadegh was imprisoned and the Shah given full power to impose his will on an angry population, a new oil consortium agreement was established in 1954 which allowed five U.S. oil companies to gain a 40 percent share of Iranian oil. Anglo-Iranian would retain another 40 percent, and the rest would be given to rich Iranians.

Over the years, the Shah's regime became the bulwark of US power in the increasingly vital Persian Gulf region. In the Nixon period, Iran was defined as a key "gendarme" state, which would serve as a surrogate western police power to oversee the region. Presumably Iran would protect the flow of Gulf oil to the United States, Europe, and Japan. By the 1970s, the Shah's military was the fifth largest in the world.

To the great surprise of left critics of the Shah's dictatorship, the CIA, and the Carter administration, the Shah's regime began to crumble in the summer of 1978 as large strikes were organized by oil workers against the regime. In January, 1979 secretly organized massive street protests led by the religious community doomed the regime. As Iranian soldiers refused to fire upon street demonstrators, President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, urged the president to send troops to Iran to save the U.S. regional policeman, the Shah, from overthrow. That proposal was rejected by Carter.

After jockeying for power in the post-revolutionary period, religious leaders consolidated their power over the political system. To add embarrassment to loss of economic and geopolitical control over the vital Persian Gulf region, Iranian students took 52 U.S. diplomats and military attaches hostage and held them for 444 days. In 1980 Carter authorized a military rescue effort

that failed. The bungled military operation further damaged the image of infallibility that American foreign policy elites, and the public, held about the nation's power and destiny.

In the 1980s, to challenge Iran's potential for becoming the hegemonic power in the Gulf, the Reagan administration sided with Iraq in the brutal war between it and Iran. In 1988, shortly before the end of the Iraq/Iran war U.S. planes shot down a civilian Iranian airliner killing 290 people aboard.

Subsequent to the ignoble history of U.S. support for the Shah's dictatorship, militarization, the overthrow of Mossadegh, the embarrassment of the hostage taking, funding Iraq in the brutal Gulf war of the 1980s, the United States has maintained hostility to Iran despite occasional signals from the latter of a desire to establish better relations. U.S. policy has included an economic embargo, efforts to create region-wide opposition to the regime, expressions of support for a large and justifiable internal movement for democracy and secularization in the country, and encouragement, more or less, for growing Israeli threats against Iran. Given this troubled history of US/Iranian relations spanning at least 60 years, the current threats of war expressed by both Israel and the United States are not surprising.

Returning to SSUSI and Iranian Relations

As an emerging global power, United States needs for natural resources, customers for consumer and military products, investment opportunities, and outlets for energy companies grew throughout the twentieth century. One of the significant historical junctures in the transfer of economic and geopolitical power in the world from the declining British empire and the rising U.S. empire was the agreement to redistribute control of Iranian oil in 1954. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was obliged to share Iranian oil with the then five U.S. oil giants.

As U.S. oil needs and those of its friends in Europe increased, control of the Persian Gulf region and access to its oil became more vital. Furthermore, since a hostile Iran could control the Strait of Hormuz, the Iranian revolution of 1979 posed an increasing geopolitical problem for American dominance.

The impulse in 1979 to send U.S. troops to save the Shah's regime was driven by both economics and geopolitics. It was only because other Carter advisers disagreed with the National Security Advisor on the possibility of saving the Shah that a U.S. intervention stalled in 1979. But in 1980 an Iraq/Iran war provided an opportunity, it was hoped, to weaken Iran's potential control of the region.

Finally, the U.S. decision-makers since 1953 saw a special relationship between this country and Iran. The U.S. put the Shah in power, plied him with enormous military power, encouraged and facilitated significant cultural exchanges, and defined his regime as a junior partner in policing the region.

The rapidity of the Shah's overthrow and the anger expressed by the Iranian people about its historic relationship to the American people communicated to the world declining U.S. power. Consequently, U.S. hostility to Iran in subsequent decades using a variety of issues including processing uranium is not surprising.

Sunday, March 18, 2012

BRING THE PEACE MOVEMENT BACK IN!

*“From Forrestal’s day to the present, semi-warriors have viewed democratic politics as problematic. Debate means delay. To engage in give-and-take or compromise is to forfeit clarity and suggests a lack of conviction. The effective management of national security requires specialized knowledge, a capacity for clear-eyed analysis and above all an unflinching willingness to make decisions, whatever the cost. With the advent of the semi-war, therefore, national security policy became the preserve of experts, few in number, almost always unelected, habitually operating in secret, persuading themselves that to exclude the public from such matters was to serve the public interest. After all, the people had no demonstrable “need to know.” In a time of perpetual crisis, the anointed role of the citizen was to be pliant, deferential and afraid.” (from a review of a biography of James Forrestal, the first Secretary of Defense by historian Andrew Bacevich in *The Nation*).*

Andrew Bacevich reminds us that a permanent war economy has been part of the political and economic landscape of the United States at least since the end of World War II. The War Resisters League pie chart of total government spending for fiscal year 2013 indicates that 47 percent of all government spending deals with current and past military costs. Despite lower government estimates that mask true military spending, by adding the Social Security Trust Fund to total spending and regarding past military spending-- particularly veteran's benefits-- as non-military, it is clear that roughly fifty cents of every dollar goes to war, war preparation, covert operations, and military contractors.

In addition "war support" contractors, such as KBR, have made billions of dollars in the twenty-first century from military spending. Top producers of military hardware, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Boeing earned 11, 8, and 5 billion dollars in contracts in 2010 alone. Ostensibly non-military corporations such as BP, FedEx, Dell, Kraft, and Pepsi received hundreds of millions of dollars in defense contracts in 2010. Virtually every big corporation is to some degree on the Department of Defense payroll.

A recent data-based report, "Don't Bank on the Bomb," prepared by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) identified "...more than 300 banks, insurance companies, pension funds and asset managers from 30 countries that invest significantly in 20 major nuclear weapons producers." The report examined in detail financial connections to 20 major nuclear weapons companies. These 20 included US producers of nuclear weapons components such as Bechtel, Boeing, GenCorp, General Dynamics, Honeywell, and Northrop Grumman. US financial institutions investing in the nuclear weapons producers included Abrams Bison Investments, AIG, American National Insurance Company, Fidelity, Franklin Templeton, JP Morgan Chase, New York Life, and Prudential Financial.

Because of the economic crisis which began in 2007, debate about military spending has increased. In 2010 Congressmen Barney Frank and Ron Paul initiated a study addressing needed cuts. The report prepared for them in 2010, "Debt, Deficits, and Defense," called for across the board reductions in spending--procurement, research and development, personnel, operations and maintenance, and infrastructure--of \$960 billion over the next decade. The report noted that over the last decade 65 percent of federal discretionary spending went to the military.

President Obama last January proposed more modest spending cuts of \$480 billion over the next decade (reductions in projected increases not existing funding). He coupled announcement about future spending with a firm statement that the world must realize that the United States remains committed to maintaining its military superiority. The President indicated that spending reductions in the future will be tied to greater use of "special operations," drones, and shifting existent forces from Europe to Asia.

The magnitude of military spending represents what Bacevich referred to as the permanent war economy articulated and defended by the “semi-warriors” dominating U.S. foreign policy in each administration since World War II. These semi-warriors gained influence after the Truman Administration accepted recommendations in National Security Document Number 68 (1950), which recommended that defense spending should always have priority over all other government spending. NSC 5412, approved by President Eisenhower, gave legitimacy to covert operations around the world allowing any president to “plausibly deny” any connections with such operations. Subsequently virtually each president proclaimed a doctrine--Eisenhower for the Middle East, Carter for the Persian Gulf, Reagan to rollback “the evil empire,” Clinton for “humanitarian interventions” and Bush for “preemptory attacks”-- justifying more and more military spending.

The Obama administration, through speeches and actions has constructed what might be called “the Obama Doctrine.” First, as the last remaining superpower and the beacon of hope for the world, the United States once again reserves the right and responsibility to intervene militarily to enhance human rights around the world. Second, U.S. humanitarian military interventions will be carried out from time to time with our friends. Third, new technologies such as drones will allow these interventions to occur without “boots on the ground.” They will be cheaper in financial and human cost (mostly for American troops). Finally, assassinations and covert killings have made it clear that the Obama Doctrine overrides recognized judicial proceedings and the sanctity of human life.

Since the establishment of the permanent war economy in the 1940s millions of proclaimed “enemies” have been killed and seriously injured, mostly in the Global South. Permanent physical and psychological damage has been done to U.S soldiers, predominantly poor and minorities as they too are victims of war. In addition, military spending has distorted national priorities and invested U.S. financial resources in expenditures that do not create as many jobs as investments in construction, education, or healthcare. And the permanent war economy has created a culture that celebrates violence, objectifies killing, dehumanizes enemies, and exalts super-patriotism through television, music, video games, and educational institutions.

These issues need to be more vigorously related to those raised by the grassroots campaigns that have sprung up to defend worker’s and women’s rights, oppose growing income and wealth inequality, and defense of working people’s homes from foreclosures. A long time ago in reference to the massive U.S. war in Southeast Asia and desperate needs of workers at home Dr. Martin Luther King described the fundamental connections that peace activists and all progressives must pursue: *“I speak of the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home, and death and corruption in Vietnam.”*

Saturday, February 11, 2012

ON PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

I teach about United States foreign policy from the 1940s until the Obama Administration. I do briefly discuss the emergence of the United States as a world power in the 1890s, the so-called Spanish American War and the crushing of liberation forces in both Cuba and the Philippines, and date the onset of the Cold War with the Russian Revolution and Western intervention of military forces to overthrow the new Bolshevik regime in 1917. But my narrative is largely about the period of the Cold War and its implications for United States foreign policy since 1991.

This week I just began to discuss the foreign policy of the Eisenhower Administration. I tell the students that the trajectory of United States policy throughout much of its history is imperial but that within that general characterization different administrations have varied in their approach to the world.

What is interesting about the Eisenhower era is that the president projected competing images of imperial America. He did say upon assuming office that “every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies...a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” This speech made in the spring of 1953, included a plea for East-West dialogue and a diminution of the escalating tensions between the two powers, the Soviet Union and the United States. Of course, many of us remember with fondness Eisenhower’s “farewell address” warning of the encroachment of a “military-industrial complex” on American life.

But as historian Blanche Wiesen Cook pointed out in her important book, *The Declassified Eisenhower*, 1984, the president, while passionate about avoiding a third world war, articulated and authorized very contradictory policies. Wiesen Cook reports on a document, National Security Council Document 5412, that led to policies the president adopted (they were foreshadowed by the interventionism and covert operations launched by the Truman administration in the late 1940s). The language of NSC 5412 is as contemporary as today’s news.

NSC 5412 recommended that the Eisenhower Administration continue its “overt” diplomacy, including calls for peace with the former Soviet Union. In addition, however, diplomacy should be supplemented, it suggested, by “covert operations.” Central Intelligence Agency activities should be authorized to “create and exploit troublesome problems for International Communism.” Activities should be approved to further induce suspicion and conflict between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, exacerbate tensions inside Eastern Europe, and impair the image of the Soviet Union and “International Communism” every place in the world, including inside non-Communist nations where left political movements may hold some legitimacy.

In short every effort should be made to “develop underground resistance and facilitate covert and guerrilla operations and ensure availability of those forces in the event of war.” Specifically NSC 5412 asserted such operations should include “...propaganda, political action; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition; escape and evasion and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states or groups including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation groups, support of indigenous and anti-Communist elementsand deception plans and operations.” (Wiesen Cook, 183).

As I was lecturing on this material, I was most taken by the recommendation that U.S. covert operations should be carried out in such a way that “U.S. government responsibility for them is not evident and if uncovered the U.S. government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them.”

At the time that NSC 5412 was still secret, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles was proclaiming a policy of “liberation” which promised to “rollback” Communist regimes we abhorred. In addition, he made it clear that we might use “massive retaliation,” or nuclear weapons, to defend against the scourge of “International Communism.”

The rest of my course will describe United States policies in Iran, Guatemala, Hungary, and Cuba in the 1950s; the continuation of militarism on the Korean Peninsula, the escalating war in Vietnam, and U.S. policies toward Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Chile. When we get to the 1980s and beyond materials will be presented about Afghanistan, Iraq, Venezuela, and in our own day ongoing support for repression of the Palestinian people, a NATO war on Libya, and claims about Iran producing nuclear weapons. Attention will be given to the U.S. global presence reflected in 700 bases in 38 countries supplemented by private contract armies everywhere and a military budget that is half that of the world.

In a recent example of media complicity with government distortion, Howard Kurtz, a television pundit who moderates a show critiquing the media, reported that a West Coast radio station played a narrative by a man claiming to have been a soldier in Iraq who killed numerous innocent civilians. The soldier’s background was checked with the Pentagon. The Army declared it had no record that a person with the soldier’s name had been in Iraq. For Kurtz, the case was closed. If the Pentagon declares it has no record of the soldier in question, the media report of atrocities committed by the soldier must have been false.

So I have to conclude from my own lectures that the historical record of United States foreign policy is defended by repeated lies; for example about who we were protecting in Korea and if two U.S. vessels in Vietnamese waters were attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats. In addition, the foreign policy establishment, both government and media, claimed that Juan Bosch and Salvador Allende were agents of International Communism,

that Palestinians had no claim to the land from which they were ejected, and anti-government rebels in Afghanistan were freedom fighters. Both government spokespersons and the media communicated uncritically the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. To assist misrepresentations organizations funded by the National Endowment for Democracy proclaim that they in fact represent the interests of the people in countries in which they covertly operate.

Therefore, ever since the onset of the Cold War, as NSC 5412 codified in 1954, United States foreign policy decision-makers authorized covert operations, which if uncovered would allow them to “plausibly disclaim any responsibility.” The Kurtz example suggests that the media will readily collaborate with such government misrepresentations.

Documents such as NSC 5412, the historical record of United States foreign policy, and news information about it, leaves little reason to believe what the American people are told by their government about its role in the world.