The Wars in Our Schools
An Ex-Army Ranger Finds a New Mission

By Rory Fanning

Early each New Year’s Day I head for Lake Michigan with a handful of friends. We look for a quiet stretch of what only six months earlier was warm Chicago beach. Then we trudge through knee-deep snow in bathing suits and boots, fighting wind gusts and hangovers. Sooner or later, we arrive where the snowpack meets the shore and boot through a thick crust of lake ice, yelling and swearing as we dive into near-freezing water.

It took me a while to begin to understand why I do this every year, or for that matter why for the last decade since I left the military I’ve continued to inflict other types of pain on myself with such unnerving regularity. Most days, for instance, I lift weights at the gym to the point of crippling exhaustion. On summer nights, I sometimes swim out alone as far as I can through mats of hairy algae into the black water of Lake Michigan in search of what

By Denny Riley

It was 1966 and I spent a year of nights in the target room of a fighter wing whose mission was to bomb North Vietnam into irrelevance. The bombing had begun 10 months before, so I expected everything significant would already be blown to bits when I arrived, but that was not so. Hanoi and Haiphong were off limits to attack, as were many railyards and bridges, all MIG bases, SAM and AAA sites, unless they engaged our birds and the men who flew them. Many targets that seemed obvious were designated JCS, for Joint Chiefs of Staff, and were not to be molested unless the JCS said so. That surprised me when I first reported to the target room, although I was in for bigger surprises than that one.

The work was Top Secret. Before I was shipped out to the fighter wing, I’d spent two years waging the Cold War in the target room of a Strategic Air Command bomb wing at an airbase out on the northern prairie. Our nuclear weapons were aimed at the Soviet Union and rested on a hair trigger that if pulled would knock out civilization in one eyeball-melting moment. In the target room we compiled and constructed the strip charts, radar photos, checkpoint coordinates, call signs and all target information needed to navigate our bombers from here to there. It all went into a black leather satchel, one for each bomber. We called it the Bomb Run Insert or BRI. It was revised regularly and stud-

Designated Ground Zero

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Refusing Hateful Rhetoric

My best friend in California comes from a Pakistani Muslim family. She and her children are bilingual and speak perfect English. (By the way, I wonder how many hateful Islamophobes speak two languages?) Last fall, she called me with tears in her eyes and hurt in her voice. She said her 12-year-old son got into a fistfight at school that day. A kid had been taunting him, calling him all kinds of names. The slurs were clearly picked up from the kid’s parents, and the bully even openly bragged about being a fan of a certain Republican presidential candidate. My friend’s son is a kind and gentle soul who avoids confrontation. But this day, physically threatened, with the teachers consistently failing to prevent it, he decided he had no choice but to protect himself.

The hateful rhetoric against Muslims currently permeating the public sphere is dangerous on many levels. On one level, boycotting governments that practiced racism was seen as a moral imperative, regardless of the eventual outcome.

Of course, countries like Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa only made life worse for their oppressed peoples. But both nations eventually collapsed, in part because they were seen as pariah states and rejected by the rest of the world.

Unfortunately, our government is reacting to the current boycott of Israeli products in the worst way possible, by targeting Muslim Americans and passing laws criminalizing human rights campaigns. Our New York State Legislature has even introduced laws identifying boycotts as illegal, with penalties for nonprophits and businesses that refuse to buy from Israel.

Greedy politicians, flush with Israeli lobby cash, are eagerly dismantling our First Amendment rights. Apartheid in Israel is undermining our democracy here at home.

Fred Nagel
Veterans For Peace
Rhinebeck, NY

Questions to Make Your Head Hurt

This issue of Peace In Our Times contains some disturbing questions—the kind that can challenge your world view, give you a cognitive dissonance headache, maybe even make you angry.

Are our soldiers heroes? Is there anything noble about war? Can it ever bring justice?

Was invading Afghanistan wrong? What would “winning” the war against ISIS look like?

Is the U.S. military a terrorist organization? Is it run by radical extremists?

Does the war on terrorism kill more civilians than terrorism?

Is the United States an imperialist power?

Is our violence a response to the violence directed at us or the cause of that violence? Has the United States practiced genocide?

Should the United States apologize to Cuba?

Defining democracy? If that list doesn’t give you a headache or make you angry, take it to your next family gathering and ask your Uncle Frank what it does for him.

These are the kinds of questions that almost never get asked outside of antiwar activist meetings or conversations. They’re the kind of questions that don’t get asked in most classrooms except on that rare day when a veteran is the guest speaker.

And yet they are the questions that go straight to much of the misery and suffering in this world; the questions that go straight to the fact that youth in this country lucky enough to go to college graduate with soul-crushing debt, that black infant mortality in our big cities is as bad as in the poorest African nations, that we have a Fourth World public transportation system, that we are rushing to the year when the glaciers are gone and the planet broils.

“Oh, c’mion now” your uncle says, “do you have to be so negative?”

No … no, you don’t. But to avoid asking such questions, to not want to know the answers, is to live in Disneyland, Uncle Frank.

—Mike Ferner
The Lie of Patriotism

By Chris Hedges

When Rory Fanning, a burly veteran who served in the 2nd Army Ranger Battalion and was deployed in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2004, appeared at the Donald Trump rally in Chicago in March he was wearing the top half of his combat fatigues. As he moved through the crowd, dozens of Trump supporters shouted greetings such as “Welcome home, brother,” and “Thank you for your service.” Then came the protest that shut down the rally. Fanning, one of the demonstrators, pulled out a flag that read “Vets Against Racism, War and Empire.”

“Immediately someone threw a drink on me,” he said when I interviewed him on my teleSUR show, Days of Revolt. “I got hit from behind in the head three or four times. It was quite the switch, quite the pivot on me. Questioning the narrative, questioning Donald Trump’s narrative, and I was suddenly out of their good graces.”

Nationalists do not venerate veterans. They venerate veterans who read from the approved patriotic script. America is the greatest and most powerful country on earth. Those we fight are depraved barbarians. Our enemies deserve death. God is on our side. Victory is assured.

Our soldiers and Marines are heroes. Deviate from this cant, no matter how many military tours you may have served, and you become despicable. The vaunted patriotism of the right wing is about self-worship. It is a raw lust for violence. It is blind subservience to the state. And it is depraved. The vaunted patriotism of the right wing is about self-worship. It is a raw lust for violence. It has no ethics.

“My name is Mike Hanes and I am with the San Diego chapter of Veterans For Peace. After my experiences in the Iraq invasion as a Force Recon Marine, I came to the conclusion that the glory, idealism, and patriotism that was sold to us growing up, and later as service members, was to perpetuate an elite agenda of militarism, profit, and resource exploitation. I now see war simply as a means to extract/secure resources, ensure industrial profits, and keep the populace in a perpetual state of fear. War is the most insane creation that humanity has ever invented! It ensures a position of de-evolution rather than a state of evolution. We want our next generation to be better than us, not in a state of regression. As we move forward in the 21st century, it is vitally important for us to elevate our consciousness and understanding of human behavior in order to promote values that are in line with peaceful problem-solving. A great place for us to start is with ourselves. Trying to be more empathetic rather than judgmental. Giving of ourselves a little more. Lending a helping hand to others. This is the premise of post-traumatic growth for all people, rebuilding and strengthening the individual and those around you. In an age of rapid technological advancement and information sharing, we have the capability to both shift our values quickly and make war a thing of the past. It is time to transcend the war mentality and bring humanity together. So how do we create a world of peace? Martin Luther King Jr. stated that “those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war.” In the two-year period I have been with Veterans For Peace, I have seen great organization from this group of dedicated men and women. To follow that up, the great futurist Buckminster Fuller stated that “you never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” This reality hits us hard in an old outdated socioeconomic system based on competition, scarcity, strategic advantage, and the priority of profit over human wellbeing.

Today in the 21st century, we have the capability to do much better and we must. I encourage all veterans and peacemakers, young and old, to think out of the box in creating that new model of cooperation and sustainability; to band together being a voice for logic, reason, and sanity in making global peace a reality. May peace prevail, Michael Hanes

Mike Hanes was a Recon Marine during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He strives to alleviate poverty and global suffering due to scarcity and war, putting his efforts into efficient technical solutions such as hydroponic food production, and other intelligent resource management principles. He also helps combat veterans in the transition process, encouraging them to become problem-solvers. He is the creator of Forager Mike’s superfoods and Dang Hot Sauce (foragermikes.com).
New Mission

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I can only describe as a feeling of falling.

A few years ago, I walked across the United States with 50 pounds on my back for the Pat Tillman Foundation in an obsessive attempt to rid myself of “my” war. On the weekends, I clean my house similarly obsessively. And it’s true, sometimes I drink too much.

In part, it seems, I’ve been in search of creative ways to frighten myself, apparently to relive the moments in the military I said I never wanted to go through again—or so a psychiatrist told me.

According to that doctor, I’m desperately trying to recreate adrenaline-fraught moments like the one when, as an Army Ranger, I jumped out of an airplane at night in a remote valley in Afghanistan. Or when I was arrested by the military at two in the morning, a time I had never before seen, not sure if I would be shot at as I hit the ground. Or I’m trying to recreate the energy I felt leaping from a Blackhawk helicopter, night vision goggles on, and storming my way into some nameless Afghan family’s home, where I would proceed to throw an empty sandbag over someone’s head and lead him off to a U.S.-controlled, Guantánamo-like prison in my own country.

This doctor says it’s common enough for my unconscious to want to relive the feeling of learning that my friend had just been blown up by a roadside bomb while on patrol in Afghanistan, a time when most normal people are sleeping. Somehow, at the oldest hours, my mind considers it perfectly appropriate to replay the times when rockets landed near my tent at night in a remote valley in Afghanistan. Or when I was arrested by the military after going AWOL as one of the first Army Rangers to try to say no to participation in George W. Bush’s Global War on Terror.

I’m aware that my postwar urge for limits-testing is not atypical of the home-front experiences of many who went to war in Afghanistan, Iraq and, for some of them, judging by the soaring suicide rates among Global War on Terror vets, the urge has proven so much more extreme than mine.

More than a decade after leaving the army as a conscientious objector, I can finally own up to the terror of the home-front experiences I remember from my own time in the military, and from which most normal people are sleeping. Somehow, at the oldest hours, my mind considers it perfectly appropriate to replay the times when rockets landed near my tent at night in a remote valley in Afghanistan. Or when I was arrested by the military after going AWOL as one of the first Army Rangers to try to say no to participation in George W. Bush’s Global War on Terror.

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I can hardly restrain my amazement. The kids are still with me. I’m now explaining how the U.S. military handed out thousands of dollars to anyone willing to identify alleged members of the Taliban and how, the most technologically advanced and powerful military from doing just what it wanted to. “I remember,” I tell them, “powerful military from doing just what the Taliban or al-Qaeda, but because a neighbor had a grudge against them. Most of the people we targeted had no connection to the Taliban at all. Some even pledged allegiance to the U.S. occupation, but that didn’t matter. They still ended up with hoods over their heads in indefinite because it made an excellent raid houses based on this information. “I later came to find out that this intelligence, if you could call it that, was rooted in a kind of desperation.”

I explain why an Afghan in abject poverty, looking for ways to support his family, might be ready to finger almost anyone in return for access to the deep wells of cash the U.S. military could call on. In a world where factories are few, and office jobs scarce indeed, people will do anything to survive. They have to.

I point out how unbearably alien Afghan culture must seem to American military officials. Few speak a local language. No Americans I ever ran into knew anything about the culture of the people we were trying to bribe. Too often we broke down doors and snatched Afghans from their homes not because of their ties with either the Taliban or al-Qaeda, but because a neighbor had a grudge against them. Most of the people we targeted had no connection to the Taliban at all. Some even pledged allegiance to the U.S. occupation, but that didn’t matter. They still ended up with hoods over their heads in some godforsaken prison.”

I can tell that the kids are truly paying attention, so I let it all out. “The Taliban had surrendered a few months before I arrived in Afghanistan in late 2002, but that wasn’t good enough for our politicians back home and the generals giving the orders. Our job was to draw people back into the fight.”

Two or three students let out genuine soft gasps as I describe how my company orders. Our job was to draw people back from the deep wells of cash the U.S. military could call on. In a world where factories are few, and office jobs scarce indeed, people will do anything to survive. They have to.

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Two or three students let out genuine soft gasps as I describe how my company of Rangers occupied a village school and our commander cancelled classes there indefinitely because it made an excellent staging point for the troops—and there wasn’t much a village headmaster in rural Afghanistan could say to dissuade history’s most technologically advanced and powerful military from doing just what it wanted to. “I remember,” I tell them, “watching two fighting-age men walk by the school we were occupying. One of them didn’t show an acceptable level of deference to my first sergeant, so we grabbed them. We threw the overly confident guy in one room and his friend in another, and the guy who didn’t smile at us properly heard a gunshot and thought, just as he was meant to, that we had just killed his friend for not telling us what we wanted to hear and that he might be next.”

“That’s like torture,” one kid half-whispers.

I talk about why I’m more proud of leaving the military than of anything I did while in it. “I signed up to prevent another 9/11, but my two tours in Afghanistan made me realize that I was making the world less safe. We know now that a majority of the million or so people killed since 9/11 have been innocent civilians, people with no stake in the game and no reason to fight until, often enough, the U.S. military baited them into it by killing or injuring a family member who more often than not was an innocent bystander.”

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“Did you know,” I continue, quoting a statistic cited from University of Chicago political scientist Robert Pape, “that from 1980 to 2003, there were 343 suicide attacks around the world, and at most 10 percent were anti-American inspired. Since 2004, there have been more than 2,000, over 91 percent against U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries. I didn’t want to be part of that, so I left.”

of them, 45 percent African-American and 50 percent Latino—of any school district in the country. And maybe so many of these kids are attentive exactly because the last thing JROTC instructors are likely to be discussing is the realities of war, including the staggering number of homeless Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. They know of the promise of an uplifting future. They know next to nothing, for instance, about our recent history in Iraq and Afghanistan, or our permanent state of war in the greater Middle East and increasingly in Africa. When I ask why so many of them signed up for the JROTC program, they talk about “leadership” opportunities and “structure” for their lives. They are focused, as I was, on having college paid for or “seeing the world.” Some say they are in JROTC because they didn’t want to take gym class. One offers this honest assessment: “I don’t know, I just am. I haven’t given it much thought.”

As I grill them, they grill me. “What does your family think about your leaving the military?” one asks.

“Well,” I respond, “we don’t talk about it too much. I come from a very pro-military family and they prefer not to think of what we are doing overseas as wrong. I think this is why it took me so long to speak honestly in public about my time in the military.”

“Did other factors weigh on your decision to talk openly about your military experience, or was it just fear of your family’s response?” an astute student asks.

I answer as honestly as I can: “Even though, as far as I know, I did something no one in the Rangers had yet done in the post-9/11 era—the psychological and physical vetting process for admission to the Ranger Regiment makes the likelihood of a Ranger questioning the mission and leaving the unit early unlikely—I was intimidated. My chain of command had me leaving the military looking over my shoulder. They made it seem as if they... continued on page 14...
Violence Always Comes Home

By Arun Kundnani

The promise of the “global war on terror” was that it was “better to fight them there than here,” as President George W. Bush put it. That promise brought mass violence to Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Yemen, and Somalia—in the name of peace in the West. It was essentially an old colonial formula of security at home sustained by a hidden system of violence in the periphery—where routine extrajudicial killing is normalized.

That killing is given a veneer of legality by the “Authorization to Use Military Force” that the U.S. Congress passed in the days after 9/11, which already defined the whole world as a battlefield in the “War on Terror.” President Obama continues to rely on this authorization for his drone-killing program.

Under President Obama, the War on Terror became a matter of bureaucratic routine, undramatic and unopposed. He was elected on a wave of opposition to Bush’s War on Terror, but he failed to take the United States in a fundamentally different direction. That neutered most of the remaining opposition and made permanent what had been presented as a “state of emergency.” Neoconservatives invented the terror war but Obama liberalized it; at which point, mainstream journalists stopped asking questions.

Take, for example, a March 7, 2016, report in The New York Times on a drone bombing in Somalia that killed 150 people. In the article, it is not called a bombing but a “strike.” A “strike” is an appropriate word for a punch in the face, not for a bombing that kills 150 people.

And the people killed were, according to The New York Times, not killed but “removed.” Apparently this “strike” was “precision-guided,” as the White House says that avoiding civilian casualties is a “very very high priority.” The truth is the military has no idea how many civilians are being killed. Nevertheless, the White House says this bombing is a “good example” of how the U.S. military can work together with other governments.

Contrast that language with the language we use to describe another form of violence that also kill civilians, but in European and American cities rather than in East Africa. This violence is not labeled a “strike” but a “terrorist attack.” The perpetrators are “terrorists,” “extremists,” “radicalized.” They “hate our values.” The consequences of their terrorist violence is documented extensively: stories of victims and survivors are sought out and broadcast continuously on every channel, printed in every newspaper. We are mesmerized by this violence, even as the violence of our own government remains invisible.

Indeed, this is the effect of words like “terrorism,” “extremism,” “radicalization”: to make us separate in our minds their killing of civilians from our killing of civilians. Because, almost by definition, our own violence can never be called “terrorism” or “extremism.” We never ask whether we have become “radicalized,” since the end of the Vietnam war, we no longer see many pictures or hear stories of the killings that result from our bombs. There are no human beings under the bombs. There is no documentation of the effects of our violence. We know that last year we dropped 22,110 bombs in Iraq and Syria. The Pentagon says these bombs “likely” killed only six civilians, along with “at least” 25,000 Islamic State fighters. The true number of civilian deaths, though, is likely to be in the thousands as well.

We all know the War on Terror kills more civilians than terrorism does, but we tolerate this because it is “their” civilians being killed in places we imagine to be far away.

All empires require violence to sustain themselves, and the violence perpetrated overseas by imperial powers always flows back, in one form or another, to the ‘homeland.’

Since the end of the Vietnam war, violence also always takes on a racial character. The British Empire, for example, relied upon racist ideology to maintain its authority, both domestically and in colonial settings, particularly in the face of resistance to its rule. Blacks and South Asians from the colonies who settled in Britain after the Second World War encountered the racism that imperialism had fostered there, even after the British Empire itself no longer existed.

The U.S. Empire is no different in this respect. When we think of racism in the
New Veteran-Led Campaign Challenges Islamophobia

By Brian J. Trautman

Violence against U.S. Muslims is growing faster than at any time since 9/11; assaults, including shootings and vandalism, on Muslim individuals and their places of worship have tripled since the Paris and San Bernardino terror attacks. According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), last year set a record for the highest number of incidents targeting U.S. mosques.

Hostility toward Muslims because of their religious faith is fundamental to the root and expression of Islamophobia. A 2017 report by the Runnymede Trust defined Islamophobia as “an outlook or worldview involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination.” The report also identified eight common misconceptions about Islam, such as a belief that the religion is inferior, primitive, and barbaric and embodies a political ideology rather than a true religious faith. For these reasons, among others, it can be argued that Islamophobia is a form of racism.

The hate propaganda and political demagoguery observed in the current presidential election season has fueled Islamophobia and contributed to the sharp rise in hate crimes. Sadly, it is quite possible that the anti-Muslim responses to the Brussels terror attacks from Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and others may have incited more Islamophobia before more innocent Muslims are targeted and harmed.

There are about 3 million Muslims in the United States and more than 1.6 billion worldwide. They have the same right to religious freedom, freedom from fear, and human dignity as members of any other religion, particularly in a nation that holds itself as a beacon of hope and the “Land of the Free.” As citizens, we have a moral responsibility to act to protect and preserve these rights. There is no room for apathy or complacency on this matter.

Determined to defy and challenge Islamophobia before more innocent Muslims are targeted and harmed, Veterans For Peace (VFP), working closely with Iraq Veterans Against the War (IWAY), has organized a campaign called Veterans Challenge Islamophobia. This national campaign is a broad-based, action-oriented effort calling on military veterans everywhere to defend the values of religious freedom, equality, and individual rights embodied in the U.S. Constitution. The campaign strives to prevent further abuse of our Muslim neighbors while building strong, positive relationships with Muslim communities to help guard them against hate-motivated threats and behavior.

VFP understands that terror groups like ISIL do not speak for Islam and, in fact, the vast majority of ISIL’s victims are Muslims. To quote Muslim Navy veteran and VFP member Nate Terani, ISIL’s atrocities represent “utter cowardice carried out by thugs who know NO religion except violence and destruction. They are NOT members of my faith, which preaches the sanctity of creation.” In a recent op-ed, Paul K. Chappell, retired Army captain and a member of VFP’s advisory board, argues that ISIL deliberately provokes Islamophobia for the purposes of recruitment. The terror organization requires two specific conditions before this objective can be fulfilled: “It needs to dehumanize the people it kills, and it also needs Western countries to dehumanize Muslims.” Chappell contends that ISIL “commits horrible atrocities against Westerners because it wants us to overreact by stereotyping, dehumanizing, and alienating Muslims.” Islamophobia, therefore, has the real potential of strengthening ISIL, especially if left unchallenged.

Besides being used as a mechanism to denigrate Muslim Americans, Islamophobia has been employed as a vehicle to vilify Muslims in foreign lands, functioning as a convenient tool for lawmakers pushing to reject war refugees from the Middle East or as a pretext for sending more military troops to the region. VFP also believes that the pro-torture rhetoric of several presidential candidates is linked to Islamophobia, a position that VFP has articulated publicly. The ongoing vilification and targeting of Muslims both here and abroad demonstrates the urgent need for, and importance of, the Veterans Challenge Islamophobia campaign.

The formal statement of the campaign reads as follows:

“We are U.S. military veterans, many of whom saw combat in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam, who are appalled by the current spate of bigotry, racism, and hatred expressed toward Muslims, the huge majority of whom are law-abiding and productive citizens.

“Bigotry and racism violate all of the values we believed we were defending during our military service.”

‘Bigotry and racism violate all of the values we believed we were defending during our military service.’

At the end of February, VFP sponsored Muslims Are Not Our Enemy, a rally outside the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, New England’s largest mosque. The campaign has inspired the hashtag #VetsVsHate, a movement of veterans who have posted personal messages of solidarity to social media and held nonviolent protests at political events nationwide. In South Carolina, Alabama, Nevada, and Arizona veterans have displayed banners with slogans such as “Veterans to Mr. Trump: End Hate Speech Against Muslims” and “We Stand With Our Muslim Brothers and Sisters.” During some of these protests, several veterans were accosted and roughed up by security officials and belligerent political supporters.

The attempts to manufacture fear and hatred of Muslims in our society must be stopped. All veterans, whether or not they agree with VFP on other issues, can be prominent and influential leaders in the struggle against Islamophobia and in persuading their fellow Americans to oppose hate.

Brian Trautman is a post-Cold War Army veteran who serves on the VFP national board of directors. He teaches peace studies and economics at Berkshire Community College in western Massachusetts and resides near Albany, N.Y. He is on Twitter @BriTraut.
Army Chaplain Resigns to Protest Use of Assassin Drones

By Ann Wright

U.S. Army Reserve Chaplain Captain Christopher John Antal resigned from the U.S. Army Reserves on April 12, 2016, in opposition to U.S. policies regarding militarized drones, nuclear weapons, and preventive war. Antal stated he could not serve as a chaplain for an “empire” and could not “reconcile his duty to protect and defend America and its constitutional democracy and his commitment to the core principles of his religious faith including justice, equity and compassion and the inherent worth and dignity of every person” with policies of the United States.

His letter of resignation stated that he resigned because he could not support “unaccountable killing” through the U.S. armed drone policy and the executive branch claiming “the right to kill anyone, anywhere on earth, at any time, based on secret evidence, in a secret process, undertaken by unidentified officials.”

Antal also cited his opposition to the U.S. nuclear weapons policy, calling it a policy of “preventive war, permanent military supremacy and global power projection” in what he calls “imperial overreach through extra-constitutional authority and impunity from international law.”

From September 2012 through February 2013, Antal continued on next page …

Violence

United States, we tend to think primarily of its domestic history. But, especially since the beginning of the 20th century, American racism has also been bound up with empire.

Specifically, since the end of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy planners have regarded the Middle East as their most troublesome territory, a region where resistance seems to be especially strongly felt, particularly against the United States’ key regional ally, Israel. Following the example of European imperial powers, large sections of U.S. public and cultural elite have turned to racialized ways of explaining resistance to its authority. Rather than seeing the Palestinian movement, for example, as rooted in a struggle against military occupation and for human rights, it has been more convenient to think that Arabs are inherently fanatical. In other words, the problem is their culture, not our politics.

With the War on Terror, that rhetoric was generalized to Muslims as a whole: their religion seen as somehow especially prone to terrorist violence. The U.S. government’s own violence—torture, drone bombings, and military occupations, which result in many times more deaths than “jihadist terrorism”—can then be more easily defended.

Thus, one of the functions of Islamophobia is to give us an apparent explanation of the violent conflicts that are our empire’s own to understand and confront. It simultaneously involves itself in, an explanation that enables us to avoid confronting the fact that we are an empire, and instead locate the source of that violence in a barbaric culture, with a fixed and inherently violent nature. The imperialist violence upon which U.S.-led capitalism depends cannot be acknowledged in liberal society, so it is transferred onto the personality of the Muslim and seen as emanating from outside ourselves. Imperial violence is then only a proportionate response to the inherently aggressive and threatening nature of the fanatical Muslim enemy. By screening out resistance in this way, a Western self-image of innocence and beneficence can be maintained.

This Islamophobic logic also leads us to misunderstand the nature of enemies such as ISIS. The young people who travel from Europe and the United States to Syria to volunteer for ISIS are not driven primarily by religious extremism, but by an image of war between the West and Islam. Theirs is a narrative of two fixed identities engaged in a global battle: truth and justice on one side, lies, depravity and corruption on the other.

ISIS recruits are not corrupted by ideology but by the end of ideology: They have grown up in the era of Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history,” of no alternatives to capitalist globalization. They have known no critique, only conspiracy theory, and are drawn to apocalyptic rather than popular struggle. Nevertheless, for all its lack of actual political content, the ISIS narrative of a global war against the West feels to its adherents like an answer to the violence of racism, poverty, and empire.

This means that the most appropriate response to ISIS is to see it as a symptom of the “normal” functioning of the modern, global system, rather than as an external element corrupting the system from outside or from the pre-modern past. Its use of social media, its rejection of the national borders of the 20th century, and its linkages to the petroleum economy all demonstrate that ISIS is a child of globalization.

ISIS is certainly a monster, but a monster we helped to make. It was born in the chaos and carnage that followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Its sectarian ideology and funding have come from the Saudi and Gulf ruling elites, our closest regional allies after Israel. Russia and Iran have also played their role, propping up the Bashar al-Assad regime—responsible for far more civilian deaths than ISIS—and prolonging the war in Syria that enables ISIS to thrive. Meanwhile, the groups that have been most effective in fighting ISIS—the Kurdish militia—are designated as terrorists by Western governments because they are considered threats to our ally Turkey.

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Therefore, one of the functions of Islamophobia is to give us an apparent explanation of the violent conflicts that are our empire’s own to understand and confront. It simultaneously involves itself in, an explanation that enables us to avoid confronting the fact that we are an empire, and instead locate the source of that violence in a barbaric culture, with a fixed and inherently violent nature. The imperialist violence upon which U.S.-led capitalism depends cannot be acknowledged in liberal society, so it is transferred onto the personality of the Muslim and seen as emanating from outside ourselves. Imperial violence is then only a proportionate response to the inherently aggressive and threatening nature of the fanatical Muslim enemy. By screening out resistance in this way, a Western self-image of innocence and beneficence can be maintained.

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How then would an appropriate response to the War on Terror look like? We must end the bombings, which only deepen the cycle of violence and reinforce ISIS’s narrative of a war of the West against Islam; and end our support for the regimes that have enabled ISIS’s rise, especially the Saudi elite, the most reactionary influence in the region.

Of course, ISIS’s ideology and governing practices should also be exposed and denounced at every opportunity—for their oppression of women, enslaving of minorities, hatred of freedom, and so on. But to do so from the stance of a global conflict between liberal values and Islamic extremism only leads to the dead end of a militarized identity politics. We should not allow ourselves to be intimidated into ceasing our criticisms of the obvious double standards and contradictions of the War on Terror.

But these points are not enough. The antiwar movement should be bolder in asserting that only an antiracist, anticapitalist, and anticolonial narrative of the War on Terror.

The German philosopher Walter Benjamin stated that behind every fascism is a failed revolution. The same is true of terrorism: ISIS exists because the Arab revolutions of 2011 failed. We must therefore defend the spaces of radical politics, for the right to dream of another world. Counter-terrorism strategies erode such spaces.

Finally, the refugees must be defended, not only because they are victims, but because they carry with them a knowledge of our past failures. We must allow them to teach us about ourselves.

Arun Kundnani is the author of The Empire and the Dominator: Islamicophobia, Extremism, and the American War on Terror. His website is kundnani.org
Chaplain Resigns

… continued from previous page

In May 2010, I was placed into the black hole of solitary confinement for the first time. Within two weeks, I was contemplating suicide.

For 17 hours a day, I sat directly in front of at least two Marine Corps guards seated behind a one-way mirror. I was not allowed to lie down. I was not allowed to lean my back against the cell wall. I was not allowed to exercise. Sometimes, to keep myself from going crazy, I would stand up, walk around, or dance, as “dancing” was not considered exercise by the Marine Corps.

To pass the time, I counted the hundreds of holes in the steel bars in a grid pattern at the front of my cell. My eyes were used to the gaps between the bricks on the wall. I looked at the rough patterns and stains on the concrete floor—including one that looked like a caricature grey alien, with large black eyes and no mouth, that was popular in the 1990s. I could hear the “drip drop drip” of a leaky pipe somewhere down the hall. I listened to the faint buzz of fluorescent lights and the “drip drop drip” of a leaky pipe somewhere down the hall.

For brief periods, every other day or so, I was escorted by a team of at least three guards to an empty basketball court-sized area. There, I was shackled and walked around in circles or figure-eights for 20 minutes. I was not allowed to stand still, otherwise they would take me back to my cell. I was only allowed a couple of hours of visitation each month to see my friends, family, and lawyers, through a thick glass partition in a 4-by-6-foot room. My hands and feet were shackled the entire time.

Federal agents installed recording equipment specifically to monitor my conversations, except with my lawyers.

U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez condemned my treatment as “cruel, inhuman, and degrading,” describing the excessive and prolonged isolation I was placed under for that period of time. However, he didn’t stop there. In a preface he wrote for the 2014 Spanish edition of the Sourcebook on Solitary Confinement, he strongly recommended against any use of solitary confinement beyond 15 days.

As Mendez explains: “Prolonged solitary confinement raises special concerns, because the risk of grave and irreparable harm to the detained person increases with the length of isolation and the uncertainty regarding its duration. In my public declarations on this theme, I have defined prolonged solitary confinement as any period in excess of 15 days. This definition reflects the fact that most of the scientific literature shows that, after 15 days, certain changes in brain functions occur and the harmful psychological effects of isolation can become irreversible.”

Unfortunately, conditions similar to the ones I experienced in 2010–11 are hardly unusual for the estimated 80,000 to 100,000 inmates held in these conditions across the United States every day. In the time since my confinement at Quantico, public awareness of solitary confinement has improved by orders of magnitude. People all across the political spectrum—including some who have never been in solitary or known anyone who has—are now beginning to question whether this practice is a moral and ethical one.

In June 2015, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy called the prison system “overlooked” and “misunderstood,” stating that he welcomes a case that would allow the court to review whether or not solitary confinement violates the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment in the U.S. Constitution.

The evidence is overwhelming that it should be deemed as such: solitary confinement in the United States is arbitrary, abused, and unnecessary in many situations. It is cruel, degrading, and inhumane, and is effectively a “no-touch” torture. We should end the practice quickly and completely.

Chelsea Manning has served three years of a 35-year sentence for leaking secret government documents.
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Ground Zero

… continued from page 1

I worked nights in the target room. We prepared the target materials for the pilots who'd come in for their briefings in the very early hours, long before the sun came up on Southeast Asia. Saigon's decoded message gave us the coordinates, we found the proper maps, drew the perimeter range of enemy defenses, and marked the target coordinates with a small red triangle around a yellow dot. The designated Ground Zero, the DGZ.

Three o'clock one morning I was alone in the target room when an F-105 pilot who that day had drawn an armed-reconnaissance flight walked in and asked if there was anything meaty in his area. Armed-reconnaissance meant his mission was to fly over a designated area of southern Laos, what we called Steel Tiger, and strafe or bomb anything that moved. We joked, "A nun on a bicycle, a boy on a water buffalo," but it was true. Anything that moved whether a nun, a boy, or a farm animal was to be killed.

This pilot hated armed reconnaissance flights. He was tired of flying over farms and jungles and finding nothing. The Laotians hid if they heard an aircraft. He wanted to expend ordnance on something, anything.

I knew of a JCS target that looked like two old barracks beside a dirt road, halfway tucked into the jungle. I showed him the aerial photo of the target, showed him where it was on the map. He didn't take the photo or map with him, though. He told me if he wasn't warned off the target in the briefing he was all set.

It was wrong on every level, even within the confines of believing everything in Laos should be killed, but I gave him the target because he asked what was there and I knew, and I was proud of that, and for a moment I was important in the war.

He flew up there and with 50-millimeter cannons and two 750-pound bombs destroyed the barracks. When he returned, his debriefing created a stir. He'd hit a JCS target without orders to do so. He told the debriefer he saw a dozen soldiers on the road. I stood nearby but he never looked at me, never looked at me again.

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After I got out I came home wanting only to be a civilian, I felt pretty bad about everything I'd done my four years in any way. In any way I looked at it, everything I'd done looked wrong. I was out of the service but couldn't sink my teeth into anything. I'd get fired up then the fire would go out and I'd move on. One day I decided I'd write about the target room. I went to the library. I found a book, Voices from the Plain of Jars, a collection of stories told by Laotians we attacked every day for 11 years. There was a group of four young men who that day had drawn an armed-reconnaissance flight walked in and asked if there was anything meaty in his area. Armed-reconnaissance meant his mission was to fly over a designated area of southern Laos, what we called Steel Tiger, and strafe or bomb anything that moved. We joked, "A nun on a bicycle, a boy on a water buffalo," but it was true. Anything that moved whether a nun, a boy, or a farm animal was to be killed.

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I was hit hard. These were the words of people who lived at the receiving end of the coded messages from Saigon, the people whose generations homes and cemeteries were in the aerial photos, whose lives were lived where I'd drawn a target symbol.

My heart began to race, vision blurred and everything lost color, became grey and black. My breathing felt labored, heavy. I wobbled out of my apartment to the front steps of my building and settled down clutching the book. I was going to die and wanted to be found gripping the truth that killed me.

It took maybe an hour until my body calmed down, but the book coiled within me. I didn't tell anyone what happened. I didn't look for other veterans to talk with. I didn't go to the VA. I kept it to myself. Life meandered along.

I met a girl and life grew better. Fifteen years later I was advertising sales manager for a computer magazine in a three-story brick building in San Francisco.

Three sales people worked for me in cubicles outside my office. Two were basically kids but one, Mark, was one of those hardboiled sales guys who'd seen it all.

I was older than him, and I'd seen a few things too, but somehow I'd arrived at that time with a wonderful wife and two healthy toddlers. One day Mark and I were in my office going over numbers. We relaxed a moment and he asked me what I'd done in the Air Force and when I told him about the war he gave me a hard time about it. He flew up there and with 50-millimeter cannons and two 750-pound bombs destroyed the barracks. When he returned, his debriefing created a stir. He'd hit a JCS target without orders to do so. He told the debriefer he saw a dozen soldiers on the road. I stood nearby but he never looked at me, never looked at me again.

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“How could you do it, man? Why did you even go over there?” As if I hadn’t had those thoughts. As though it wasn’t my life we were talking about but instead a drama that begged the comment of every American.

Giving myself a hard time is different from someone too young to have been in the war giving me a hard time. A day came when he gave me reason to fire him and though firing someone is never pleasant, I was glad to get rid of Mark but I can’t forget him. He was still one of my ads reps when the first Bush threatened Iraq with bombardment unless Iraqi forces quit Kuwait.

Other people in the office were either against bombardment or thought anything our leaders did was okay because the United States does the right thing. I was asked what I thought.

Bombing stopped for me when I got out. I didn’t read war news. Laos had been on my mind until I read Voices from the Plain of Jars, when I backed away from thinking. But they asked, so I told them the Air Force is a terrorist organization that drops bombs from high altitude on civilians, the logical and expedient conclusion of my experience, yet too far-fetched for my educated and scrubbed co-workers. Rather than considering my words or asking me to explain, they stopped including me in conversations.

Vietnam War veterans aren’t received as people who learned a vital truth, but as people who are damaged by...
Banished from Their Own Country

By Lida Dianti

To some U.S. veterans, the tragedy of war is more than the violence or conflict on the ground. It is a shadow that follows them home in the form of unemployment, PTSD, and substance abuse. Noncitizen veterans—despite spending years of their lives defending this country—must not only unpack shellshock but also face the threat of deportation.

Thomas Stock, the Iraq veteran whose reaction was his unabashed statement.

Margaret Stock of Cascadia Cross-Border Law in Anchorage, Alaska, who has represented deported service-members, expressed a common misconception among immigrants and the promise of citizenship that the Constitution and defend the only country he called home. He certainly was “American” enough to serve in the United States military. One in six troopers in George Custer’s 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn was an Irish immigrant. The promise of U.S. citizenship after military service has been a long-standing practice that provided immigrants with a highly valued avenue to naturalization.

The history of military service in America would be significantly different without the inclusion of immigrants and the promise of citizenship that followed.

In recent years, as veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, they find adjusting to civilian life difficult. Many struggle with PTSD and substance abuse as they work to regain a sense of the lives they led before suffering the trauma of war.

It is important to note that naturalization after deployment has long been a benefit provided to servicemen. As early as the Civil War, immigrants have played a pivotal role in the U.S. military. One in six troopers in George Custer’s 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn was an Irish immigrant. The promise of U.S. citizenship after military service has been a long-standing practice that provided immigrants with a highly valued avenue to naturalization.

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In recent years, as veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, they find adjusting to civilian life difficult. Many struggle with PTSD and substance abuse as they work to regain a sense of the lives they led before suffering the trauma of war.

The ACLU of California is partnering with Deported Veterans Support House, a shelter and resource center for deported veterans based in Tijuana, Mexico, on a project to end the unjust deportations of U.S. military veterans. Although a 2011 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) memo provides veterans special consideration in deportation hearings, more often than not, this consideration is ignored or applied inconsistently.

Since January, the ACLU of California has documented 70 cases of veterans deported to countries around the world and is evaluating each case for possible avenues for legal relief to enable these veterans to come home.

“If these men, their deportation is like a life sentence—it means permanent separation from their families, their lives, their livelihoods, and the only country that most of them have ever known.”

Ground Zero

… continued from previous page

A bad experience.

Bush, though, had thrown down his gauntlet and he couldn’t appear soft, and his family’s fortune was drenched in oil, so on January 17, 1991, we began a five-week bombardment of Iraq that destroyed everything an Iraqi family needed to get them through the day. As the bombardment began I was in my office with the door open. Alaa, who had represented deported service-members, came over again on a perfectly decent hippie such as I was overwhelmed. That bombs were falling was too vivid. I was breaking down and I wanted to be alone. I rushed to me head for the stairs. No one saw me head for the stairs. As the bombardment began I was in my office with the door open. Alaa, who had represented deported service-members, came over and said, “I could believe it. It was much too vivid.”

Mark suddenly burst in and blurted, “They started bombing Iraq!”

“We’re not just some foreigners that got deported,” Torres told NPR. “We feel like Americans that have been banished, in exile from the country we love the most.”

It was a great day of solidarity with an Iraq veteran. Thanks to Willie Hager, Jan Ruhman, George Johnson and other vets, supporters of Daniel Torres, and the press. We were waiting to welcome home former Marine Daniel Torres. Daniel came to the United States as a youth with his father. He was raised in Utah where his father worked. He was not at the time of his enlistment a U.S. citizen. He lied about that because he wanted to serve his adopted country and prove his loyalty.

I was later discovered that he was not a citizen and he was eventually deported to Mexico and stayed at the deported veterans house in Tijuana. He was never criminally charged. He was finally given a five-year tourist visa that enabled him to come through the border as we waited. The following day, a hearing was held on application for U.S. citizenship before an immigration judge in San Diego. Torres was represented by an immigration law specialist from the ACLU and was granted U.S. citizenship.

He will return to Mexico to finish his last year in law school and then will return to the United States to attend law school.

By Barry Ladendorf

On April 20, I spent a couple of hours at the San Ysidro boarding crossing from Mexico into the United States along with VFP members Jan Ruhman and George Johnson and other vets, supporters of Daniel Torres, and the press. We were waiting to welcome home former Marine Daniel Torres. Daniel came to the United States as a youth with his father. He was raised in Utah where his father worked. He was not at the time of his enlistment a U.S. citizen. He lied about that because he wanted to serve his adopted country and prove his loyalty.

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While I was at the border, a Homeland Security official who looked like he was ready for combat came over and looked at my VFP of California hat and wanted to know who was sponsoring this event. I said Veterans For Peace. He said, “I’ve heard of Veterans For Peace.” I thought, you’re going to hear more about us.

It was a great day of solidarity with an Iraq veteran.

Barry Ladendorf is president of Veterans For Peace.
Who will you remember on Memorial Day?

By Roger Ehrlich

On a day that began as “Decoration Day” in 1868, with orphans and widows placing flowers on graves of the Confederate and Union dead, we now pretend that only the deaths on “our side” of war are worth remembering.

I remember my British and Austrian grandfathers who fought on opposite sides of WWI, the “War to End All Wars.” I remember how bells rang around the world in mourning of all those who died, in hopes that disarmament would end all wars.

I remember how my grandfather’s service to his country did not protect him from being taken in May 1938 by the Nazis because he spoke out for the rights of all Austrians including Jews. I remember how after enlisting and serving in the U.S. Army in Europe my father found out when he got his files from the FBI and found that his loyalty, like that of his veteran father, was baselessly questioned during the “Red Scare.” And I remember my father opposed the arms race and the Iraq War.

It is natural to first remember those who are closest to us. But in a nation mostly of immigrants we should know better. Combat veterans, civilian victims, and their families are all equally human beings. Honoring and remembering some deaths while ignoring others not only perpetuates war, but also ignores the “moral injuries” of war which some now recognize as a significant cause of veteran suicide.

It is ironic that those of us who did not “give the ultimate sacrifice to protect American Freedom”—those who are not dead and unable to talk—are expected to sit in patriotic approval while pundits—often funded by arms manufacturers—claim that was what it was all about.

On this coming Memorial Day morning Veterans For Peace will be camped in a shady grove near Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. within sight of the Vietnam Wall.

I was there last year and I’ll be there again this year, with the 24-foot tall, touring Swords to Plowshares Memorial Belltower. The Belltower was dedicated by Veterans For Peace on Memorial Day 2014 at the site of the WWI-era belltower in Raleigh, N.C. The inscription on the bronze door says, “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares.”

At rituals when we’ve raised the tower, Jews, Christians, Mus-
lims, and others have recommit-
ted themselves to realizing this
prophecy. Everywhere the tower
has traveled visitors are invited to
add inscriptions and bear witness
to how they, their relatives, and
others close to them have been af-
affected by war. Frequently we re-
cord their story and photograph
them with their plaque. After they
hang it on the tower we invite
them to open the door and ring the
big bell. Often they leave with ex-
pressions of gratitude and tears in
their eyes.

There’s something about the
tower—perhaps the personal in-
scriptions about loss from so
many points of view—that brings
the unexpected. Surprisingly open
conversations with active duty
troops who pause on their morn-
ing run from Arlington Cemetery,
tearful testimony from leather-
jacketed combat veterans—there
for the “Rolling Thunder” rally—
who actually appreciate that there
are inscriptions to Viet Cong vic-
tims of UXO and others in Arabic.
I had my explanation of the tower
translated into Chinese and French
by tour guides whose buses load
and unload nearby. Many clearly
appreciated the inclusiveness and
redemptive message of our tower
compared to the triumphant na-
tionalism of other monuments.

To be on the Mall at dawn by
our tent with the VFP flag flying
overhead, the windblown memo-
rial plaques rippling high on the
tower, and Lincoln Memorial in
the background is a privilege.

Donations, a visit to our table
with literature about VFP, moral
injury, suicide, Agent Orange and
other issues are gratefully wel-
comed.

We have added a 70-foot-long
V-shaped fabric wall to display
some of the 150 “Letters to The
Wall” that were delivered on
Memorial Day 2015. We will set
this up again near the belltower
in Washington to encourage peo-
ple to write more letters and en-
courage “Full Disclosure” about
the many profound and terrible
impacts of the American war in
Vietnam. The new letters, includ-
ing letters sent in to the Vietnam
Full Disclosure project, will be
delivered by VFP members from
around the country on Memorial
Day morning.

Roger Ehrlich is co-creator of
the Swords to Plowshares Me-
memorial Belltower and an associ-
ate member of VFP Chapter 157,
Raleigh, N.C.
New Mission

... continued from page 5
could drag me off to jail or send me back
to the military to be a bullet stopper in the
to Afghanistan. Any time I ever talked
about my service in the Rangers. I did, af-
ter all, like all Rangers, have a secret so-
ciety clearance.” Heads shake. “The mili-
tary and paranoia go hand in hand. So I
kept quiet,” I tell the kids. “I also started
reading books like Anand Gopal’s No
Good Men. Among the greatest and most
brilliant story of our invasion of Afghani-
to myself: no moralism, no regrets, no
way, regardless of what I say. But I swear
maybe all of them—won’t sign up any-
thing that might make them
turn off war.”

A quiet settles over the classroom. Fi-
ally, after a long silence, one of the kids
suddenly says, “I’ve never heard anything
like this before.”

What I am feeling is the other side of
that response. This first experience of
mine talking to America’s future cannon
fodder confirms that, not surprisingly,
the recruiters in our schools aren’t telling
the young anything that might make them
think twice about the glories of military
life.

I leave the school with an incredible
sensc of calm, something I haven’t felt
since my time began in Afghanistan. I
tell myself I want to speak to classrooms
at least once a week. I realize that it took
me 10 years, even while writing a book
on the subject, to build up the courage to
talk openly about my years in the mili-
tary. If only I had begun engaging these
kids earlier instead of punishing myself
for the experience George W. Bush, Dick
Cheney, and their cohorts put me through.

I start making calls, create a website
to advertise my talk, send out word to
rooms of kids. I have nine long months
for the experience of meetings with only 12 schools.
I decide that I’ll even throw in some ex-
tra schools as a bonus. I create a Face-
book page so that teachers and principals
learn about my talk and book me di-
ection. Notices of both my website and
my talk and book me di-
rectly. Notices of both my website and
that page are placed in teacher newslet-
ners and I highlight the Chicago Teachers
Union endorsement in them. I’m think-
ering: slam dunk! I even advertise on mes-
sage boards, spend money on targeted ads
on Facebook, and again reach out to all
my teacher friends.

It’s now April, seven months into the
school year, and only two teachers have
returned the call. One of them tells me
she was afraid someone might think
she was a Ranger in a world that will never, it
seems, be truly postwar. The world, how-
ever, is in no rush to welcome me on my
new mission.

I start making calls, create a website
to advertise my talk, send out word to
be a Ranger in a world that will never, it
seems, be truly postwar. The world, how-
ever, is in no rush to welcome me on my
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In a world without a draft, JROTC’s
school-to-military pipeline is a lifeline for
Washington’s permanent war across the
greater Middle East and parts of Af-
rica. Its unending conflicts are only pos-
sible because kids like those I’ve talked
to in the few classrooms I’ve visited
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sible because kids like those I’ve talked
to in the few classrooms I’ve visited
continue to volunteer.

As a result, the U.S. government has
spent $598 billion on the military, more
than half of its total discretionary budget.
That’s nearly 10 times what it spent on
education. In 2015, we also learned that
the Pentagon continues to pour some $14
billion a year into a fleet of fighter planes
that may never work as advertised. Imagine
the school system we would have in this
country if teachers were compensated as
well as weapons contractors. Confront-
ing the attacks on education in the United
States should also mean, in part, trying to
interrupt that school-to-military pipeline
in places like Chicago. It’s hard to fight
ever work as advertised. Imagine
the school system we would have in this
country if teachers were compensated as
well as weapons contractors. Confront-
ing the attacks on education in the United
States should also mean, in part, trying to
interrupt that school-to-military pipeline
in places like Chicago. It’s hard to fight
endless trillion-dollar wars if kids aren’t
enlisting.

I spoke at a college in Peoria, three
hours south of Chicago. “My brother
hasn’t left the house since returning home
from Iraq,” one of the students told me
with tears in her eyes. “What you said
helped me understand his situation better.
I might have more to say to him now.”

It was the sort of comment that re-
minded me that there is an audience for
what I have to say. I just need to figure
out how to get past the gatekeepers. So
I’ll continue to write about and advertise
my willingness to talk to soon-to-be-mili-
tary-age kids in Chicago.

I’m not giving up, because speaking
honestly about my experiences is now my
therapy. At the end of the day, I need those
students as much as I think they need me.

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Dispatch.com

Rory Fanning walked across the United
States for the Pat Tillman Foundation in
2008–09, following two deployments to
Afghanistan with the 2nd Army Ranger
Battalion. He is a housing and antihar-
mer activist living in Chicago. A member of
Veterans for Peace and the author of Worth Fighting For: An Army Ranger’s
Journey Out of the Military and Across
America (Haymarket Books, 2014). Fol-
low him on twitter @RTFanning.
North of Vietnam

Every generation has its war
the one we fought
the one we fled
or the one we watched from afar
as I watched Vietnam from Canada,
condemning Nixon and his hawks
menacing men with menacing eyes
hair wired to their heads
the unnamed ones
who played the game
with Agent Orange and napalm
and B-52s like Hitchcock’s birds
that swarmed Hanoi at Christmas,
black confetti, sky of bombs
children streaming blood.

There was nothing we could not see
from Canada
across our pristine parallel,
warmed by beer and northern weed
conscripting penicillin
to fight little wars on our behalf,
safe in a permanent Pentagon shade
mining bright uranium
and pasting NORAD like a fig leaf
on every Dakota silo.
The guard we stood was Yorkville,
ribbon of darkness, four strong winds
children teaching parents well
calling all resisters north
four dead, Oh-High-Oh.
The war we fought was sticks on ice
taking the mighty Russians down
three oceans wrapped around us
pillows for our sleep.

We did not mourn those soldiers
much, men as young as we
The Tet Offensive, Rolling Thunder
the ones who died at Hue
or wished they had
when they limped home
to a land no longer theirs,
Rusty Calley—My Lai shame
Okies from Muskegon,
young men, young little girls, three,
they come into a family’s house and there’s
he went on. “Busting in these doors, you
had to kick in doors, place charges in doors
and rushing into these homes and terrorize these people.”

I was in the Iraq invasion,” Hanes said.
“We pushed up into Baghdad and things [became] very real for me when we began to kick in doors, place charges in doors
and rush into these homes and terrorize these people.”

“Our lie is that we could have come to Canada
sleep their tortured jungle sleeps
and settling with such grace
unknotting those long differences
forty years along
see
black flowers writ in granite
under Lincoln’s gaze,
‘that from these honored dead’
under Lincoln’s gaze,
‘from these honored dead’
black flowers writ in granite
under Lincoln’s gaze,
‘that from these honored dead’
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Why BDS Cannot Lose

A flurry of condemnations of the boycott of Israel seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Calls from Western governments, originating from the UK, the United States, Canada, and others, to criminalize the boycott of Israel have hardly slowed the momentum of the pro-Palestinian boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement (BDS). On the contrary, it has accelerated.

It is as if history is repeating itself. Western governments took on the pro-South African anti-apartheid movement, fighting it at every corner and branding its leaders. Nelson Mandela and many of his comrades were called terrorists.

Once he passed away in 2013, top U.S. politicians vied for the opportunity to list the late African leader’s great qualities in their many press conferences, speaking of his commitment to justice and human rights. However, Mandela’s name was not removed from the U.S. terrorism watch list until 2008.

The Reagan administration called the African National Congress—the main platform for the anti-apartheid struggle—a terrorist group, as well. The ANC’s strategy against the apartheid government was “calculated terror,” the administration said in 1986.

Many South Africans will tell you that the fight for equality is far from over, and that the struggle against institutional apartheid has been replaced by equally pressing matters. Corruption, neoliberal economics, and disproportionate allocation of wealth are only a few such challenges.

But aside from those who are still holding on to the repellent dream of racial superiority, the vast majority of humanity looks back at South Africa’s apartheid era with revulsion.

The South Africa experience, which is still fresh in the memory of most people, is now serving as a frame of reference in the struggle against Israeli apartheid in Palestine, where Jews have been designated a privileged race, and Palestinian Muslims and Christians are poorly treated, oppressed, and occupied.

While racism is, unfortunately, a part of life and is practiced, observed, and reported on in many parts of the world, institutionalized racism through calculated governmental measures is only practiced—at least, openly—in a few countries around the world: Burma is one of them. However, no country is as adamant and open about its racially motivated laws and apartheid rules as the Israeli government. Almost every measure taken by the Israeli Knesset that pertains to Arabs is influenced by this mindset: Palestinians must remain inferior, and Jews must ensure their superiority at any cost.

The outcome of Israel’s racist pipe dream has been a tremendous amount of violence, palpable inequality, massive walls, trenches, Jews-only roads, military occupation, and even laws that outlaw the very questioning of these practices.

Yet, the greater its failure to suppress Palestinian resistance and to slow down the flow of solidarity from around the world with the oppressed people, the more Israel labors to ensure its dominance and invest in racial segregation.

“The whole world is against us,” is quite a common response in Israel itself to the international reaction to Israel’s apartheid practices. With time, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and feeds on past notions that are no longer applicable. No matter how many companies divert from Israel—the latest being the world’s largest security corporation G4S—and, no matter how many universities and churches vote to boycott Israel, Israeli society remains entrenched behind the slogan and its disconcerting sense of victimization.

Many Israelis believe that their country is a “villa in a jungle”—a notion that is constantly enforced by top Israeli leaders. Right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is purposefully advancing the crippling fear in his own society. Unable to see the unmistakable crimes he has carried out against Palestinians for years, he continues to perpetuate the idea of the purity of Israel and the wickedness of everyone else.

In February, he spoke of the need to create yet more fences to keep his “villa in the jungle” safe, and, to quote, “to defend ourselves against the wild beasts” in neighboring countries. The statement was made only a few weeks before the launch of the annual Israel Apartheid Week in numerous cities around the world. It is as if the Israeli leader wished to contribute to the global campaign which is successfully making a case against Israel as being an apartheid state that ought to be boycotted.

Israel is, of course, no “villa in the jungle.” Since its inception over the ruins of destroyed and occupied Palestine, it has meted out tremendous violence, provoked wars and harshly responded to any resistance carried out by its victims. Similar to the U.S. and UK designation of Mandela as a “terrorist,” Palestinian resistance and its leaders are also branded, shunned, and imprisoned.

Israel’s so-called “targeted killings”—the assassination of hundreds of Palestinians in recent years—have often been applauded by the United States, norther Israeli allies as victories in their “War on Terror.”

Comforted by the notion that the U.S. and other Western governments are on their side, most Israelis are not worried about exhibiting their racism and calling for more violence against Palestinians. According to a survey released March 8 by the Pew Research Center, nearly half of Israel’s Jewish population wants to expel Palestinians to outside of their historic homeland.

The study was conducted between October 2014 and May 2015—months before the current intifada began in October 2015—and is described as a first-of-its-kind survey, as it reached out to over 5,600 Israeli adults and touched on myriad issues, including religion and politics. Forty-eight percent of all Israeli Jews want to exile half of Israel’s Arab minority; however, the number is significantly higher—71 percent—among those who define themselves as religious.

What options are then left for Palestinians, who have been victimized and ethnically cleansed from their own historic homeland for 68 years, when they are described and treated as “beasts,” killed at will, and suffer under a massive system of apartheid and racial discrimination that has never ceased after all these years?

BDS has, thus far, been the most successful strategy and tactic to support Palestinian resistance and steadfastness while at the same time holding Israel accountable for its progressively worsening policies of apartheid. The main objective behind BDS, an entirely nonviolent movement championed by civil society across the globe, is not to punish ordinary Israelis, but to raise awareness of the suffering of Palestinians and to create a moral threshold that must be achieved if a just peace is ever to be realized.

That moral threshold has already been delineated in the relationship between Palestinians and South Africans, when Mandela himself said, “We know all too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”

He was not trying to be cordial or diplomatic. He meant every word. And, finally, many around the world are making the same connection, and are wholeheartedly in agreement.

Dr. Ramzy Baroud has been writing about the Middle East for over 20 years. He is an internationally syndicated columnist, a media consultant, author of several books and the founder of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza’s Untold Story. His website is ramzybaroud.net.
Cowardice and Exoneration in Kunduz

By Robert Koehler

“The people are being reduced to blood and dust. They are in pieces.”

The doctor who uttered these words still thought the hospital itself was a safe zone. He was with Doctors Without Borders, working in Kunduz, Afghanistan, where the Taliban and government forces were engaged in hellish fighting, and civilians, as always, were caught in the middle. The wounded, including children, had been flowing in all week, and the staff were unrelied in their duties, working an unending shift.

Their week ended at 2 a.m. last Oct. 3 when—as the world knows—a U.S. AC-130 gunship began strafing the hospital, the crew apparently acting on the mistaken belief that this was a Taliban compound. The strike lasted for an hour, continuing even though the humanitarian organization contacted the Pentagon and pleaded that it stop.

A total of 211 shells hit the hospital. The Intensive Care Unit was wiped out. Every patient in the unit except for a 3-year-old girl was killed, some burning to death in their beds. A total of 42 people—patients, staff and doctors—died because of this lethal mistake.

One of the dead was Dr. Osmani, the young doctor quoted above, who had just begun ophthalmology training in Kabul but still worked at the MSF facility in Kunduz on weekends, according to an eyewitness account by Kathleen Thomas, another doctor there, an Australian, who survived.

“Our colleagues didn’t die peacefully like in the movies,” she wrote last month. “They died painfully, slowly, some of them screaming for help that never came, alone and terrified, knowing the extent of their own injuries and aware of their impending death. Countless other staff and patients were injured, limbs blown off, shrapnel rocketed through them, burns, pressure-wave injuries of the lungs, ears and eyes. Many of these injuries have left permanent disability. It was a scene of nightmarish horror that will be forever etched in my mind.”

Some mistake

This is all news again, of course, because the U.S. government, having investigated the incident, has just released a 3,000-page, mostly classified report exonerating itself. This comes as no surprise.

It admitted the bombing was an unfortunate mistake and 16 military personnel involved in the incident have received “administrative actions” as punishment. Also, since the tragedy, the United States has made “condolence payments” to the victims: $6,000 to families of the dead, $3,000 to the injured.

It seems to me all this requires a moment or two of profound silence, as we try to absorb both the tragedy and the absurdity of these events, which unite in a sort of horrific shrug of indifference to the predictable consequences of war.

The New York Times, for instance, informs us: “Still, the release of the investigation’s findings and the announcement of the disciplinary measures were unlikely to satisfy Doctors Without Borders and other human rights groups, which on Friday reiterated their calls for an independent criminal investigation.”

Of course Doctors Without Borders will not be “satisfied” with these findings, as though, my God, any finding or any action whatsoever by the U.S. military—gosh, the payout of six grand per dead Afghan or the stern punishment of a few scapegoats—could bring balance and resolution to the horror Kathleen Thomas describes. Just the use of that word—“satisfied”—trivializes the infliction of suffering, whether intentional or merely recklessly accidental, beyond comprehension.

But this is the language of war, as spoken by those who wage it and those who uncritically report it: a language of implicit moral relativism.

The same Times story, describing the report’s account of what happened, explained: “The aircrew appeared to be confused by the directions from the Americans on the ground in the minutes leading up to the attack. At one point, the crew was told it would need to hit a second target after the strike it was about to commence, and ‘we will also be doing the same thing of softening the target for partner forces,’ that is, Afghans.”

This is the reality: An action that wound up killing 42 hospital workers and patients—men, women and children, some of whom were burned alive in their beds—was instigated in order to “soften the target”...which is nothing less than linguistic exoneration of murder. Or rather, pre-exoneration.

And this is war. This is what the United States allot 54 percent of its annual discretionary spending—some $600 billion—to perpetuate. I’m quite certain this money would be unspendable, and the game called war would be unplayable, if it weren’t for the linguistic pre-exoneration that removes all humanity from those who will die (think: collateral damage) and all responsibility from those who will kill.

But with the exoneration solidly in place, anything goes. Every side in war plays with the instruments of hell. The Times also recently reported that war zone hospitals everywhere are more vulnerable than they’ve ever been and the “rules of war” seem to be in tatters.

[The ‘rules of war’ seem to be in tatters. Maybe this is because war can’t be contained by ‘rules.’]

Maybe this is because war can’t be contained by ‘rules.’

For instance, not only have there been six attacks on hospitals in Aleppo, Syria—perpetrated by both government and rebel forces—in the past week, but also: “In 11 of the world’s war zones, between 2011 and 2014, the International Committee of the Red Cross tallied nearly 2,400 acts of violence against those who were trying to provide health care. That works out to two attacks a day.”

What might “satisfy” Doctors Without Borders or the maimed and grieving victims of the Kunduz tragedy? In my view, nothing less than an American commitment to global demilitarization.

This is called atonement. Robert Koehler is an award-winning Chicago-based journalist and nationally syndicated writer.
U.S. Should Apologize to Cuba, Not the Other Way Around
American anger—and the blockade—was about property rights, not human rights

By Eamonn McCann

I wonder, did President Obama put in a good word for the Lanskys during his visit to Cuba? The family wants its hotel back. Says spokesman Gary Rapoport: “It was through my grandfather’s hard work that the hotel was built. By rights it should be our property.”

The Hotel Riviera epitomized the glamour of an era long gone. Its casino was among the hottest of Havana hotspots, its guest list a roll call of the celebrities of the age—Marlon Brando, Ava Gardner, Marlene Dietrich, Gary Cooper, Errol Flynn, Buster Keaton, and Rocky Marciano, as well as figures such as Winston Churchill. The hotel was run by the Mob. Meyer Lansky was the Mob’s accountant. He had a mutually enriching relationship with dictator Fulgencio Batista, but was to lose everything when Batista bolted for the airport on New Year’s Day 1959 as Castro’s guerrillas exulted into the city.

Meyer was himself a celebrity gangster, represented in The Godfather II as Hyman Roth, bookkeeper and bagman for Vito Corleone. His grandson recalls: “Innocent people may have been killed now and then, but not like the crimes of today. That is why my grandfather’s era of crime is so popular. They were like gentlemen killers and they dressed nice.”

It’s hard to believe Lansky’s role in Cuba was no more damaging than that of the operators of mines, sugar plantations, or refineries—Coca Cola, Exxon, etc.—respectable enterprises that had ridden roughshod over Cuban rights until Castro put a halt to their gallop and whose compensation claims are now among $7000 submitted to the U.S. government for negotiation as an element in the “normalization” process.

It was in retaliation for the seizure of U.S. property that the blockade of Cuba was first imposed. It was not a denial of human rights but of property rights that incurred Washington’s wrath.

The strength of the compensation lobby shouldn’t be underestimated. The nationalization of U.S. assets has been estimated in the Inter-American Law Review as the “largest uncompensated taking of American property by a foreign government in history.” Both Republican and Democratic members of Congress have deemed it an issue needing resolution before tentative détente can develop into friendly relations. The Lanskys won’t win the $70 million they say they are owed, but they’ll get something.

Historical Blindness
That the overthrow of the alliance of the Batista regime and U.S. freebooter capitalism can still be seen by some as an illegitimate act that must even now be fought, or perhaps settled, is a revolution in the place where you actually live.

The future is dark from their bunkers, deep in the earth. They grow bored. They sit in their bunkers, always alert, holding the keys to the future in their hands.

Nothing happens. Day after day, they remain alert to nothing.

They are ready to follow orders, ready to do their part to bring the world to an end.

They are instruments of a system gone mad.

—David Krieger

The hotel was run by the Mob. Meyer Lansky was the Mob’s accountant. He had a mutually enriching relationship with dictator Fulgencio Batista, but was to lose everything when Batista bolted for the airport on New Year’s Day 1959 as Castro’s guerrillas exulted into the city.

No Paradise
None of this is to present Castro’s Cuba as a sepia-toned paradise. Down through the years, the tendency of many on the left to swamp any criticism of the latest chosen land in a gush of sentimentality—Cuba is by no means the first example—has served no progressive purpose. Hitching hopes of socialist advance to the fate of a faraway country idealized out of all recognition has served as a comforting alternative to the slog of trying to make a revolution in the place where you actually are.

But there’s a balance of political morality to be made in the meantime, and the weight of morality is on Cuba’s side.

While we wait for an updated version of Meyer Lansky to saunter into his nostalgic-themed Havana casino, just one more time: ¡Cuba sí! ¡Yanqui no!

Eamonn McCann is a journalist, author and political activist from Northern Ireland. McCann was tried in Belfast in May–June 2008 for his actions as one of the Raytheon 9, a group who attacked and destroyed the Raytheon factory in Derry. The jury unanimously acquitted McCann and his co-defendants of charges of criminal damage to property belonging to multinational arms company, Raytheon.
Death Squads Back in Honduras

By Alex Emmons

In March, Honduran activist Gaspar Sanchez spoke at a briefing on Capitol Hill, urging lawmakers to support an impartial investigation into the murder of environmental activist Berta Cáceres.

Cáceres had mobilized native communities to speak out against the Agua Zarca Dam, a hydroelectric project backed by European and Chinese corporations, before being killed by two unknown gunmen last month.

In April, back in Honduras at a protest outside the Honduran Public Ministry in Tegucigalpa, Sanchez unfurled a banner demanding justice for Cáceres’s murder.

When nearby soldiers saw him, they dragged him away from the crowd and brutally beat him, stopping only after the crowd of protesters came to his defense.

Sanchez is a member of the organization Cáceres founded, the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). The group’s leadership believes that Sanchez’s assault was meant to send a message against speaking out against the Agua Zarca Dam, a hydroelectric project backed by international corporations. In 2008, Zebrana, the project’s lead developer, opened three of which were built after the coup, how to raid homes.

In 2009, a coup toppled Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, who had long been seen as a leftist threat to the interests of international corporations. In 2008, Zebrana blocked a series of hydroelectric dam projects, citing concerns raised by native Hondurans. Less than a year after he was deposed, the new government had already approved 40 dam contracts. When current President Juan Orlando Hernández came to power in 2013, his slogan was “Honduras is open for business.”

The coup was accompanied by a huge rise in political violence. By 2012, state security forces had assassinated more than 300 people, and 34 members of the opposition and 13 journalists had disappeared, according to data compiled by Honduran human rights organizations. The political assassinations added to the violence from emboldened gangs and drug traffickers, making Honduras one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

In 2012, Reuters reported that it had the highest murder rate of any country. Although the murder rate has since declined, political violence in Honduras has continued. Since the end of 2012, at least 22 prominent environmental activists have been killed, according to Global Witness.

Due to the Honduran government’s abysmal human rights record, critics have called on the United States to stop supporting the coup regime.

Citing the flows of drugs as a rationale, the U.S. government gave at least $57 million in military aid to Honduras between 2009 and 2014, not including the tens of millions of dollars spent on U.S. military contracts in Honduras. The Pentagon has not released figures for 2015 or 2016.

The U.S. military also maintains a force of more than 600 troops in Honduras, as part of a program called “Joint Task Force Bravo.” U.S. Special Forces play a large role in training their Honduran counterparts. In February, the Wall Street Journal published a video report showing Green Berets teaching Honduran soldiers how to raid homes.

The United States also helps maintain at least 13 military bases in the country, three of which were built after the coup, according to David Vine, author of Base Nation.

Congress has placed restrictions on military aid to countries with poor human rights records, but the State Department rarely applies them. The “Leahy Law,” for example, requires the State Department to suspend military aid to any country that it determines “has committed a gross violation of human rights.” Congress has even singled out Honduras in State Department appropriations bills, requiring the Secretary of State to withhold aid if he finds the Honduran government did not “protect the right of political opposition parties, journalists, trade unionists, human rights defenders, and other civil society activists to operate without interference.” The State Department, however, is still sending aid.

Under the spending laws passed last year, Congress can withhold 50 percent of the military aid budgeted to go through the State Department.

Following Cáceres’s murder, 62 members of Congress also signed a letter calling on the administration to “immediately stop all assistance to Honduran security forces ... given the implication of the Honduran military and police in extrajudicial killings, illegal detentions, torture, and other violations of human rights.” More than 200 activist organizations signed a similar letter, requesting that Secretary of State John Kerry suspend military aid until an independent investigation into Cáceres’s murder is completed.

Panelists at the briefing last Thursday argued that the Honduran government should receive the condemnation, not the assistance, of foreign governments.

Fernandez, Cáceres’s lawyer, said, “This government produces so much corruption, it can’t just have subtle backing from world governments.”

When asked by The Intercept whether U.S. aid is contributing to human rights violations in Honduras, State Department spokesperson Mark Toner responded by condemning Cáceres’s murder. “We strongly condemn the murder of civil society activist Berta Cáceres,” Toner said, “and extend our deepest condolences to her family, friends, and the people of Honduras, who have lost a dedicated defender of the environment and of human rights.”

The Pentagon declined to comment, deferring to the State Department’s response.

First published at the Intercept.

Alex Emmons is an intern for The Intercept in Washington, D.C. He was formerly a human rights activist with Amnesty International and the ACLU.
Why Solidarity in the 21st Century Means Understanding Race and Class as One Entity, Not Two

By Danny Haiphong

White supremacy and capitalism were constructed for the same purpose: to exploit humans, turn them into commodities, and enrich private owners of capital. This remains true in the 21st century. The Black working class of this era’s post-industrial, crisis-ridden U.S. capitalism has been made disposable by a system that once required its free, slave labor to develop and thrive. Endless neocolonial wars rage throughout the planet. These wars are justified by the same white supremacist ideology that preconditions Black life to the economic margins. On this basis, solidarity between oppressed peoples can only be achieved when a movement strikes against race and class as one entity, not two.

The question of solidarity must be approached from an objective analysis of present day society. The United States is a class society. It is ruled by dictates of capitalism, profit and private property. Large U.S. monopoly corporations and banks accumulate exorbitant profits from the labor of workers all over the world. At the same time, the majority of people in U.S. society suffer from impoverishment due to capitalist exploitation. This cuts across racial lines.

However, the United States is also a racist society. Black Americans, indigenous Americans, and self-identified Latinos are the most impoverished communities in the country. These communities also face levels of repression, segregation, and state violence that White Americans do not experience. White supremacy, as the ruling ideology of U.S. capitalism, justifies such oppression through the dehumanization of “non-white” life and the humanization of “white” life. This permeates every social, political, and economic institution in U.S. society.

So while it is important to understand the layers of U.S. society, it is just as important to possess consciousness of the source of the oppression. All forms of exploitation are ultimately ruled by the class that controls the dominant political economy of this period: capitalism. The extreme concentration of wealth, where 62 individuals alone own more capital than half of the planet’s population combined, lays bare just what is responsible for the disease of capitalism. And the capitalist class that owns all of this wealth has built a global system of Empire to facilitate large-scale theft.

What unites all oppressed people, then, is their relationship to the capitalist state. The state mitigates and manages the affairs of the U.S. capitalist class. For example, it is Washington that ultimately enforces “free trade” deals such as NAFTA to create a more friendly “investment” environment for multinational corporations. Washington also facilitates arms deal contracts with countries like Saudi Arabia to ensure that its allies continue to fund terrorism and repress independent development throughout the world to the benefit of oil and arms corporations. Everything the capitalist state does thus revolves around enriching the capitalist class at the expense of oppressed and working class people.

This does not mean that Black workers in the United States have the same experience as workers in Bangladesh or Somali workers funding off starvation from U.S.-sponsored sanctions. There are variations to how workers experience exploitation based on their social and economic relationship to capital in a given moment of history. However, all of them face the same enemy in one degree or another. This is what Malcolm X realized after his travels throughout the African continent just prior to his assassination in 1965. Malcolm X identified with the national liberation struggle in Algeria because he saw the Algerians (and Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cubans, among others) as providing a great service to Black people in the United States by weakening the international influence of the U.S. capitalist state.

The basis of solidarity, then, should ultimately derive from an internationalist perspective. It means working together with the peoples of the world in the struggle against the common enemy of imperialism. This will take work and much education. While much of the world is no stranger to white supremacy and colonialism, some may not completely understand the intricacies of racism against Black people in the United States. At the same time, many Black Americans and oppressed peoples of color may not fully understand the importance of standing with Libyans, Cubans, and all oppressed people against U.S.-backed imperial warfare. Eight years of the Obama era and nearly a generation of counterinsurgency does have its negative consequences, after all.

But this should not deter us from upholding a banner of internationalism and solidarity in our day to day work. Reactionary conditions should harden and strengthen our orientation to these important principles. Millions of people continue to perish or starve because of the United States and its imperial allies. And the system of capitalism that dictates what this alliance does abroad continues the assault on Black people and peoples of color within its artificial borders. Solidarity will make us stronger in our quest for political power. The question shouldn’t be whether people around the world elevate the struggle of Black Americans, but how we can organize on an internationalist basis to confront our common enemy.

Danny Haiphong is an Asian activist and political analyst in the Boston area. He can be reached at wakeuprising1990@gmail.com.
Healing Viet Nam War Trauma in Australia

For the second year in a row Veterans For Peace put out a call for letters to be written to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial for delivery to The Wall on Memorial Day. The letter below is one of more than 200 we received.

Many of the men of my generation fought alongside U.S. troops in Vietnam. Some were regular army—but an awful lot were conscripts—kids barely out of school.

Growing up in Australia after WWII was probably quite similar to growing up in the USA—there were a lot of jobs around and most of us had relatively untroubled childhoods—even if there was not much money around. So, for these young men, having to go and fight in Vietnam was an enormous shock—particularly as WWII had been so romanticized in the movies that we grew up watching. The things they saw and experienced—and had to participate in—and the fact that you were never safe, even on R&R, meant that, apart from physical wounds—and the Agent Orange damage—very many of those boys came home with undiagnosed and untreated emotional and mental health issues.

Twenty-odd years later I was doing “work assessments” for these ex-servicemen, as a result of them having made an appeal for a veteran’s pension, because they stated they were disabled and unable to work. The system automatically assumed they were faking and did not believe them. This was their last resort after having been rejected twice already.

Every last one of these men was an emotional wreck . . . Some had tried to hold it together but, over the years, had fallen apart.

Many lost jobs, lost families, self-medicated with drink and/or drugs, and, in some cases, lost everything.

I was part of the assessment process to provide reports containing evidence on which they could base the decision to deny or accept the claim. One was a WWII veteran who had been an officer during the Vietnam War. He had to take these school kids and prepare them for the insanity and horror that faced them—and lead them into the fray.

Every one of these men was an emotional wreck—many of them for the entire time since they had got home. Some had tried to hold it together but, over the years, had fallen apart. Many lost jobs, lost families, self-medicated with drink and/or drugs, and, in some cases, lost everything. They went into the army as school kids—telling them to come in and be assessed. From the bedside manner and empathy of a drill instructor. It was my way or the highway with him. He was not a bad man, but had no idea of compassion or empathy at all.

By the time these poor men had seen him, and all the rest, they were exhausted (some had travelled hundreds of miles) and were ready to throttle someone. Not the least of the things they saw and experienced—and their one guard at the door? The feeling to come see someone with a guard at the door? The stigma. There were only about two in all of Sydney that were human and empathetic, but even so, all we did was throw drugs at the problem, which was like a band-aid over a severed artery. There were a lot of suicides.

I suspect that it was the same, or worse in the USA for your returned young men after Vietnam. Hearts and minds broken, along with bodies, oftentimes with little or no support or help. We at least had a Veterans’ Hospital (where I worked) and free healthcare. But in Oz, the Vets’ were not humanized, as now, we eventually managed to get some effective help. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) was just starting to get noticed in Australia at the time. The Vietnam Vets’ Association was doing good work, but the local psychiatrists were a total waste of oxygen. There were only about two in all of Sydney that were human and empathetic, but even so, all we did was throw drugs at the problem, which was like a band-aid over a severed artery. There were a lot of suicides.

I hope very much that grassroots support like yours is growing and bringing the new generations of service men and women into your fold. We older generations surely have a responsibility to share the love and support and the lessons we’ve learned along the way. All the very best to you.

Margaret Gallagher, Wales, UK

Margaret Gallagher worked as a rehabilitation counselor for the Department of Veterans’ Affairs in Sydney, assessing ex-servicemen for their pension applications.
It’s no surprise that a movie with some of Hollywood’s finest acting, writing, directing, and filmmaking failed to win a single Academy Award, particularly since the movie criticizes Hollywood for its unethical political discrimination.

Trumbo, directed by Jay Roach, is about James Dalton Trumbo (December 9, 1905—September 10, 1976), the screenwriter who broke the Hollywood Blacklist. When I first saw the trailer, I broke down in tears because theTrumbos for a year in the Hollywood Hills and the eight-year-old inside me didn’t expect him to reappear as though for a hug, his thick mustache yellowing like the pages of a cherished book, sporting a khaki mechanic jump suit with “Trumbo” embroidered on the pocket. The trailer and film capture perfectly Trumbo’s feisty, non-compromising spirit and integrity, encapsulating the contradictions of the avuncular man who joked with my mother as they watched me dog-paddling in his pool, “Come the revolution, we’ll all have swimming pools.”

Thanks to David Rubin’s casting and brilliant character acting by Bryan Cranston, by the end I couldn’t tell whether I was watching Trumbo himself or black and white footage of Cranston, so completely did the film allow me to suspend disbelief. In the film, Diane Lane juggles recalling Cleo’s vaudeville days. (Indeed, Cleo taught me to juggle and stand on my head!) The film also allows me to see Trumbo writing in his bathtub—his “enchanted second act to what would have otherwise been an unmitigated tragedy. Not only did I see Trumbo writing in his bathtub—his novel Crusoe, dodged

Trumbo’s exciting two-year Mexico period. Mexico, not the United States, is where Trumbo, under the pseudonym Robert Rich, wrote a few screenplays for the King Brothers including The Brave One, which won an Oscar.

When my self-exiled father died of lung cancer, Trumbo’s wife Cleo, my mom’s best friend, returned to Mexico City to be of support, and then took me back to the States until my mother settled her affairs. Thus began my year of foster care at the Trumbos, bringing an enchanted second act to what would have otherwise been an unmitigated tragedy. Not only did I see Trumbo writing in his bathtub—his toes shivered and cigar ashes occasionally drifting into the water—contrary to the movie, he welcomed interruptions at the marble bar that he had converted into a desk in his poolside ‘study.’

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Trumbo defying the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947.
organizing in Mexico, increased his tobacco consumption and died of cancer, just like the fictitious Arlen Hird.

Regardless of its flaws, I’m grateful to Roach, McNamara, Monica Levinson, and crew for rescuing the domestic Cold War from the memory hole and inserting Trumbo’s historical contribution into popular consciousness. Just as Trumbo broke the blacklist by openly claiming authorship of the screenplay for Otto Preminger’s Exodus, it is likely that Roach and McNamara have, with Trumbo, broken the blacklist against Hollywood movies sympathetic to the spirit of communism. Ceplair agrees that “Trumbo is the best of the blacklist films.”

At first, when I showed my mom the DVD, she thought Cranston was Trumbo. She didn’t recognize her best friend, Cleo, though. “Oh sort of,” she said. She followed and laughed along for a while. But when a headline mentioned the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the only two U.S. civilians killed for conspiracy to commit espionage during the Cold War, the film’s historical context, at least for someone in the know, was indeed strong enough to re-traumatize her.

Trumbo began sobbing and crying out, “Their two little children! Two innocent people sentenced to death!” Over and over. And though the tiny audience crammed into my mom’s assisted living studio reassured her, my mother had become fixated on the government’s needlessly electrocution of the couple and she could neither focus nor follow nor care about the trivialities of a movie after that.

“Evidence is surfacing about Ethel Rosenberg’s innocence and their wrongful deaths,” activist, educator Lynn Odenheim Kalmar reassured my mom. Her family also fled to Mexico during the Cold War. “It’s okay. You’re safe. It’s over now.”


Said Meeropol, “After my parents’ arrests, my relatives were so frightened of being associated with ‘Communist’ spies; that they refused to take me into their homes. First I lived in a shelter. Later I lived with friends of my parents in New Jersey, but I was thrown out of school after the Board of Education found out who I was. After my parents’ execution, the police even seized me from the home of my future adoptive parents, and I was placed in an orphanage.”

The blacklist was a different kind of bomb with silent explosions and invisible radiation that still lingers. On December 19, 2011, the Writers Guild of America restored the late Dalton Trumbo’s name as the writer of the 1953 romantic comedy Roman Holiday, almost 60 years after the fact. A similar awards scene, after which a teary Cleo says to Trumbo, “It’s over,” referring to the blacklist, is the happy ending to the film. This statement is but a half-truth.

The blacklist will truly be over when corporate radio, television, books, and Hollywood movies stop screening out works that reflect the politics and economic interests of our multiracial 99 percent and when all the blacklist victims get their names restored on films and DVDs that contain their work, including my father, George Pepper. Even so, the chilling repercussions of the Cold War, like uranium fallout, and like the writings of one of its survivors, will persist.

Margot Pepper is a Mexican-born journalist whose work has appeared in Common Dreams, Utne Reader, Monthly Review, Z-net, Counterpunch, Dollars & Sense, Prensa Latina, NACLA, the San Francisco Bay Guardian, City Lights, Hampton Brown, Rethinking Schools, El Tecolote, El Andar, and elsewhere. She is the author of a memoir about her year working in Cuba (Through the Wall: A Year in Havana), a book of poetry (At This Very Moment), and most recently a dystopian science fiction thriller, American Day Dream. Learn more at margotpepper.com.
One Woman’s Arduous Voyage

Long Way Out
By Nicole Waybright with Jim Bastian
SpeakPeace, 2016

By John Heuer

Imagine you’ve just been commissioned an ensign in the U.S. Navy. You’ve been flown to Sydney, Australia, to sign on an Arleigh Burke Class guided-missile destroyer as a gunnery officer and realize that you know very little about gunnery, or seamanship for that matter. You’re one of the first women to serve as a naval surface warfare officer aboard a combatant ship. You’re 5’3” tall, weigh 110 pounds, are deathly seasick on your inaugural voyage aboard the USS Curtis Wilbur, and realize that you have a minimum 5-year Navy obligation for the ROTC scholarship that put you through college. How do you spell panic? And this was before the executive officer (XO) from hell signed on to the USS Curtis Wilbur.

Reading Nicole Waybright’s Long Way Out, about her experience as a fledgling Navy officer, reminded me that the most enjoyable day during the first half of my 26-year career at the university was the day my superintendent announced that he was moving to the coast and leaving the Design and Estimating Department. “David” was such a talented tyrant that no one in his department was aware that he was not the only employee singled out for David’s psychological abuse. At least David didn’t actually hurl objects at his employees in the middle of a profane torrent of verbal abuse, or put the entire company at risk for his incompetence as an officer like Ms. Waybright’s XO.

Nicole Waybright’s riveting account of her experience living through a historic Navy scandal is told via third person. “Brenda” represents the author in a narrative in which all the names have been changed. In the wake of the Navy’s Tailhook scandal, when 83 women and 7 men were sexually assaulted during a traditional celebration of Navy and Marine aviators in 1991, the Navy came under congressional pressure to eliminate longstanding patterns of military sexual abuse and promote women service members and officers in an affirmative action program. Unfortunately, some misguided Navy brass chose the wrong woman to promote to captain. Brenda’s XO was eventually relieved of command for “cruelty and maltreatment” and “conduct unbecoming an officer.”

Brenda takes considerable pride in being a woman officer, which creates serious psychological stress as she realizes that her talents are not particularly suited for success as a naval officer. All her life she followed her father’s advice to seek a technical education. He ridiculed liberal arts students for wasting their time in studies that would not contribute to a successful career. Brenda completed her college degree in mechanical engineering by virtue of her impressive ability to memorize data for purposes of testing. However, while short-term memory may help a candidate pass a test, it does not build a comprehensive grasp of the principles being studied.

To complicate matters, the culture of naval surface warfare officers was one that enforced sleep deprivation, so that they were vulnerable to chronic fatigue.

As Brenda gives her all to succeed as gunnery officer and watchstander on the bridge of a warship, she is confronted with some stark realizations. First she recognizes that she has forsaken her true love, the study of Spanish literature and art, in order to please her parents, who have their hearts set on a successful technical career for their only child.

Her second realization is perhaps even more profound. Having grown up idealizing a military career as epitomizing the highest form of patriotism, Brenda begins to doubt that sailing the western Pacific in an 8,000-ton billion-dollar warship, test-firing all sorts of explosives without any regard for the oceanic habitat of marine life, is not exactly defending freedom for America.

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And have had the effect of stifling honest conversation and critical thinking regarding recent wars, fought by an all-volunteer force.”

Also in her epilogue, which includes sections on Jungian psychology, naval history, and war culture, the author challenges the reader to “individuate from parents and institutions, to become a distinct self, and to survive crisis and conflict and emerge on the other side as a new or renewed person.” She cautions that such journeys are “not for the faint of heart.”

Nicole Waybright, aka Brenda Conner, survived extraordinary challenges in the Navy and received an honorable discharge in 2001. She has since earned a master’s degree in Spanish literature and still studies Jungian psychology. She is the most recently confirmed member of the national board of directors of Veterans For Peace. Long Way Out is an excellent read, highly recommended by this reviewer.

Long Way Out is available on ecrater.com (print) and Amazon (print and Kindle).

John Heuer registered with the U.S. Coast Guard right out of high school and served in Viet Nam in 1968 as an ordinary seaman in the Merchant Marine. On his return voyage to the United States he decided that he would not return to Viet Nam as a soldier. He is currently a member of Veterans For Peace national board of directors.