

Peace in Our Times



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

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

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

By Ann Wright

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

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

parture Program.

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

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

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



U.S. sergeant with Vietnamese baby at Ft. Chaffee, Ark., 1975. Photo: Ann Wright.

The United States has also shown indifference to refugees from Iraq and Syria by barely opening its doors. Admission numbers were already paltry under the Obama administration, when the United States was only allowing tens of thousands of refugees a year. Now, under Trump, 2018 is on track to hit a 40-year low, finds *Global Citizen* in an analysis of U.S. State Department data. More than 5 million Syrians are registered refugees, with Turkey hosting the highest number,

followed by Lebanon and Jordan, according to December data from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees. More than six million Syrians have had to seek refuge inside their own country.

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

continued on page 10 ...

A U.S. Veteran Who Can Never Leave Afghanistan

By Rory Fanning

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

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

Each of those dusts has dry, earthy, almost sugary smells. It's hard right now for me to tell which is louder, the helicopter

continued on page 7 ...



Letters to the Editor



What Hell Are We Waiting For?

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

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

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

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

Yet, day in and day out, this dangerous, violent, cruel, racist white supremacist, xenophobic white nationalist, misogynist sexual predator, greed and hate-filled man remains free to act out in the highest office of this country.

There is no justice.

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

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

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

Will we check absolute power and balance the U.S. presidency? Will we arrest Trump?

Laurie Arbeiter
New York City

A Note from the Editors

A Promise Fulfilled

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

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

He started the trail on May 1. In October, taking a break from his epic journey, Mike stayed at Ellen Davidson's and my house in Woodstock, N.Y., for a week, resting an injured foot. What a pleasure it was to spend time with our pal of many adventures and what joy to watch him eat! I have never seen someone his size (about 150 lbs.) eat so much. Where did it all go I wondered? But Mike was burning so many calories on the trail it was impossible, no matter how much he ate, to keep weight on. He's always been all muscle so had nothing really to spare. No matter how much he ate he still lost 15 pounds during the hike.

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

After his stay in Woodstock, Mike had some 700 hard miles to go from Bear Mountain, N.Y., to McAfee Knob. There was no question for me that I would drive to Virginia and hike the four miles up to be there when Mike finished. Uncle Steve, as he had promised, met Mike at the top, along with Mike's mother and a bottle of champagne.

Mike wrote this shortly after finishing: "On December 17, 2018, at 12:30 p.m. I completed the 2,191 miles of the Appalachian Trail. What a life-transforming journey this has been! Words cannot describe what I am feeling right now. I began this journey after losing my brother earlier this year. His memory has given me strength to carry on. To give up, would have meant to me, giving up on my brother and myself. The trail has always



Photos: Tarak Kauff

been a healing thing for me after my experiences in the Iraq war. This time it was a deep loss, Matt, my younger brother, was like a son to me.

"The trials and challenges involved with completing this journey were quite extreme and pushed me to the limits. There were injuries that almost took me off trail three separate times, there was extreme weather hiking through snow, ice, and often frozen shoes and shoe-strings. I endured a head-first downward tumble on slippery rocks that put me in the hospital in August. It left me with a badly sprained wrist, a rib fracture/contusion, and a head injury. I persevered and in time healed. Then a foot injury almost finished my journey two separate times. I kept massaging and stretching and talking to my feet. They got better.

"With only 90 miles to go, another massive snowstorm blew through giving me 2 feet of snow to negotiate in high elevations in freezing temperatures. My appreciation level for a warm bed, a hot shower, good food, good people and pliable room-temperature dry shoes is off the charts now. The challenge and adversity of the trail, through the injuries and the extreme cold, has given me the motivation and strength to grow and made me a better man.

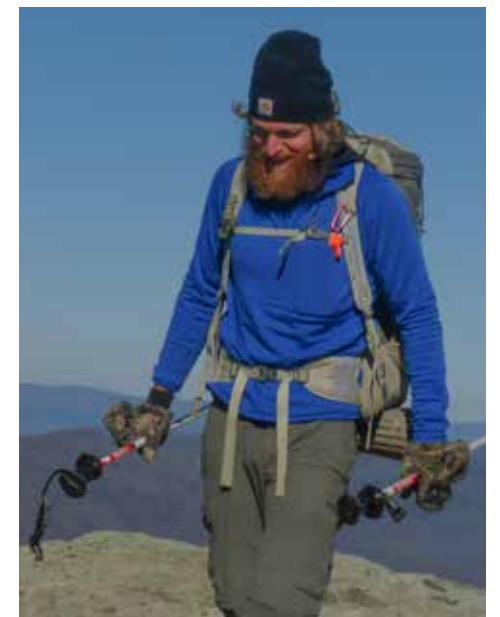
"I got so much from this experience. The stresses of life, the noises of society, the tragedy of loss, stresses from the military, combat, and even activism takes its toll. Sometimes one just needs to get away from it all, to recharge, to listen to an inner voice, to feel the energies of nature and let it heal us. It took me the entire time to go through everything I needed to, but the trail lets you do that, without judgment. Withdrawing from the noises and many distractions of society allows us to listen to our own inner voice.

"The finish, I knew, would be an emo-

tional moment. As I got to the top of the mountain, I got down on my knees, put my head back, felt the wind, smelled the fragrance of nature, and took in the epic view. All the emotions fell upon me—the entire experience, the challenges, the beauty, the struggles, seemed to flash before my eyes. The hairs stood up on my arms. I grabbed the middle of my poles, held my hands high and gave three huge victory roars to the top of my lungs. Then the tears came as I felt my brother's presence. I wished so much he was there. He would have been. It was at this moment, I felt a shift—I was a changed person. The trail has broken me down and built me back up, made me a stronger and better man. Now I am ready to go back into the world and make a positive difference with a new sense of focus and purpose I didn't have before.

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

—Tarak Kauff



Peace in Our Times

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Trump: An 'Idiot Entertainer' Who Only Cares about Lurid Spectacles of Sex, Gore, and Fantasy

By Chris Hedges

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

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

The idiots know only one word—“more.” They are unencumbered by common sense. They hoard wealth and resources until workers cannot make a living and the infrastructure collapses. They live in privileged compounds where they eat chocolate cake and order missile strikes. They see the state as a projection of their vanity. The Roman, Mayan, French, Habsburg, Ottoman, Romanov, Wilhelmine, Pahlavi, and Soviet dynasties crumbled because the whims and obsessions of ruling idiots were law.

Donald Trump is the face of our collective idiocy. He is what lies behind the mask of our professed civility and rationality—a sputtering, narcissistic, bloodthirsty megalomaniac. He wields armies and fleets against the wretched of the earth, blithely

ignores the catastrophic human misery caused by global warming, pillages on behalf of global oligarchs and at night sits slack-jawed in front of a television set before opening his “beautiful” Twitter account. He is our version of the Roman emperor Nero, who allocated vast state expenditures to attain magical powers, the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang, who funded repeated expeditions to a mythical island of immortals to bring back the potion that would give him eternal life, and a decayed Russian royalty that sat around reading tarot cards and attending séances as their nation was decimated by war and revolution brewed in the streets.

This moment in history marks the end of a long, sad tale of greed and murder by the white races. It is inevitable that for the final show we vomited a grotesque figure like Trump. Europeans and Amer-

The Roman, Mayan, French, Habsburg, Ottoman, Romanov, Wilhelmine, Pahlavi, and Soviet dynasties crumbled because the whims and obsessions of ruling idiots were law.

icans have spent five centuries conquering, plundering, exploiting, and polluting the earth in the name of human progress. They used their technological superiority to create the most efficient killing machines on the planet, directed against anyone and anything, especially indigenous cultures, that stood in their way. They stole and hoarded the planet's wealth and resources. They believed that this orgy of blood and gold would never end, and they still believe it. They do not understand that the dark ethic of ceaseless capitalist and imperialist expansion is dooming the exploiters as well as the exploited. But

even as we stand on the cusp of extinction we lack the intelligence and imagination to break free from our evolutionary past. The more the warning signs are palpable—rising temperatures, global financial meltdowns, mass human migrations, endless wars, poisoned ecosystems, rampant corruption among the ruling class—the more we turn to those who chant, either through idiocy or cynicism, the mantra that what worked in the past will work in the future, that progress is inevitable. Factual evidence, since it is an impediment to what we desire, is banished. The taxes of corporations and the rich,

who have deindustrialized the country and turned many of our cities into wastelands, are cut, and regulations are slashed to bring back the supposed golden era of the 1950s for white American workers. Public lands are opened up to the oil and gas industry as rising carbon emissions doom our species. Declining crop yields stemming from heat waves and droughts are ignored. War is the principal business of the kleptocratic state.

Walter Benjamin wrote in 1940 amid the rise of European fascism and looming world war:

“A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

Magical thinking is not limited to the

PROPHECY...

“AS DEMOCRACY IS PERFECTED, THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT REPRESENTS, MORE AND MORE CLOSELY, THE INNER SOUL OF THE PEOPLE. ON SOME GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY, THE PLAIN FOLKS OF THE LAND WILL REACH THEIR HEART'S DESIRE AT LAST, AND THE WHITE HOUSE WILL BE OCCUPIED BY A DOWNRIGHT FOOL AND COMPLETE NARCISSISTIC MORON.”

—H.L. MENCKEN
THE BALTIMORE EVENING SUN
JULY 26, 1920



beliefs and practices of pre-modern cultures. It defines the ideology of capitalism. Quotas and projected sales can always be met. Profits can always be raised. Growth is inevitable. The impossible is always possible. Human societies, if they bow before the dictates of the marketplace, will be ushered into capitalist paradise. It is only a question of having the right attitude and the right technique. When capitalism thrives, we are assured, we thrive. The merging of the self with the capitalist collective has robbed us of our agency, creativity, capacity for self-reflection and moral autonomy. We define our worth not by our independence or our character but by the material standards set by capitalism—personal wealth, brands, status and career advancement. We are molded into a compliant and repressed collective. This mass conformity is characteristic of totalitarian and authoritarian states. It is the Disneyfication of America, the land of eternally happy thoughts and positive attitudes. And when magical thinking does not work, we are told, and often accept, that we are the problem. We must have more faith. We must envision what we want. We must try harder. The system is never to blame. We failed it. It did not fail us.

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

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

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



Photo: Ellen Davidson

How Capitalism Torched the Planet and Left It a Smoking Fascist Greenhouse



By Umair Haque

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

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

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

Catastrophic climate change is not a problem for fascists—it is a solution. History's most perfect, lethal, and efficient means of genocide, ever, period. Who needs to build a camp or a gas chamber when the flood and hurricane will do the dirty work for free? Climate change accords perfectly with the foundational fascist belief that only the strong should survive, and the weak—the dirty, the impure, the foul—should perish. That is why neofascists do not lift a finger to stop climate change—but in fact do every-

thing they can to accelerate it and prevent every effort to reverse or mitigate it.

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

The world is in the midst of a great mass

[Capitalism] ate through people's ... communities, then through social systems, then through their savings, and finally, through their democracies.

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

Biological life was not the only unpaid cost—“negative externality”—of capi-

talism. It was just one. And these unpaid costs weren't to be additive: they were to multiply, exponentiate, snarl upon themselves—in ways that we would come to find impossible to untangle.

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

capitalism sold back to them with the other hand, the very things they were busy producing, rose even more—and so middle classes began to stagnate, while inequality exploded. Let's specify the unpaid costs in question: trust, connection, cohesion, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth itself.

These were social costs—not environmental ones, like the mass extinction above.

A sense of frustration, of resignation, of pessimism came to sweep the world. People lost trust in their great systems and institutions. They turned away from democracy, and toward authoritarianism, in a great, thunderous wave, which tilted the globe on its very axis. The wave rippled outward from history's greatest epicenter of human stupidity, America, like a super-sonic tsunami, crossing Europe, reaching Asia's shores, crashing south into Brazil,

cresting far away in Australia. Nations fell like dominoes to a new wave of fascists, who proclaimed the same things as the old ones—reichs and camps and reigns of the pure. People began to turn on those below them—the powerless one, the different one, the Mexican, the Jew, the Muslim—in the quest for the sense of superiority and power, the fortune and glory, capitalism had promised them, but never delivered.

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

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

The social costs of capitalism weren't just additive to the environmental costs—they were more like multiplicative, snarled upon themselves, like a great flood meeting a great hurricane. The social costs exponentiated the environmental, making them now impossible to reduce, pay, address, manage. 2+2 didn't equal 4—it equaled infinity, in this case. Both together made a system that spiraled out of control. Wham! The planet's fate was being sealed, by capitalism imploding into fascism—which meant that a disintegrating world could hardly work together anymore to solve its greatest problem of all.

continued on page 17...

Why Green New Deal Advocates Must Address Militarism

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

By Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater

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

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

Some members of Congress are already showing their historic mettle by support-

ing a Green New Deal. This would not only start to reverse the damage we have inflicted on our collective home, but it would create hundreds of thousands of good jobs that cannot be shipped overseas to low wage countries.

Even those congresspeople who want to seriously address the climate crisis, however, fail to grapple with the simultaneous crisis of militarism. The war on terror unleashed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack has led to almost two decades of

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

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

the largest source of greenhouse gasses, contributing about 5 percent of global warming emissions. Almost 900 of the EPA's 1,300 Superfund sites are abandoned military bases, weapons-production facilities, or weapons-testing sites. The former Hanford nuclear weapons facility in Washington state alone will cost over \$100 billion to clean up.

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

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

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

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

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

unchecked militarism. We are spending more money on our military than at any time in history. Endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere are still raging, costing us trillions of dollars and creating humanitarian disasters. Old treaties to control nuclear arms are unraveling at the same time that conflicts with the major powers of Russia and China are heating up.

Where is the call for the New Peace Deal that would free up hundreds of bil-

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ing this treaty and promoting it among the other nuclear weapons states. A New Peace Deal and a Green New Deal should go hand in hand. We cannot afford to waste our time, resources, and intellectual capital on weapons and war when climate change is barreling down on all of humankind. Environmentalists need to contest the Pentagon's staggering global footprint. The U.S. military is the world's largest institutional consumer of fossil fuels and



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

Two More Knees Need Attention

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

By Nancee Kesinger

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

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

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

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



Countless soldiers and their families were poisoned by contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune.

leached into the drinking water at Camp Lejeune from 1953 until the affected wells were shut down in 1985. Of the eight hallmark diseases that medical evidence readily correlates to Camp Lejeune's water poisoning, adult leukemia is often listed first (the other seven presumptive diseases are aplastic anemia, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and Parkinson's disease).

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

More shameful is that our government and our military have been complicit and negligent for over five decades, actively denying the toxic mixture of chemicals in

ca's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act, which aims to ensure that those sickened by Camp Lejeune water receive medical treatment through the Department of Veteran Affairs.

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

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

Allow me to insert, briefly, a metaphorical knee (not my second, real knee), symbolically lowered in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick and all of the other professional athletes and protesters who were drawn to perform a simple, nonviolent action to hold viewers' attention on racial strife in the United States. Kaepernick's was never a protest of the American flag, the U.S. military, the national anthem, or the United States itself, a misrepresentation that drew applause when a President cynically warped its expressed intent.

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

That the President wedged himself into a peaceful protest against racial inequality and made it about himself should surprise no one, but the lives of generations of

continued on page 8 ...

It's their flag ... their song, their country, and every American's right to call out and spotlight injustice where it is found.

weight to drive a long metal rod with a hollow center down the same path until he hits bone.

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

Some living readers and many long-departed spirits may sense where this story of knees needing attention leads when it is revealed that my "fit, healthy, Marine Corps rugby-team-athlete" was stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina in the early 1980s as an enlisted teenaged soldier far from his southern California home. Most Americans, however, will likely be unaware of the toxic legacy of the place and the countless men and women (and their family members) who were poisoned by contaminated water between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, while in the service of our nation.

Extremely unsafe levels of five chemicals classified as causing or probably causing cancer, including trichloroethylene (TCE), perchloroethylene (PCE) and benzene

the water at Camp Lejeune and repeatedly disregarding warning signs of contamination.

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

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

In 2012, dedicated advocates won a qualified victory when President Obama signed the Honoring Ameri-

Afghanistan Vet

... continued from page 1

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

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

My own kids are three and five, probably close in age to those terrified children I glimpsed ever so briefly in that house and still can't get out of my head. My daughter and son couldn't be sweeter, but they do like to tell me "no" a lot. Sometimes they, too, scream and some-

other times, particularly since my kids were born, they just won't leave and I end up writing them down. That, at least, gives me the passing feeling of being a little more in control.

I used to have a good memory. As a kid, I remembered everything: phone numbers, names, each play in a baseball game a month later. At 41, nearing the decade-and-a-half mark since my time in Afghanistan, my recall leaves something to be desired. I blame it on that war and on the distracting memories I just can't keep out of my head.

Controlling bad memories, particularly at night when I'm trying to go to sleep, is important. So I keep my laptop close. It was one thing years ago to get through the workday on no sleep; it's another to raise two little kids while bleary-eyed and sleepless. It's not good for them, my wife, or me.

Making a Desk in 'Afghanistan'

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



U.S. Army Ranger unit during a demonstration of the elite force.

times, when those screams set me off, I yell back, which is frustrating for me and unnerving for them, as well as my wife. And so I find myself out in that garage more than she would like and more than I would like, too, since it often means that I've taken that endlessly unnerving trip back to Afghanistan.

"Try to remember what it's like to be the kids' age and parenting will be easier," my mom tells me when I complain. Being a parent, I guess, means being a good rememberer. The problem with remembering is that when I do, my mind feels like it's filled with landmines or maybe I mean IEDs.

So many years later, fragmented memories from my time in Afghanistan still flood my head when I least expect them. Sometimes, I'll push them out quickly;

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

It bothers me that I can't remember names or a lot of what happened in that country while standing here in my shop. I wish I had access to more of the details. I'd like to write them down. Somehow, that blank space leaves me feeling vulnerable. You can't pack away something that's not immediately there.

It's in the distant past—so I try to con-



vince myself. No one here seems to know or care about Afghanistan anyhow. How much attention was given to the 20 people who were killed by a suicide bomber at a wrestling club in Kabul in early September, or Brent Taylor, the Utah mayor and National Guardsman, killed during his fourth tour of duty in an "insider attack" in early November by a man whom U.S. forces were supposed to be training? Or what about the other U.S. personnel killed or wounded in similar ways recently? Or what about the suicide bomber who targeted Afghan election headquarters in Kabul in October?

Washington has spent between \$900 billion and \$2 trillion in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 9/11 and certainly killed tens of thousands of Afghans in that never-ending war. Yet, just about everything that happens there is generally ignored here. That's perplexing in a way. After all, we could have paid for the college education of every student in America for the last 25 years with \$2 trillion.

Forget it, I tell myself. Focus on the saw blade and the wood. There's furniture to be made and kids to raise. If I want to be a good parent I have to have a good memory. A good memory makes you more empathetic. That's what I now say to myself, repeating the words of my mom.

Maybe memories of this sort are easier to control once whatever they're attached to is officially over and in the past. I grab wood glue off a shelf next to the saw. But faint hope of that! Washington's Afghanistan War shows no signs of ending all these years later. American soldiers are still killing and dying there. The country is worse off than it was during my 2003 deployments. Seventeen years after "peace" was declared in Afghanistan at a conference in Bonn, Germany, in December 2001, the Taliban controls or is fighting for half the districts in the country. It holds more territory than at any moment since the U.S. invasion.

Being a Parent in Chicago and a Vet in Afghanistan

I wonder what happened to the men (or were they teenagers?) that we dragged from that house that long-ago night? Did they ever make it home? And what about those screaming kids? Are they tormented by that experience? What do they remember, if they're still alive? They must be of fighting age today. Are they fighting? And for whom?

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

It's colder than normal on this particular October night. I shut the garage door. I'm making a desk for a friend. The cheap saw blade stammers as I work to keep the wood straight. I try not to think about my hand on that wood slipping into the blade. Too much thinking and I'll get nervous. Not enough thinking and I'll get careless. I wish I had a safer saw.

Despite the noise and the blades, making furniture does calm me down, even as it takes me back to Jalalabad. In such a situation, working is better than not working for me. And doing creative work like this is even better.

Everything that needs to be said about my own experience in Afghanistan has already been said. So I tell myself standing over that angry blade as I make another cut, my finger safely a few inches away from it. And that, in its fashion, couldn't be truer. In the last five years, I've written a book and dozens of articles on my time there, the way I turned against and resisted that war while still in uniform, and what happened to me thereafter. And any chance I get, I still talk to high school or college students about all the things military recruiters ignore when it comes to the war on terror. I've even been to Japan twice to support that country's antiwar movement.

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

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

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

continued on page 23 ...

A Celebration of Killing and Dying

By Camillo Mac Bica

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

the resultant void filled with the values, “virtues,” and abilities appropriate to the role I was about to assume.

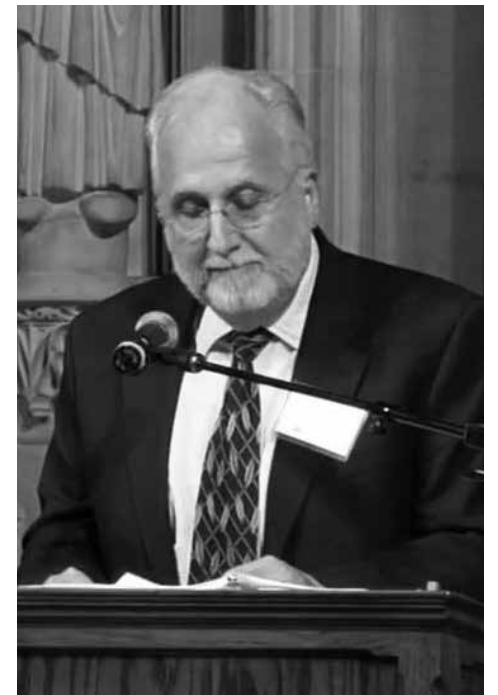
The Marine Corps builds men (and women), it is said, albeit of a specific sort. I have realized that much of this physical, emotional, psychological, and ethi-

intense fraternity and camaraderie with others who wear the uniform. Anyone who has experienced the insanity of the battlefield understands that when the shit hits the fan, we kill and sacrifice not for god, flag, country, or even for corps, but for the man or woman at our side.

*When you make Marines, create killers,
send them to war to kill and to destroy, sometimes
they can't leave it on the battlefield.*

cal conversion and conditioning process is intended to create effective instruments of death and destruction, killing machines who will do the bidding of our nation's political and military leadership without hesitation or question. I have realized that Marine training focuses on building an

I have realized that I and many others who claim the title of Marine have had our selflessness, dedication, and patriotism exploited; have been asked, better compelled, to make sacrifices fighting in wars that were (are) ill-conceived, unnecessary, unjust, and immoral. I have real-



Dr. Camillo “Mac” Bica testifies at the Truth Commission on Conscience in War at the Riverside Church in 2010.

ized that as a Marine I was not fighting for freedom—ours, or in my case, the Vietnamese—a claim we hear so often, and that I was an aggressor, invader, and occupier fighting for corporate profit and national hegemony, placed in an untenable survival situation of kill or be killed.

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

So, this year on November 10, I will not eat birthday cake or toast the corps. Nor will I celebrate the mythology. Rather, I will embrace the reality of the experience; acknowledge the entire process as a charade, a deception, and as a tool of those who profit from our efforts, our sacrifices, our blood, and our lives. And finally, I will again acknowledge my identity as a Marine and accept responsibility and culpability for what I have done and what I have become. And finally, I will speak out to ensure that other young men and women not be misled into embracing the mythology and lured into the “cult of the Marine.”

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Camillo Mac Bica is a philosophy professor at the School of Visual Arts (NYC) and a former Marine Corps officer and Vietnam Veteran.

Reclaiming Nov. 11 as Armistice Day



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

Two Knees

... continued from page 6

decent African-American citizens in my loved one's family are respectfully honored when Kaepernick and others take a knee. A maternal grandfather is buried nearby at Fort Rosecrans Cemetery, a WW2 veteran, and many other family members have served devotedly in the U.S. military. It is their flag as well as the President's, their song, their country, and every American's right to call out and spotlight injustice where it is found.

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

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

low utterances of “support the troops” when proof shows U.S. military brass poisoned people and tried to cover it up at Camp Lejeune. I protest U.S. military brass for failing to own up to its role in the contamination. I protest U.S. military brass on behalf of the people who may fall ill in the years ahead from this toxic water scandal. I protest the U.S. President who mistakes love of country as being incompatible with love of social justice. I protest the President's whitewashing of the entire “take a knee” conversation started by Kaepernick, which had only to do with the myriad manifestations of racism in the United States.

If, as some observers note, taking a knee after the President's Sept. 23 comments about NFL players “became” more or less a protest against a President who distorts truly salient issues with incendiary, race-baiting comments (repeatedly), I'm down. I'm taking a knee in protest of a President who crudely and cavalierly insulted and shamed the women who gave birth to some of our finest American

athletes, insinuating that the men themselves forfeit First Amendment protections when they appear on a playing field (as if being a paid employee trumps being a free citizen with constitutional rights) and who, further, laid down directives to NFL owners (as if being a corporate CEO in the United States means you necessarily follow the President's every dictate). I protest a President who seems to expect blind obedience to his will and whim.

No taking of a knee compares to the combined words, actions, and inactions of the current U.S. President that, together, constitute the most egregious offense to our precious democratic process; he is the fake, but that is not news, so please give attention to two more knees.

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Radical Attorney Says Take Over Democratic Party

By Denny Riley

At a church hall in a pleasant suburb in California, a progressive organization that applies its concerns to our country's interference in Central and South America held its annual dinner. The guest speaker was constitutional attorney Danny Sheehan. His clients are a who's who of the "movement." Daniel and Phillip Berrigan, Dick Gregory, Dr. Spock, Ralph Abernathy, a group seeking to bring attention to the mysterious death of labor union activist Karen Silkwood. He was counsel for the Native American Rights Committee at Wounded Knee, counsel for the *New York Times* during the Pentagon Papers. And here's one you probably aren't aware of: He worked to successfully overturn a decision by the school district in Drake, North Dakota, that banned—and burned—Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five* and fired the high school English teacher who had assigned it. Drake, North Dakota, population 479.

For 45 minutes Danny Sheehan delivered an uncompromising message of what is happening on the ramparts of legal resistance to our government's nefarious activities. None of his words were issued in anger, but what he covered offered sufficient opportunity for the emotion.

Most recently he was chief counsel of the Lakota People's Law Project on the Standing Rock reservation where charges against 800 Water Protectors for trespassing were dropped because it was proved they were on Lakota land. Charges against Chase Iron Eyes for sedition were also dropped for similarly wobbly footing.

Those of us hearing this news applauded. Sheehan said wryly, "Yeah, I clap one time for that. By dismissal we were denied the chance to present the facts to a jury and to the press."

One element of the Standing Rock confrontation he felt should be widely known is the involvement of TigerSwan, the name Blackwater goes by now. Wikipedia has a page about the outfit but it's mostly hooey. James Reese, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and disabled veteran, is the only named founder with the open secret being Eric Prince as the man.

Sheehan framed TigerSwan as a company whose personnel largely come straight from Delta Force, an elite Army Special Forces group that discharges personnel who have been trained by our government and are perfect for a private army that is hired out to corporations such as Energy Transfer Partners, the builders of the Dakota Access Pipeline, and who at Standing Rock referred to the Lakota in the same terms they used for the Iranians and Afghans, calling them Jihadis, which is "an ideologically driven insurgency with a strong religious component." The allure of joining TigerSwan is great for young men who enlisted in the Army to be part of something brutish and came out knowing nothing more. TigerSwan gives them a chance to use their training, only this time with real pay, against unarmed peace-

ful demonstrators. Sheehan told us TigerSwan has APCs and aircraft and a camp in North Carolina comparable in size to an army base. (As I write this I wonder about the demographics of TigerSwan. Like how many are white, and how many are members of the majority of our population.)

Sheehan spoke also about our government's official secret army, called the CIA. He said the CIA should be abolished.

The CIA came into existence in 1947 with the Cold War, and should have gone out with the end of it. Sheehan, though, went on to say nothing like that will happen so long as we have two political parties who represent the same people; bankers, corporate board members, and oil. When Roosevelt introduced the New Deal the Democratic Party genuinely represented the issues of the working class. After the Second World War, when the United States manufactured everything the world needed and money poured in, the Democrats slowly became just another sold-out political party. Bill and Hilary Clinton and

States as we know it will no longer exist within a decade or, at most, two."

The difference here is that Sheehan says the Democratic Party could be retaken and he told us how: Thirty five congressional districts are sure to be won by Democrats. "The incumbent candidate could fall down and die and she'd win." In these districts we should work to enter progressive candidates for the 2020 election. In a primary the progressive candidates would either take the seat or force the incumbent to change his or her ways, thus rededicating the Democratic Party to the values it espoused when it spoke for the people during the New Deal.

Sheehan advised everyone at the dinner to find progressive candidates to challenge Democratic incumbents. If we live in a district where there already is a progressive candidate, help organize another congressional district. If we want to help return the Democratic Party to the people, we must go where organizing is needed and do the work. Rather than trek-

with me that those two candidates are elements of the problem.

When we got to the Q&A only half a dozen questions had time to be asked because everyone with a question took the opportunity to deliver their own little speech. Each ended with a question but the questions were rhetorical. The Democratic party is too big to budge. Its contamination can't be cured. To be welcomed into the halls of Congress a Democrat must sell out or never have a voice. One person stood in defense of third parties. Another rose to say the previous person was the Green Party congressional candidate in that district.

By the fifth refutation, Danny appeared on the verge of impatience. Everyone had the same objection to his message and he gave each of them roughly the same follow-up. He told us third parties had been poisoned long ago. We won't be able to get 50 percent of the voters to stand behind the candidate of the Working Families Party. But run as a Democrat and also as a Working Families Party candidate, or a Green, or a Socialist, and Congress will take on a new look with new caucuses where a government not beholden to Wall Street can be on the table.

Of the 100 activists at the progressive organizations dinner almost everyone looked old enough to have stories of the '60s, and only a few were not white. Fifty years ago the issues were civil rights and Vietnam, with the farm workers gathering momentum. Now there are thousands of issues, most with more than one advocacy group. Divide and conquer could be what has happened. Was everyone who came to a peace rally and passed out information on a free food cooperative or an affordable housing movement or a prison workshop really of the political left? Or were we being divided? So many causes have arisen we are defused beyond having any effect. Try to find a cause most of us would agree is primary.

Peace may be that cause. Many of us, though, will say we can't have peace unless yada yada yada. I don't know about the yada yada yada. Probably all of us,

continued on page 23 ...

Sheehan says the Democratic Party could be retaken and he told us how.

Barack Obama knew how to talk about social justice but they threw in with Wall Street. He told us the Democratic ticket in 2020 will be Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, a façade of liberalism but both stooges of big business. This is Sheehan's summation of what became of social-democratic politics in our lifetime. He says it can be fixed.

Chris Hedges, the progressive journalist, Princeton lecturer, and author, paints a similar picture of the Democratic Party but comes to a different conclusion. In his new book, *The Farewell Tour*, Hedges writes, "The ruling elites bought the allegiances of the two main parties by purging ... New Deal Democrats and corporate and imperial critics. They imposed obedience to corporate capitalism and globalization within academia and the press." And he says, "The death spiral seems unstoppable, meaning the United

king down to Latin America to aid democratic efforts there, he told us, our friends in those countries would prefer we go to Washington and bring democracy to our own government.

Danny Sheehan speaks with such a solid and easy conviction that those of us in the audience could lose track of who we were before Sheehan took the floor. Take me: I haven't voted for a major party candidate since 1968, yet here I was suddenly identifying as a Democrat. I know many progressives already do. It's like rooting for a team you always hope will win but even in victory disappoints you. I've had otherwise rational people tell me I should have voted for Al Gore or Hillary Clinton simply to keep a greater evil out of the White House, while nothing was irrational about my vote for someone other than Al Gore or Hillary Clinton. Many people agree



Face-off with police at Standing Rock: Trespass charges against 800 water protectors at Standing Rock were dismissed, but, says lawyer Danny Sheehan, 'we were denied the chance to present the facts to a jury and to the press.'



President Gerald Ford visited the base in 1975, with author at left.

U.S. Opened Doors

... continued from page 1

12 report by *The Atlantic*. Those targeted for deportation have committed crimes in the United States but were still protected by a 2008 bilateral agreement between Vietnam and the United States assuring that Vietnamese citizens would not be subject to return if they arrived before July 12, 1995, the year diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States were resumed after the war. John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran and former U.S. secretary of state, called the move despicable on his Twitter account.

Mobilizing for Newcomers

In 1975, the U.S. military mobilized to take care of newcomers while their paperwork was processed, after which the U.S. government sent them to communities all over the United States.

These measures were by no means a comprehensive attempt at redress. Many people seeking a way out of Vietnam were stranded. Some became part of the huge wave of “boat people” in 1979, who overwhelmed refugee settlements in Asian countries and caused an international crisis. But it is safe to say the United States demonstrated a far more humane response than it does today.

And in 1980, the United States once again welcomed people in distress when 125,000 Cubans arrived as a part

and was in a U.S. Army Civil Affairs Reserve unit. The Army was notified on April 25, 1975, that the five military installations would be used and the Pentagon immediately sent out a call for reservists to help set up the military installations to receive and house up to 30,000 persons at a time.

The first refugees arrived at Fort Chaffee just seven days later, on May 2, on a plane carrying 70 people. Within 22 days, 25,812 refugees were at the base, making it the 11th-largest city in Arkansas. By June, 6,500 reservists had volunteered for active duty at Fort Chaffee.

At the peak of the airlift, as many as 17 flights a day landed at Fort Smith Municipal Airport with passengers bound for Fort Chaffee. All told, 415 refugee flights landed at the Fort Smith airport during the seven months that the base served as a refugee center. When the camp closed on Dec. 20, 1975, it had helped 50,809 people begin to regroup for life in the United States.

Fixing Up the Base

With the exception of annual two-week training cycles for the U.S. Army Reserve and Arkansas National Guard, Fort Chaffee had not been used since the mobilization for the Korean War. The majority of the sprawling barracks, built during World War 2 and the Korean War, had been shut for over 20 years. Units of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and medical units from Fort Sill, Okla.—the closest active-duty U.S. Army installa-

The first refugees arrived at Fort Chaffee just seven days later, on May 2, on a plane carrying 70 people. Within 22 days, 25,812 refugees were at the base, making it the 11th-largest city in Arkansas.

of the Mariel boatlift during the Carter administration. Another 15,000 Haitians arrived on the shores of Florida by boat that same year.

In 1975 I was one of thousands of U.S. military personnel who received the Vietnamese, first on military ships, later at military bases in the Philippines and then in Guam. Ultimately, I wound up volunteering at Fort Chaffee, Ark, one of the five refugee camps set up in the continental United States. The others were at Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Camp McCoy, Wisc.; Indiantown Gap, Pa.; and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

At the time, I was attending law school at the University of Arkansas, 50 miles from the Fort Chaffee base,

tion—arrived in late April 1975 to open up the facilities.

Animals were driven out of the buildings, toilet facilities re-opened. Some barracks were partially renovated for use by families. Giant “mess halls,” or military cafeterias, were set up. A small hospital was cleaned and equipped, along with office spaces for refugee placement agencies.

Once the refugees had arrived, an array of hosting demands arose. U.S. Army doctors and nurses tended to people with medical needs. The Army’s kitchen staff began cooking huge caldrons of rice and vegetables and boiling water for tea. Mess halls fed 6,000 people three meals a day and were open around the clock.

Rice Incident

There was an incident over rice. The Vietnamese did not like the rice being served to them, which had been grown in the camp’s host state. It was a diplomatic challenge to inform former President Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, that we would have to get a different type of rice produced in another state because the Vietnamese refugees were not eating Arkansas rice. (That did not go over well in a state where most residents, including myself, didn’t know there were different kinds of rice.)

Lots of babies arrived with mothers who were so severely stressed that they had trouble producing milk. Any infant formula would have to be lactose-free because in Vietnam cow milk was not used in formulas. One of my jobs was to make this arrangement. Companies cooperated very quickly, turning trucks around from their original destinations and sending them to the military bases and ramping up production for a new lactose-intolerant demographic in the country.

Resettlement was swift. Within two weeks, hundreds were leaving the camps as refugee organizations expertly found communities and groups all over the United States who poured out support, eager to sponsor families and individuals. Churches and civic groups found housing, equipped the houses and found jobs for the people who were arriving.

As the summer of 1975 drew to a close, any refugees who had not been resettled were consolidated in one camp at chilly Indiantown Gap, Pa. The U.S. Army general in charge of Fort Chaffee called me into his office and assigned me to procure winter clothing. We wound up finding clothing in the warehouses of the Armed Forces Post Exchange System, which were delivered in September.

All of these stories are to say that the U.S. government today could do far more to alleviate the refugee crisis than it is doing. There is still plenty of room in U.S. society and its land mass for people fleeing violence. All that’s missing today is political will.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. She was also a U.S. diplomat and was in U.S. embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan, and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to the lies the Bush administration was stating as the rationale for the invasion, occupation, and destruction of Iraq. She is the co-author of Dissent: Voices of Conscience.



Top: Base cafeteria. Bottom: World War 2 barracks had to be renovated. Photos: Ann Wright.

10 Good Things About 2018

By Medea Benjamin

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

1. The election of the progressive new members of Congress, particularly women of color such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Deb Haaland, Ayanna Pressley and Sharice Davids. Before even taking office they are shaking up the D.C. establishment: Calling out lobbyists for briefing new members of Congress? Refusing to take the "mandatory" AIPAC trip to Israel? Paying congressional interns? Calling for a Green New Deal and Medicare for All? It's head-spinning for the establishment and thrilling for the rest of us. With these new progressive allies, with Democrats now controlling the House, and with an expanded and invigorated Progressive Caucus, we have a chance to drag centrist Democrats into supporting policies that might not be popular with their big-dollar donors but are wildly popular with the public.

2. 2018 was a year of awe-inspiring youth activism. The Parkland school shooting two days after Valentine's Day led to a massive student-led movement for tougher gun laws. Students mobilized in Washington, D.C., at the March for Our Lives and in schools across the country. This same kind of energy and creativity exploded with the Sunrise Movement, a youth movement determined to make climate change an urgent priority for U.S. elected officials with a Green New Deal. And just as the year was coming to an end, a sensational 15-year-old student from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, captured world attention at the U.N. climate summit with her call for youth to hold adults accountable for the mess they've created. In a fabulous example of synergy between young activists, Greta's school strike (she sat in front of the Swedish Parliament instead of going to school) was itself inspired by the walkouts initiated by the Parkland students.

3. A historical turning point was reached this year to start breaking up the 75-year U.S.-Saudi alliance. With three years of relentless Saudi bombing of Yemen leading to the world's greatest human catastrophe and the barbaric murder of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Congress and business leaders finally began to question their relationship with this retrograde kingdom and its brutal de facto leader Mohammad bin Salman. In an unprecedented vote, the Senate approved a measure to halt U.S. support to the Saudis in Yemen, which is helping promote a negotiated settlement. The effort to curb Trump's support for the Saudi war in Yemen comes at the same time that Trump announced the

withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria and a halving of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Maybe, just maybe, 2019 will mark the winding down of the disastrous wars that have marked U.S. policy since the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

4. Labor organizing has been on the rise, from teachers to high-tech workers. The audacious 13-day strike by teachers in West Virginia won a 5 percent pay increase and launched a wave of similar actions from Oklahoma to Arizona. West Virginia teachers stood with bus drivers, janitors, and school kitchen staff before calling an end to the strike, refusing to take a pay increase until everyone's demands were met. In the tech industry, Google employees pushed the

[P]ut on your seatbelts and hold tight—or better yet, prepare to take to the streets. If you thought 2018 was frenetic, 2019 promises to be one helluva ride.

company to end its contract to help the Pentagon with artificial intelligence that could be used in drone strikes. They also demanded that Google not cooperate with Chinese censorship. Microsoft employees are pushing the company to break its contract with ICE; Amazon workers want Jeff Bezos to stop supplying facial recognition technology to the police.

5. Florida's restoration of voting rights through Amendment 4, the ballot measure lifting the state's permanent ban on voting by anyone with a felony conviction, received overwhelming support from nearly 65 percent of voters. It restores voting rights for some 1.4 million people, potentially changing the Florida—and national—electoral landscape, since most formerly incarcerated people vote Democratic and the 2000 president election was determined in Florida by a mere 537 votes. Iowa and Kentucky are now the only states that must change this retrograde lifetime ban. But with the myriad examples of voter suppression in the 2018 election, voter rights must be a key focus before 2020!

6. Stopping the Keystone XL pipeline is a victory for the coalition of environmental and Indigenous groups that have been opposing the pipeline for years. Among the opponents is the Cheyenne River tribe. Like Standing Rock in the case of the Dakota pipeline, the Cheyenne River tribe fears a tar sands oil spill from the pipeline would contaminate its waters. President Obama, under tremendous pressure from the grassroots, halted further work in 2015 but Trump started it up again in 2017. Thanks to legal challenges, in November a federal court blocked any further work until the Trump administration undertakes a serious review of its climate impact. This reprieve gives organizers more time ... to organize!

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

An August poll found that a whopping 70 percent of Americans, including 85 percent of Democrats and 52 percent of Republicans, back the single-payer plan. When Senator Bernie Sanders promoted this idea during his presidential campaign, he was pilloried by liberal commentators. Well, guess what? Medicare for All now has support from 124 House members and 16 senators, including most of the high-profile likely 2020 presidential contenders. Even Barack Obama, who eschewed single-payer in favor of the Affordable Care Act during his presidency, has now endorsed Medicare for All. In 2018, the Congressional "Medicare For All Caucus" was launched with 76 members. Since health care was the top concern for voters in the 2018 midterms, Medicare for All should be a no-brainer for politicians who care more about their

constituents than Big Pharma.

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

9. Ethiopia's new prime minister, 42-year-old Abiy Ahmed, took office in April and immediately went to work ending the 20-year war with Eritrea, releasing thousands of prisoners, allow-

ing dissidents to return home and lifting censorship. Then he appointed a cabinet with 50 percent women and the nation's first female president! His astounding reforms have won him adoration among millions, but he has been challenged with an assassination attempt by the old guard and ethnic clashes. His message to the nation's 90 ethnic groups remains one that Donald Trump should hear: "Take down the wall, build the bridge."

10. Armenia experienced a dramatic, people power uprising against corrupt, autocratic rulers, in which one out of every three Armenians participated. The campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience was led by a young member of parliament, Nikol Pashinyan. After initially attacking the protesters, the police later joined them. In April, the massive street protests were so powerful they pushed the prime minister to resign and coerced the ruling party to elect the opposition street leader, Pashinyan, as prime minister. In December, the new political bloc went on to trounce the former ruling party 70 percent to 5 percent in parliamentary elections. This "velvet revolution," which represented the climax of a decade of peaceful protest focused on human rights, women's rights, workers' rights and environmentalism, succeeded in taking power without shedding a drop of blood!

So there you have it. Despite Trump in the White House and the rise of right-wing movements around the globe, 2018 was chock full of good things—most of which went underreported because of all the attention on Donald Trump. And oh, speaking of Trump, I left out probably the most important development of all: the tightening noose of investigations, making his presidency seems less and less tenable. So put on your seatbelts and hold tight—or better yet, prepare to take to the streets. If you thought 2018 was frenetic, 2019 promises to be one helluva ride.

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



The March 24 March for Our Lives was part of the awe-inspiring youth organizing that blossomed in 2018. Photo: Ellen Davidson.

A call for a more sane more humane border **An Encounter on the U.S./ Mexico Border** By John Grant

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

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

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

continued on page 18 ...



Two demonstrators who inspired the author: Sally Alice Thompson, well into her 90s, is a seasoned antiwar veteran, while Luna, who roamed widely among the demonstrators, is just starting out.
Photo: John Grant.



Encuentro Links Immigration and Increased Militarization

By SOA Watch Staff

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

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

During the vigil at Eloy, we heard moving testimony from Alejandra Pablos, an immigrant rights and reproductive justice activist and two-time detainee at Eloy Detention Center. She, alongside other immigrant rights activists throughout the United States, is being targeted for her activism in defense of her community and for boldly denouncing systems of injustice. Alejandra has been added to a growing list of names of immigrant and human rights defenders being targeted by ICE

for deportation. Earlier this week, she and other social justice activists testified in a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., about the pattern of criminalization of human rights defenders in this country. The vigil at Eloy was powerful because it created a space for us to listen to those most directly affected by the systems that criminalize and dehumanize our brothers and sisters, and to not lose sight of the connections between the policies of displacement in countries of origin and the policies of criminalization, detention and deportation in the United States.

On Saturday, veterans and others took to the streets to march to the militarized U.S./Mexico border wall as a show of solidarity with migrants who have embarked on long and perilous journeys and to denounce U.S. intervention in Latin America. Soon after, hundreds of activists from across the Americas converged at the border wall in ambos Nogales to build a collective analysis around the political mo-

ment. Speakers from across borders—the Tohono O’odham community, the Maya Mam community, veterans, human rights defenders and survivors from Mexico and Guatemala, families searching for their disappeared, and activists fighting to demilitarize the borderlands—all came together to speak truth to power. It was a day to recognize that borders have not succeeded in separating our connected struggles, and we built and deepened our transnational networks of solidarity and resistance. And because joy is one of the most powerful tools of resistance to oppression, artists held the space at the border wall to resist through music, spoken word, celebration, and dance, as no border can ever contain the human spirit or our right to dream.

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

We stood together, divided by a dehumanizing border wall, but united in our resolve to dismantle border imperialism and the structures that maintain it. We called out the names of those whose lives have been taken from us, singing “¡Presente!” to affirm that they are with us, that they are not forgotten, and we will continue to resist U.S. state violence in their name. Non-violent direct action is a meaningful tra-

continued on page 18 ...



Jesus Would Be Appalled by America's Immigration Policy

By Major Danny Sjursen

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

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

Whether or not you believe Jesus was the literal Son of God—I have doubts myself—two truths remain salient at this time of year: America is, by and large, the most religious (Christian) wealthy country on the planet, and the founder of that religion was, according to its holy book, a refugee. Depending on the gospel you favor, Christ was born on the run from wicked King Herod, spending the first years of his life not in his reputed birthplace, Bethlehem, but in Egypt and/or the small village of Nazareth in the Galilee.

Ironical then, isn't it, that so many Americans lack empathy for a new generation of refugees—many of them victims of U.S. foreign policy generally and its militarism specifically. This has been especially true for people of color, who constitute the vast majority of migrants seeking refuge and repatriation today. As 2018 turns to 2019, the largest migration of people since the end of World War 2 has become a global crisis. And U.S. military policy is at least partly—if not mostly—responsible for some of the worst humanitarian disasters the world over.



Asylum seekers on the Mexico side of the border are tear-gassed by U.S. troops.

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

The results have been nothing less than

down by Israeli Defense Forces. None of this would be possible, again, without the support of Washington's \$3 billion in annual military aid and the reflexive cover of America's most powerful institutions.

Forgetting, conveniently, that Jesus Christ was himself a brown Palestinian (Jew), the U.S. has relegated Gaza residents to second-class citizenship, subjugating them to an increasingly unhinged, far-right Israeli government. For good measure, and as a final slap in the face to Palestinian sovereignty, President Donald Trump

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

To return to Americans' favored theology, let us admit the baby Jesus was born a refugee, and the grown Jesus essentially died one. Beginning his preaching mission, Christ had “nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8.20; Luke 9.58), and he and his followers counted on the hospitality of ordinary villagers to survive (Mark 6.8–11; Matthew 10.9–11; Luke 9.3). Reflect for just a moment this Christmas on the starving Yemeni children, perennially blockaded Gaza residents and the migrants tear-gassed on America's southern border or separated from their parents. Think then, as the song says, of the children “shivering in the cold.”

When you do, ask what role America, our government, has played in creating and perpetuating the latest refugee crises. Is the United States living up to the ostensible ethics of its zealously proclaimed Christianity? The oldest gospel speaks of Jesus telling his transient apostles this: “And if any place will not receive you and refuse to hear you, shake off the dust on your feet when you leave, for a testimony to them” (Mark 6.11).

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

Merry Christmas, America.

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

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

horrifying: tens of thousands of civilians killed in air strikes, 85,000 children already starved to death, the world's worst cholera epidemic spreading, and, yes, the creation of more than 3 million refugees. Imagine the popular outcry if those starving faces and bodies were white and Christian. (Side note: Our beloved Jesus was himself rather brown, despite the best efforts of the institutional church to literally whitewash that inconvenient fact.) To its credit, the U.S. Senate has voted, however belatedly, to end U.S. support for that war. Still, don't expect a change in Washington's criminal policies any time soon: the president has announced his intention to veto the resolution, and the Senate thus far lacks the votes to override him.

In the Gaza Strip, the most densely populated sliver of the planet earth, Israel has forged the largest all-but-permanent refugee camp in the world—this with the unconditional backing of the United States. Now in its 11th year, the inhuman blockade of Gaza has reduced Palestinians trapped there to a state of complete dependency on humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations. And when the residents have the gall to protest their deplorable (and preventable) conditions, they are indiscriminately mowed

has also unilaterally moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. Despite it being home to three world religions, the region is now for Jews only, Washington has apparently decided. Paradoxically, and ever so cynically, American evangelicals have thrown their full support behind the decision. A staggering 30 percent of Americans believe that end times are near and that backing of the Israeli government will help usher in Jesus' return. Of course, according to the evangelical view, when the Messiah does materialize, all those Jews will promptly go to hell unless they accept Christianity, but that's a risk Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his reactionary government are willing to take. The \$3 billion in arms support goes a long way, I suppose.

Then there's the migrant crisis on America's own southern border. The President, naturally, wants a “tremendous” wall to keep the stream of asylum-seeking men, women, and children out of the country. He's even proved willing to shut down the government until he receives funding for his “artistically designed steel slats.” This Christmas, in fact, U.S. soldiers will spend the holiday season stationed on the border to halt an “invasion” that isn't an invasion at all but a collection of impoverished refugees seeking a better way of life.



British Neutrality: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?

By Edward Horgan

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

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

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

Let's consider what being a neutral state means in terms of international law, and some of the practicalities involved. The 1907 Hague Convention on Neutrality is



Members of Veterans For Peace demonstrate Nov. 19 against the U.S. military's use of Ireland's Shannon Airport as a transit point for troops and weapons headed for wars in the Middle East. Photo: Ellen Davidson.

convoys of either munitions of war or supplies across the territory of a neutral Power.

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

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

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

In recent years it has been considered acceptable for neutral states to engage in military actions in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations, but this provision has

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

Let's consider what neutrality for Britain actually means.

Advantages of British neutrality:

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

Disadvantages of Britain going neutral:

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

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British neutrality would help restore the United Nations to its primary role in maintaining international peace. Britain could take the lead in transforming the United Nations into a genuine humanitarian organization.

the foundational document on neutrality.

Austria, Finland, and Switzerland have neutrality enshrined in their constitutions and others, such as Ireland and Sweden, are neutral as a declared matter of government policy. Once a state declares itself to be neutral, it is obliged to comply with international laws on neutrality. Any country that is not an active belligerent in a particular war is considered to be a neutral state by default with regard to that war, and should comply with international rules of neutrality. But constitutional neutrality is by far the best option. Where neutrality is only a matter of government policy, then governments can easily involve their countries in wars. One of the difficulties for Britain achieving constitutional neutrality is that Britain does not have a written constitution—the British Constitution has evolved from legal custom and practice.

The following sections of the Hague Convention on Neutrality are important:

The Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers

Article 1. The territory of neutral Powers is inviolable.

Article 2. Belligerents are forbidden to move troops or

been very seriously abused in cases, such as the overthrow of the Libyan government in 2011, ostensibly in compliance with a U.N. resolution to impose a no-fly zone for so-called humanitarian reasons. This was in gross breach of international laws on neutrality regardless of any U.N. resolutions. The U.N. resolution did not and could not allow NATO and its allies to overthrow the government of Libya, as any such action is a clear breach of the U.N. Charter, yet NATO and its allies did overthrow the Libyan government, and also of course overthrew the Afghan and Iraqi governments and almost did the same in the case of Syria.

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

1848 and the Yellow Vests

By David Rovics

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

They know that when those they are governing collectively realize that, fundamentally, their interests are not being represented by those that govern them, then governance becomes impossible. French authorities de-

ployed 8,000 riot cops and unprecedented amounts of armor into the streets of Paris last weekend, but the Yellow Vest movement appears only to be growing, as well as spreading to neighboring countries.

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

Despite all efforts to vilify the movement, despite the burning banks and charred remains of sports cars in central Paris, as people in yellow vests gather on highways throughout the country to shut it down for another day, all polls indicate the movement is overwhelmingly popu-

lar among the French public, unlike their very unpopular banker-turned-president, Macron.

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

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

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

1848

By David Rovics

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

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

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

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

David Rovics is a topical singer/songwriter and anarchist, whose music addresses such issues as the 2003 Iraq War, Palestine, globalization and social justice. His most recent recording is Ballad of a Wobbly.



Neutrality

... continued from previous page

tinuation of the nuclear power industry is the need to provide fuel and expertise for the nuclear weapons industry.

6. Britain might become a welfare state, at enormous expense to the banking and financial sectors.

In reality there are no genuine disadvantages for the majority of the British people if Britain went neutral. It would be a win-win situation.

The reason for having a government at all is that the government in a democracy should act as all times in the best interest of the vast majority of its people, and not just in the best interests in its elite, including its bankers and big business and especially in the interests of the military-industrial complex.

Protecting the lives of its citizens is the most basic and most important duty and responsibility of any government.

But there are even more serious strategic reasons why Britain should consider neutrality in the interests of the British people, and these are connected with the real risk of nuclear war. Britain's possession of a small number of nuclear weapons provides no defense for the people of Britain in the event of a European war. On the contrary, they are a real liability, making Britain a target for a nuclear strike without any defense advantages.

The first step therefore for Britain toward becoming neutral should be to get rid of all its more or less useless nuclear weapons. They are not a deterrent, more just a

very convenient target.

Humanity is now facing a coming together or confluence of crises that could destroy humanity and our living environment on this very vulnerable planet Earth.

The existing or impending crises in possible order of priority include:

1. The real risk of nuclear war
2. Climate change and catastrophic damage to our environment
3. Unjustified conventional wars causing millions of deaths and infrastructural and environmental damage
4. The resulting refugee and migrant crisis
5. The economic chaos being caused by destructive neo-liberal global economic systems
6. Political upheaval across the world

If VFP UK makes proposals that Britain should eventually become a neutral state, this will initially be received with incredulity and possibly some shock, but just like planting an acorn that will likely grow into a large oak tree, likewise with neutrality. It may fall on rocky ground, but it may also grow into a very significant movement.

Common sense should tell us that in this age of weapons of mass destruction, war is no longer a safe or sane way of conducting international affairs. Unfortunately, common sense has become very uncommon these days.

Let's give peace and neutrality a try—it cannot do any harm, and it might do a lot of good.

Edward Horgan is a veteran of 21 years military service, he is coordinator of Veterans For Peace Ireland and International Secretary of the Irish Peace and Neutrality Alliance.

International activists in Dublin demand that closing of U.S./NATO bases Conference Confronts Global Militarism

By Roger Harris

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

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

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

Guantánamo was the first of the world network of U.S. foreign military bases, according to keynote speaker Dr. Aleida Guevara from Cuba, daughter of Che. Cuba opposes this violation of national sovereignty. Today the United States possesses some 1,000 foreign military bases with troops stationed in over 170 countries.

Annette Brownlie of the Independent



Margaret Kimberley and Margaret Flowers at the International Conference Against U.S./NATO Military Bases. Photo: Ellen Davidson.

and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) warned of a new Cold War. The recent U.S. National Security Strategy document, focusing on “great power confrontation,” signals open preparations for direct military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

David Webb of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK explained that the United States is the only nation with nuclear weapons based outside its soil. U.S. policy is to develop “usable” nuclear weapons in an enhanced first-strike capacity. Missile defense, he reproved, is the shield for the sword of nuclear weapons. The purpose of missile defense is to protect the aggressor against the inevitable retaliation after a first nuclear strike.

Margaret Flowers of Popular Resis-

tance reported that the recent U.S. mid-term elections brought in more congressional representatives with military or security state backgrounds. The duopoly of the two U.S. “war parties” is united in supporting an accelerated arms race. Well over half of the U.S. government’s discretionary budget now goes to the military.

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

The session on the environmental and health impacts featured testimony on the toxic effects of military bases in Oki-

nawa, Czech Republic, and Turkey. The U.S. Department of Defense is the world’s largest polluter.

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

Margaret Kimberley of the Black Agenda Report chaired the Africa session. South African Chris Matlhako and Kenyan Ann Atambo discussed the dependency of African states on foreign aid, which is used as a tool to facilitate the occupation of Africa by foreign militaries.

Paul Pumphrey of Friends of the Congo described the development of U.S. strategy in Africa, which has used African proxies to allow domination and extraction of valuable resources such as coltan from the Congo. Now the strategy also includes direct occupation by the U.S. military. George W. Bush’s establishment of AFRICOM in 2008, with just a single acknowledged U.S. military base on the continent, was followed by an explosion of some 50 bases and, under Obama, a military presence in practically every African nation..

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

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

The conference concluded on a high note of unity among the international peace forces. Conference coordinator Bahman Azad of the World Peace Council closed with a call to first educate and then mobilize.

Actions are being planned in Washington, D.C., around the 70th anniversary of NATO on April 4 (see article on page 17). Coincidentally that is the date of the assassination of Martin Luther King and of his famous speech a year before when he presciently admonished that “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government.”

Originally published at popularresistance.com.

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

Coalition Calls for Closing U.S. Bases Overseas

Closing Bases Will Make America Safer and Save Billions of Dollars

Washington, DC—Military experts from across the ideological spectrum held a public event Nov. 29 in the Russell Senate Office Building, to release an open letter arguing for the closure of wasteful, damaging, and unneeded U.S. military bases abroad. In an era of bitter divisions between right and left, consensus is growing around a long-overlooked but crucial part of how the United States engages with the world: the nearly 75-year-old strategy of maintaining some 800 U.S. military bases in 80 foreign countries.

The open letter is addressed to the Trump administration and Congress and was drafted by the new transpartisan Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition (OBRACC). The Coalition reflects growing agreement among military experts that reducing the excessive U.S. military footprint could actually make the country safer while sav-

ing billions of dollars a year. Signatories to the letter include Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Greens, and independents. They span a retired Army general and other retired military officers; peace advocates; a former GOP member of Congress; Clinton, Reagan, and George W. Bush administration officials; and academics and think tank analysts across the ideological spectrum. Speakers at the event included Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, (U.S. Army, Ret.), former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell; Dr. Catherine Lutz, professor of anthropology and international studies, Brown University; John Glaser, director, Foreign Policy Studies, Cato Institute; Sayo Saruta, director, New Diplomacy Initiative (Japan); and David Vine, professor of anthropology, American University.

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson commented, “It’s encouraging to see experts

from across a broad political spectrum finally questioning our Cold War-era overseas basing strategy. That strategy today is wasting billions of dollars, making the U.S. and the world less secure, and inviting constant military responses to threats that rarely concern the vital interests of America.”

Another signatory, Col. Andrew Bacevich, added, “Persisting in the Cold War policy of stationing vast numbers of U.S. troops in hundreds of bases around the globe is obsolete and counterproductive. We must chart a different course.”

The Cato Institute’s John Glaser said, “U.S. overseas basing creates needless cost and danger. A less aggressive strategy requiring fewer overseas bases would greatly reduce both military spending and security dangers to the United States.”

This article was originally published at overseasbases.net.

Protests Called for NATO Anniversary in DC

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

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

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

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

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

in order to meet U.S. demands for even more military spending.

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

At the recent conference in Washington, D.C., organized in opposition to Trump's proposed, then canceled military parade, 100 activists supported a resolution to oppose the NATO meeting. A similar proposal was supported by the 300

people from 35 countries who gathered in Dublin in November to oppose U.S./NATO military bases (see article on page 16). In unity, our movement is capable of producing the kind of numbers that can show the world that we want to see an end to NATO and an end to war.

The schedule for protest activities is starting to come together. On Saturday, March 30, a mass rally and march will start at 1 p.m. in Lafayette Park, across from the White House.

On April 2, an alternative summit will be held.

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

On April 4, Black Alliance for Peace will hold an open meeting, and other rallies are being planned.

Join us in DC, March 30–April 4.

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

For more information on the April 3 peace festival, visit worldbeyondwar.org/notonato.

For more information in the Black Alliance for Peace event, visit blackallianceforpeace.com/events/april4natodemo.



Anti-imperialists at the International Conference Against U.S./NATO Military Bases in Dublin, Nov. 16. Photo: Ellen Davidson.

Torched Planet

... continued from page 4

By 2005, after a great tussle, much of the world had agreed on a plan to reduce carbon emissions—the Kyoto Protocol. It was just barely enough—barely—to imagine that one day climate change might be lessened and reduced enough to be manageable. Still, there was one notable hold-out—as usual, America.

Now, at this point, the world, which was in a very different place politically than it is today, imagined that with enough of the usual diplomatic bickering and horse-trading, maybe, just maybe, it would get the job done. And yet, by 2010 or so, the point of all this, which was to create a global carbon pricing system, had still not been accomplished—in large part thanks to America, whose unshakeable devotion to capitalism meant that such a thing was simply politically impossible. So by this point the world was behind—and yet, one could still imagine a kind of success. Maybe an American president would come along

who would see sense. Maybe progress was going in the right direction, generally. After all, slowly, the world was making headway, toward less carbon emissions, toward a little more cooperation, here and there.

And then—Bang! America was the first nation to fall to the neofascist wave. Instead of a president who might have taken the country into a decarbonized future, Americans elected the king of the idiots. He questioned whether climate change was real. He packed the government with lobbyists and cronies who were quite happy to see the world burn, if it meant a penthouse overlooking a drowned Central Park. He broke up with allies, friends, and partners. The idea of a decarbonizing future was suddenly turned on its head. It had been a possibility yesterday—but now, it was becoming an impossibility.

Before the neofascist wave, the world might have indeed “solved” climate change. Maybe not in the hard sense that life would go on tomorrow as it does today—but in the soft sense that the worst and most vicious scenarios were mostly outlandish science fiction. That is be-

cause before the neofascist wave, we could imagine nations cooperating, if slowly, reluctantly, in piecemeal ways, toward things like protecting life, reducing carbon, pricing in the environment, and so on. These things can only be done through global cooperation, after all.

But after the neofascist wave, global cooperation—especially of a genuinely beneficial kind, not a predatory kind—began to become less and less possible by the day. The world was unraveling. When countries were trashing the United Nations and humiliating their allies and proclaiming how little they needed the world—how could such a globe cooperate more then? So the neofascist wave that we are now in also means drastically less global cooperation—but less global cooperation means incalculably worse climate change.

So now let's connect all the dots. Capitalism didn't just rape the planet laughing, and cause climate change that way. It did something that history will think of as even more astonishing. By quite predictably imploding into fascism at precisely the moment when the world needed co-

operation, it made it impossible, more or less, for the fight against climate change to gather strength, pace, and force. It wasn't just the environmental costs of capitalism that melted down the planet—it was the social costs, too, which, by wrecking global democracy, international law, cooperation, the idea that nations should work together, made a fractured, broken world that no longer had the capability to act jointly to prevent the rising floodwaters and the burning summers.

Americans will ask me, a little angrily, for “solutions.”

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

Umair Haque is a writer and economic philosopher.

Humane Border

... continued from page 12

meshes to prevent that; they also installed a steel fence 10 feet from the wall on the U.S. side, preventing people from getting next to the wall. This, however, did not stop people from effectively doing civil disobedience and going up to the wall.

On the U.S. side of the demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday, Border Patrol SUVs kept an eye on the peaceful demonstrators. The Border Patrol agent I spoke with spent the day parked overlooking the demonstration. The man seemed quite bored. He explained to me that the steel meshes all over his SUV were because, "They like to throw rocks at us." This SUV was parked at the spot where, across the border in Mexico, there is a large painting of 16-year-old Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez who was shot dead in 2012 by a U.S. Border Patrol agent for throwing rocks through the wall. The agent was charged with second-degree murder but was acquitted in April. It was 11 p.m.; the agent claimed there was drug activity in the area and that he was scared due to the rocks coming at him; he emptied his pistol and re-loaded, firing a total of 20 rounds—10 of them hitting the boy. The Border Patrol agency has gone from 4,000 agents in the late '90s to over 21,000 currently.

The Encuentro was a festive affair, with puppets, bands, and speeches. The spirit of the *manifestación* could be characterized by the idea of Ambos Nogales, a historic community that may straddle a national border but is in reality a place of international dialogue and human exchange, a place where a distinct, rigid border separated by a tall steel wall is resented by those living near it—a situation that must necessarily be enforced by violence, something that explains the ridiculous death of Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez.

The Battle of Ambos Nogales

The border running through Ambos Nogales is rich with history. This year is the 100th anniversary of two things, the Nov. armistice ending World War I and what is called the August 1918 Battle of

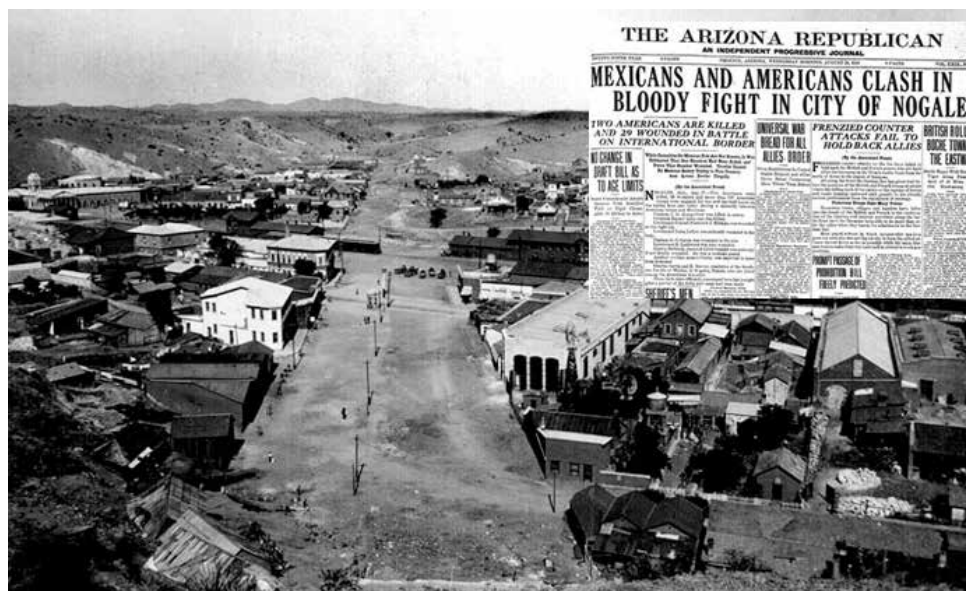
Ambos Nogales. The battle began with a shoot-out in the customs area between the United States and Mexico, an area now characterized by retinal scans of everybody going north into the United States. We all breezed south with our signs and puppets into Mexico but to return we had to wait an hour-and-a-half in a line to get our papers checked and our retinas scanned, lest a threat to America slip into our midst. Like today, back in 1918, there was considerable tension along the border. Smugglers were an issue. The Mexican Revolution was ongoing, creating tension along the border. Also, in the midst of WWI, German military agents had been stirring up the Mexicans with the idea of re-taking the U.S. Southwest, which had once belonged to Mexico.

Like many wars, this tiny war began out

been shot, so he opened fire with his pistol, killing the U.S. Army private. All hell broke loose, and there was a brief shootout. The carpenter and others either hunkered down behind something or ran for their lives.

The U.S. military went into action. Units were sent to secure the high ground around Nogales. Black U.S. buffalo soldiers from Fort Huachuca's 10th Cavalry were sent into the streets of Nogales. During the fighting, the mayor of Nogales, Mexico, tried to stop the carnage by stepping into the street with a white handkerchief tied on his cane. He was hit and killed by a shot that came across the border from the U.S. side.

Examples of civilian Mexican heroism that have been historically honored include local prostitutes from the red-light district, two of whom were wounded.



The open swath of ground that was the border at the turn of the 20th century and the reporting of the Battle of Ambos Nogales.

of confusion. A Mexican carpenter was moving with materials from the U.S. side to Mexico. He had technically passed into Mexico when a U.S. customs agent, figuring he was smuggling something, ordered him to return to the U.S. side. Mexican customs officials told the man to ignore the U.S. customs agents. At this point, a U.S. Army private raised his Springfield rifle to make the carpenter back up. He apparently let loose a warning shot, which caused the carpenter to quickly drop to the floor. A Mexican agent thought the carpenter had

These women ventured into the street under fire, waving painted red crosses and carrying bed-sheets to minister to the wounded. An account by 10th Cavalry First Sgt. Thomas Jordan reports a soldier being recognized by one of the women. "Sergeant Jackson! Are we all glad to see you!" she exclaimed, according to his account. "Not now, honey," was apparently the reply.

By the time a cease-fire was declared, two U.S. persons had been killed and 29 wounded; on the Mexican side, the num-

bers are less certain, but at least 125 were killed and some 300 wounded. An investigation laid the blame for the incident on resentment over routine mistreatment of Mexicans by U.S. border agents. It seems little has changed. One Mexican official honored "the many Mexican civilians who laid down their lives in fitting protest against such humiliating and unjust conduct toward them."

Today's Border

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

There is no human reason why a more dignified, more humane border control cannot be conceived and worked out—one that does not rely on violence to the extent the one we have now does. Ending the inhuman, supply-focused failure of the many-decade old U.S. drug war would be a great place to start. Little seems to have changed since 1918; the issues just get wrapped up with modern technological advances as the problems get darker and seem ever more insurmountable.

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

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



Fifteen activists risked arrest, staging a die-in next to the border wall.

Encuentro on the Border

... continued from page 12

dition in the SOA Watch movement. The construction of a new restricted pedestrian area along the U.S. border wall presented an opportunity for us to "cross a new line" with our civil disobedience. As the souls and names of the 123 people found dead in the Arizona desert this year were memorialized from the stage, 15 people risked arrest and crossed into this area to stage a die-in. As each person lay on the ground holding a cross with the numbers of people found dead crossing the desert each year over the past decade, others planted marigolds, and the space was transformed into what the wall and the border really represent—a mass grave. While no one was arrested this year, this action renewed our movement's commitment to crossing the line to expose the truth of our government's policies.

The weekend of the Border Encuentro was, for our brothers and sisters in the struggle in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, and Costa Rica, a space to be a part of the continued struggle of SOA Watch to close the School of the Americas and put an end to the systems of oppression that affect us all.

It was also a reminder that we refuse to be silenced and that communities everywhere are fighting back.

Stand with Okinawa

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

By Moé Yonamine

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

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

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

Four months have passed since I joined the Okinawan elders back home, and so

many have continued to hold sit-ins every week—for some, every day—despite being forcibly removed by Japanese riot police. Meanwhile, the concrete blocks and metal bars have been dropped into the ocean on top of the coral to outline where the base will be constructed. Governor Takeshi Onaga, who had succeeded in halting the base construction, died from cancer in August, and the Okinawan people elected a new governor, Denny Tamaki, by an overwhelming majority—based on his promise that he would stop the Henoko destruction. More than 75,000 Okinawans showed up in an island-wide protest during typhoon weather to show the world how strongly we oppose this base construction. Yet, the Japanese central government announced that on Dec. 14 they would resume construction of the landfill with sand and concrete. Authorities argued that building a new Henoko base is necessary in order to maintain the U.S.-Japan security alliance, and U.S. government leaders touted the base’s location for regional security.

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

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



Above: Daily protests have blocked the construction gates at Henoko for more than 14 years. Photo: Tarak Kauff. Right: Okinawan demonstrator is removed by police from mainland Japan. Photo: Ellen Davidson.



were left homeless.

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

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

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

For me, the Henoko struggle is about honoring my people’s existence and our right to protect our native land. I draw in-

spiration from the Australian students’ protest to stop the Adani coal company from building coal mines in Queensland, and from the Kanaka Maoli people’s movement to block the destruction of Mauna Kea in Hawai’i for an 18-story telescope. Okinawa is my home, my ancestral home. To have it destroyed is unfathomable.

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

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

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

Moé Yonamine, an Okinawan native, is a teacher in Portland, Ore., and is an editorial associate of *Rethinking Schools*. She is part of a network of Zinn Education Project teachers.



Three delegations of Veterans For Peace members have joined the protests at the Henoko construction site. Photo: Tarak Kauff.

‘Thank you, we are with you’

Palestinian Activists Stand in Solidarity with Marc Lamont Hill

By Yumna Patel

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

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

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

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

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

Munther Amira: He paid a very high price by taking a decision to stand with



Munther Amira (third from right) and other activists staged a protest in Ramallah in solidarity with Marc Lamont Hill. Photo courtesy of Munther Amira.

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

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

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

We must stand in solidarity with him because he was in solidarity with us. We are trying to send a message to the activists who support us, we will not leave you

alone. We are trying to send a message from here in Palestine, to CNN and to the Americans in general, that we are fighting together with people all over the world for the values of justice peace and freedom.

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

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

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

that we are fighting for the same values.

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

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

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

CNN is always against the Palestinians, trying to show that we are terrorists, people who just want to die. But he [Dr. Hill] shows the other face of the Palestinians: that we are people seeking peace. This is the only thing we are fighting for, for peace. We are not terrorists, we are people who want to continue living on their land.

Firing Marc was a huge loss for CNN. He is one of the few people who is trying to show the real facts on the ground. By firing him, CNN is saying they are not objective, they are against human rights, they are against the freedom of speech for the people, and they stand against basic human rights.

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

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

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

Come to Your Senses

Incantation written on the way to Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C. October 6, 2011

*Jackboots echo in the alleyways
That is what fascism sounds like
The sea sweeps onto the sand
This is what democracy sounds like*

*Black sunglasses hurl your face
back at you*

*That is what fascism looks like
Dawn’s first light eases over the ridge*

This is what democracy looks like

*Cordite gnaws at your soul
That is what fascism smells like
Your granddaughter’s newborn cheek
This is what democracy smells like*

They’re both reaching out for you now.

Come to your senses.

*Bury your tongue into
The one you love.*

Throw away your shoes.

*Walk out of the mall
into the streets.*

Democracy is waiting for you.

Doug Rawlings

Israeli Conscientious Objector Released after 107 Days

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

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

Garbi added: “Throughout the nights and days I spent in prison, I tried to imagine the suffering of the Palestinians undergoing the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, including the lack of drinking water, food and medicine, or that of the Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank, who suffer the theft of their lands, road blockages, arbitrary search and arrest. Some people have told me that my refusal amounts to evading responsibility for the security

of the citizens of Israel, but I believe rather that this act is one of taking responsibility for all those affected by my deeds, Israelis and Palestinians, by not joining in the cycle of violence and not hurting any of them, and by convincing others to act likewise.”

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

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

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

White Christianity

... continued from page 24

abstraction; it is the instrument of death used by the oppressor to crucify the oppressed. And the cross is all around us. He writes in “The Cross and the Lynching Tree”:

“The cross is a paradoxical religious symbol because it inverts the world’s value system, proclaiming that hope comes by way of defeat, that suffering and death do not have the last word, that the last shall be first and the first last. Secular intellectuals find this idea absurd, but it is profoundly real in the spiritual life of black folk. For many who were tortured and lynched, the crucified Christ often manifested God’s loving and liberating presence within the great contradictions of black life. The cross of Jesus is what empowered black Christians to believe, ultimately, that they would not be defeated by the ‘troubles of the world,’ no matter how great and painful their suffering. Only people stripped of power could understand this absurd claim of faith. The cross was God’s critique of power—white power—with powerless love, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

“Present-day Christians misinterpret the cross when they make it a nonoffensive religious symbol, a decorative object in their homes and churches. The cross, therefore, needs the lynching tree to remind us what it means when we say that God is revealed in Jesus at Golgotha, the place of the skull, on the cross where criminals and rebels against the Roman state were executed. The lynching tree is America’s cross. What happened to Jesus in Jerusalem happened to blacks in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Kentucky. Lynched black bodies are symbols of Christ’s body. If we want to understand what the crucifixion means for Americans today, we must view it through the lens of mutilated black bodies whose lives are destroyed in the criminal justice system. Jesus continues to be lynched before our eyes. He is crucified wherever people are tormented. That is why I say Christ is black.”

Every once in a while, when Cone expressed something he thought was particularly important, he would say, “That’s Charlie talking.” To know Cone was to know Charlie and Lucy, his parents, who wrapped him and his brothers in unconditional love that held at bay the dehumanizing fear, discrimination, and humiliation that came with living in Jim and Jane Crow Arkansas. He, like poet and novelist Claude McKay, said that what he wrote was “urged out of my blood,” adding “in my case the blood of blacks in Bearden and elsewhere who saw what I saw, felt what I felt, and loved what I loved.”

The essence of Cone was embodied in this radical love, a love that was not rooted in abstractions but the particular reality of his parents and his people. The ferocity of his anger at the injustice endured by the oppressed was matched only by the ferocity of his love. He cared. And because he cared, he carried the hurt and pain of the oppressed, the crucified of the earth, within him. As a boy, after dark, he waited by the window for his father to return home, knowing that to be a black man out on the roads in Arkansas at night meant you might never reach home. He spent his life, in a sense, at that window. He wrote and spoke not only for the forgotten, but also in a very tangible way for Charlie and Lucy. He instantly saw through hypocrisy and detested the pretensions of privilege. He never forgot who he was. He never forgot where he came from. His life was lived to honor his parents and all who were like his parents. He had unmatched courage, integrity, and wisdom; indeed he was one of the wisest people I have ever known.

Cone was acutely aware, as Charles H. Long wrote, that “those who have lived in the cultures of the oppressed know something about freedom that the oppressors will never know.” He reminded us that our character is measured by what we have overcome. Despair, for him, was sin.

“What was beautiful about slavery?” Cone asks in his memoir. “Nothing, rationally! But the spirituals, folklore, slave religion, and slave narratives are beautiful,

and they came out of slavery. How do we explain that miracle? What’s beautiful about lynching and Jim Crow segregation? Nothing! Yet the blues, jazz, great preaching, and gospel music are beautiful, and they came out of the post-slavery brutalities of white supremacy. In the 1960s we proclaimed ‘Black is beautiful!’ because it is. We raised our fists to ‘I’m Black and I’m Proud,’ and we showed ‘Black Pride’ in our walk and talk, our song and sermon.”

He goes on: “We were not destroyed by white supremacy. We resisted it, created a beautiful culture, the civil rights and Black Power movements, which are celebrated around the world. [James] Baldwin asked black people ‘to accept the past and to learn to live with it.’ ‘I beg the black people of this country,’ he said, shortly after [*The Fire Next Time*] was published, ‘to do something which I know to be very difficult; to be proud of the auction block, and all that rope, and all that fire, and all that pain.’

“To see beauty in tragedy is very difficult. One needs theological eyes to do that. We have to look beneath the surface and get to the source. Baldwin was not blind. He saw both the tragedy and the beauty in black suffering and its redeeming value. That was why he said that suffering can become a bridge that connects people with one another, blacks with whites and people of all cultures with one another. Suffering is sorrow and joy, tragedy and triumph. It connected blacks with one another and made us stronger. We know anguish and pain and have moved beyond it. The real question about suffering is how to use it. ‘If you can accept the pain that almost kills you,’ says Vivaldo, Baldwin’s character in his novel *Another Country*, ‘you can use it, you can become better.’

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

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

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

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



Prince Bandar bin Sultan (second from left) with George W. Bush, who dubbed him ‘Bandar Bush.’

Our Man in Riyadh

... continued from page 20

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

So there is more than a little poetic justice—or is it irony?—in General Abizaid’s proposed posting to Riyadh. The one senior military officer who early on demonstrated an inkling of understanding of the Long War’s true nature now prepares to take up an assignment in what is, in essence, the very center of the enemy’s camp. It’s as if President Lincoln had dispatched Ulysses S. Grant to Richmond, Va., in 1864 as his liaison to Jefferson Davis.

Which brings us to the opportunity referred to at the outset of this essay. The opportunity is not Abizaid’s. He can look forward to a frustrating and probably pointless assignment. Yet Trump’s nomination of Abizaid presents an opportunity to the U.S. senators charged with approving his appointment. While we can take it for granted that Abizaid will be confirmed, the process of confirmation offers the Senate, and especially members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a chance to take

stock of this Long War of ours and, in particular, to assess how Saudi Arabia fits into the struggle.

Who better to reflect on these matters than John Abizaid? Imagine the questions:

“General, can you describe this Long War of ours? What is its nature? What is it all about?

“Are we winning? How can we tell?

“How much longer should Americans expect it to last?

“What are we up against? Give us a sense of the enemy’s intentions, capabilities, and prospects.

“With MBS in charge, is Saudi Arabia part of the solution or part of the problem?

“Take all the time you need, sir. Be candid. We’re interested in your opinion.”

After the embarrassment of the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, the Senate is badly in need of refurbishing its reputation. The Abizaid nomination provides a ready-made chance to do just that. Let’s see if the “world’s greatest deliberative body” rises to the occasion. Just don’t hold your breath.

Andrew Bacevich is a regular contributor to TomDispatch. His new book is Twilight of the American Century.

Coming Out of the Shadows

Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen

By Jose Antonio Vargas

Harper-Collins, 2018, hardcover, 256 pages

By Andrew Moss

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

Vargas, who had been sent to the United States by his mother at the age of 12 (with the misplaced hope that she'd be able to follow him) was stunned and disoriented. He soon learned that the "uncle" who accompanied him on the flight from Manila was a smuggler hired by his grandfather, and he found himself as a teenager questioning all his relationships and his capacity for trust. Yet he persevered as one of the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, succeeding in school and in college, and ultimately finding his way as a journalist, all the while engaging in what he called the common moves of undocumented people: "lying, passing, and hiding."

Recently Vargas came out with a new book, *Dear America: Notes from an Undocumented Citizen*, and in it he bears witness to the "homelessness" that he and others

[H]e bears witness to the 'homelessness' that he and others experience: not a traditional kind of homelessness, 'but [an] unsettled, unmoored psychological state'

experience: not a traditional kind of homelessness, "but the unsettled, unmoored psychological state that undocumented immigrants like me find ourselves in." Vargas argues that if the politics of immigration are ever to change, the "culture in which immigrants are seen" has to change, and to this end he has dedicated his writing, his documentary-making, and his public appearances to storytelling that can help change the image of immigrants and the understanding of immigration in American life.

Vargas writes compellingly, not from a place of abstract ideals but from deeply felt personal experience. When, as a young man, he was awarded an internship at the *Washington Post*, he felt an old anxiety creep up: "I always thought I was taking someone else's spot. I had internalized this anxiety from years of hearing the they're-taking-our-jobs narrative about 'illegals.'" Years later, after finding out that he and colleagues from the *Post* had been awarded a 2008 Pulitzer Prize for breaking news coverage of the 2007 Virginia Tech mass shootings, he found it unbearable to continue hiding his undocumented status, and eventually he came out in 2011 in a confessional essay he wrote for the *New York Times Magazine*: "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant." Coming out presented Vargas with new opportunities and challenges, and, overcoming some initial reluctance, he agreed to accept an increasingly public role.

Vargas' stories from this phase of his life highlight the depersonalizing ways in which undocumented people are often seen and represented. He tells of appearing on a Fox News show with Megyn Kelly, not knowing in



Jose Antonio Vargas. Photo: Nathaniel St. Clair.

advance that another guest would be interviewed along with him: a woman named Laura Wilkerson, whose son Josh had been killed by an undocumented immigrant. In describing the interview later, Vargas writes compassionately about Wilkerson, but he doesn't withhold comment about the way she sought to pigeonhole him. She said, "I think if you're not a United States citizen, you don't have a seat at the table regardless, especially where you're making laws." Vargas comments, "But I was seated next to her. We were sharing a table."

In writing *Dear America*, Vargas composed his own story about what it means to be undocumented. Drawing on the immediacy of personal experience, he was able to write with authority about larger issues at stake, including America's responsibility for helping create many of the political and economic circumstances that continue to drive so many migrants to our borders.

But it's the focus on language itself that I believe constitutes one of Vargas' most significant contributions. At a time when dehumanizing speech and writing help propel much of the violence behind our current immigration policies, whether those policies result in the caging of children or the teargassing of families, Vargas points to the need for a new language that can help us understand migration and migrants with compassion and discernment.

There are, of course, existing ironies: the way, for example, that phrases like "removable alien," "undocumented person," and "Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist" all currently apply to Vargas himself. But there's also a new language in formation, a language symbolized by

the seemingly contradictory phrase "undocumented citizen." In using that phrase, Vargas takes the idea of citizenship beyond birthright or privilege and associates it with a higher concept of participation. He invites us to recognize the 11 million undocumented citizens among us as people who contribute and participate in countless ways. Vargas is one of these 11 million, telling stories that help change the language, thereby helping change our understandings of ourselves.

Andrew Moss, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is an emeritus professor at California State Polytechnic University.

Afghanistan Vet

... continued from page 7

try is anywhere but. Given that 15.7 percent, or nearly 500,000, of the 2.77 million soldiers deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan or Operation Iraqi Freedom are said to have PTSD, the odds seem good.

No matter how much the media (and Americans more generally) choose to ignore that war, if I'm thinking about Afghanistan on this night here in my garage, undoubtedly tens of thousands of vets like me are reflecting on or grappling with their experiences in similar ways. I'm not the only one trying to navigate the contradiction of being a parent and being a vet. Of that I have no doubt.

And what about all those Afghan families on the receiving end of so much American violence over the years? Surely, it's not over for them either. I can only imagine what it must be like raising a kid or trying to live a normal life once soldiers have stormed your home in the middle of the night. How do you relax after that? How do you deal with screaming kids after that?

Sometimes I wonder whether I shouldn't tag along with other vets like me on a trip back to increasingly war-torn Afghanistan. I know that members of U.S. organizations like Voices for Creative Nonviolence regularly visit that country's capital, Kabul. Why not me?

Even at this late date, I remain hopeful that I'll eventually learn ways to better control the time I mentally give over to that war. I've got to figure it out for my kids. I've got to figure it out for those other kids, the ones I heard screaming that night. They deserve at least that much from me.

I turn off the lights to go back inside. It's time to tell my daughter and son some stories—and not war stories, either.

Rory Fanning walked across the United States for the Pat Tillman Foundation in 2008–2009, following two deployments to Afghanistan with the 2nd Army Ranger Battalion. He is a war resister, military counter-recruiter, and writer living in Chicago. His writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *Jacobin*, *Socialist Worker*, *salon.com*, *truthout.com*, *truthdig.com*, and *tomdispatch.com*.

Danny Sheehan

... continued from page 9

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

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

The Heresy of White Christianity

James Cone: 'Every Sunday morning, we went to church to exorcise hate—of ourselves and of white racists.'

By Chris Hedges

There are, as Cornel West has pointed out, only two African-Americans who rose from dirt-poor poverty to the highest levels of American intellectual life—the writer Richard Wright and the radical theologian James H. Cone.

Cone, who died in April, grew up in segregated Bearden, Ark., the impoverished son of a woodcutter who had only a sixth-grade education. With an almost superhuman will, Cone clawed his way up from the Arkansas cotton fields to implode theological studies in the United States with his withering critique of the white

in America that fails to engage white supremacy and God's liberation of black people from that evil is not Christian theology but a theology of the Antichrist."

White supremacy "is the Antichrist in America because it has killed and crippled tens of millions of black bodies and minds in the modern world," he writes. "It has also committed genocide against the indigenous people of this land. If that isn't demonic, I don't know what is ... [and] it is found in every aspect of American life, especially churches, seminaries, and theology."

Cone, who spent most of his life teaching at New York City's Union Theological Seminary, where the theological luminar-

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

"I didn't want to talk to white people about King's assassination or about the uprisings in the cities," he writes of that period in his life. "[I]t was too much of an emotional burden to explain racism to racists, and I had nothing to say to them. I decided to have my say in writing. I'd give them something to read and talk about."

Cone is often described as the father of black liberation theology, although he was also, maybe more important, one of the very few contemporary theologians who understood and championed the rad-

I was not interested in making an academic point about theology; rather, I was issuing a manifesto against whiteness and for blackness in an effort to liberate Christians from white supremacy."

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

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

"After more than 50 years of working with, writing about, talking to white theologians, I have to say that most are wasting their time and energy, as far as I am concerned," he writes, an observation that I, having been forced as a seminary student to plow through the turgid, jargon-filled works of white theologians, can only second. Cone blasted churches, including black churches, that emphasize personal piety and the prosperity gospel as "the worst place to learn about Christianity."

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

"I write on behalf of all those whom the Salvadoran theologian and martyr Ignacio Ellacuría called 'the crucified peoples of history,'" Cone writes in his memoir. "I write for the forgotten and the abused, the marginalized and the despised. I write for those who are penniless, jobless, landless, all those who have no political or social power. I write for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and those who are transgender. I write for immigrants stranded on the U.S. border and for undocumented farmworkers toiling in misery in the nation's agricultural fields. I write for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, on the West Bank, and in East Jerusalem. I write for Muslims and refugees who live under the terror of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. And I write for all people who care about humanity. I believe that until Americans, especially Christians and theologians, can see the

'Those who have lived in the cultures of the oppressed know something about freedom that the oppressors will never know.'

supremacy and racism inherent within the white, liberal Christian church. His brilliance—he was a Greek scholar and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Swiss theologian Karl Barth—enabled him to "turn the white man's theology against him and make it speak for the liberation of black people." God's revelation in America, he understood, "was found among poor black people." Privileged white Christianity and its theology were "heresy." He was, until the end of his life, possessed by what the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called "sublime madness." His insights, he writes, "came to me as if revealed by the spirits of my ancestors long dead but now coming alive to haunt and torment the descendants of the whites who had killed them."

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

"White supremacy is America's original sin and liberation is the Bible's central message," he writes. "Any theology

ies Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr preceded him, was acutely aware that "there are a lot of brilliant theologians and most are irrelevant and some are evil."

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

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

'[U]ntil we can identify Christ with "recrucified" black bodies hanging from lynching trees, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy.'

ical message of the Gospel. Theological studies are divided into pre-Cone and post-Cone eras. Post-Cone theology has largely been an addendum or reaction to his work, begun with his first book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, published in 1969. He wrote the book, he says, "as an attack on racism in white churches and an attack on self-loathing in black churches.

cross and the lynching tree together, until we can identify Christ with 'recrucified' black bodies hanging from lynching trees, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy."

The cross, Cone reminded us, is not an
continued on page 22 ...