

Ten Revealing War Lies

By [David Swanson](#)

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Let's look at 10 revealing moments in the history of lying about wars to see what they tell us, and then I'll be glad to try to answer any questions I can. These remarks will be published at teleSUR.

I'll say the most about the first items on this list, and less as I move toward #10.

1. On January 31, 2003, President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair met in the White House prior to a joint press conference. Bush proposed to Blair that one good way to get a war on Iraq started would be to fly U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in U.N. colors, in hopes that Iraq would fire on them. This was one of a number of possible ways to get a war started that Bush proposed to Blair. Following the meeting, the two of them walked out to do a joint press conference, of which you can still watch the [video](#).



Image: EFE

At the press conference, the two of them said they wanted to keep the peace – Bush used the word “peace” at least three times – and that if Iraq would simply disarm of the weapons that in fact it did not have and which much of the world did not believe it had, there would be no need for war. Bush also claimed Iraq had ties to al-Qaida, though declining to claim any “direct” ties to al-Qaida. Asked what they thought of Iraq having just invited U.N. inspectors back to Iraq, Bush and Blair said it was a trick and a deception. Asked whether he hadn’t always wanted a war on Iraq and whether he wasn’t just going through a charade of diplomacy, Bush claimed to be denying the charge but in fact spoke mainly of his view of how high the stakes were and seemed to be defending his drive toward war.

This event came six months after the meeting in London recorded in the Downing Street Minutes at which the head of British so-called intelligence reported on his meeting with the head of U.S. so-called intelligence, to the effect that the United States was decided on war and would lie as needed. In fact, by the time of this meeting and press conference, the United States was already deploying troops to the Middle East to attack Iraq.

In addition, by this point, the Iraqi government had approached the CIA’s Vincent Cannistrato to offer to let U.S. troops search the entire country. The Iraqi government had offered to hold internationally monitored elections within two years – something I’d love to see the United States do. The Iraqi government had offered Bush official Richard Perle to open the whole country to inspections, to turn over a suspect in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, to help fight terrorism, and to favor U.S. oil companies. And the Iraqi president had offered, in the account that the president of Spain was given by the U.S. president, to simply leave Iraq if he could keep US\$1 billion.

The pretense that war was the last resort requires ignoring all of these other options, plus millions more. One can always think of another resort prior to the last resort. To use war as a last resort would mean to never use it. But even if we imagine the impossible, that literally everything else had been tried, we could not explain away Bush’s brainstorming schemes to get the war started, as he did with Blair on January 31, 2003.

Nor should we ignore the fact that the same reasons given for any war have failed to generate a war on numerous other occasions. When the Soviet Union actually shot down a U2 plane, the United States did not choose war. That incident may have been created by the CIA to sabotage President Eisenhower’s diplomacy, but Eisenhower did not choose to use it as grounds for war, as Bush seemed to think, in a similar situation, he could. Numerous nations other than Iraq in 2003 actually had weapons of mass destruction, yet in no case other than Iraq’s was that seen as a basis for war.

The U.S. war on Iraq in 1990-1991 was also, like every war of the past several decades, depicted as a last resort, but the Iraqi government had been willing to negotiate withdrawal from Kuwait without war and ultimately offered to simply withdraw from Kuwait within three weeks without conditions. The King of Jordan, the Pope, the President of France, the President of the Soviet Union, and many others urged such a peaceful settlement, but the White House insisted upon its so-called last resort. In 2001 the Taliban repeatedly offered to turn Osama bin Laden over to a third country to stand trial, al Qaeda has had no significant presence in Afghanistan for most of the duration of the current war, and withdrawal has been an option at any time. Go back through U.S. history. Mexico was willing to negotiate the sale of its northern half, but the United States wanted to take it through an act of mass killing. Spain wanted the matter of the U.S.S. Maine to go to international arbitration, but the U.S. wanted war and empire. The Soviet Union proposed peace negotiations before the

Korean War. The United States sabotaged peace proposals for Vietnam from the Vietnamese, the Soviets, and the French, relentlessly insisting on its so-called “last resort” over any other option, from the day the Gulf of Tonkin incident mandated war despite never having occurred. Osama bin Laden was even killed as a “last resort” despite being unarmed.

2. On June 4, 1939, a ship carrying over 900 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, many of them children, anchored close enough to Miami, Florida, to see the lights. Passengers cabled President Franklin D. Roosevelt asking to be allowed into the United States. The U.S. secretary of state and secretary of the Treasury had just discussed the matter and sought unsuccessfully to persuade Cuba to accept the Jewish refugees. The U.S. Coast Guard was sent out to chase the ship, the MS St. Louis, away from the Land of the Free. Canada also refused to allow the ship entry, and it returned to Europe, where over 250 of the passengers were murdered by the Germans. How is it possible both that such an incident occurred and that World War II was a noble war fought to save the Jews? In fact, it isn't possible. The incident occurred, but the lies used to support World War II at the time were lies of defense and last resort. FDR claimed to have a map of Nazi plans for taking over the Americas. It was forged. He claimed to have a Nazi plan for eliminating religion. He didn't. He claimed that U.S. ships were innocently attacked. They were assisting British war planes. He [provoked](#) Japan in hopes of getting into the war in Europe, and drafted a declaration of war on both Japan and Germany the night of Pearl Harbor. He was talked into holding off on Germany.

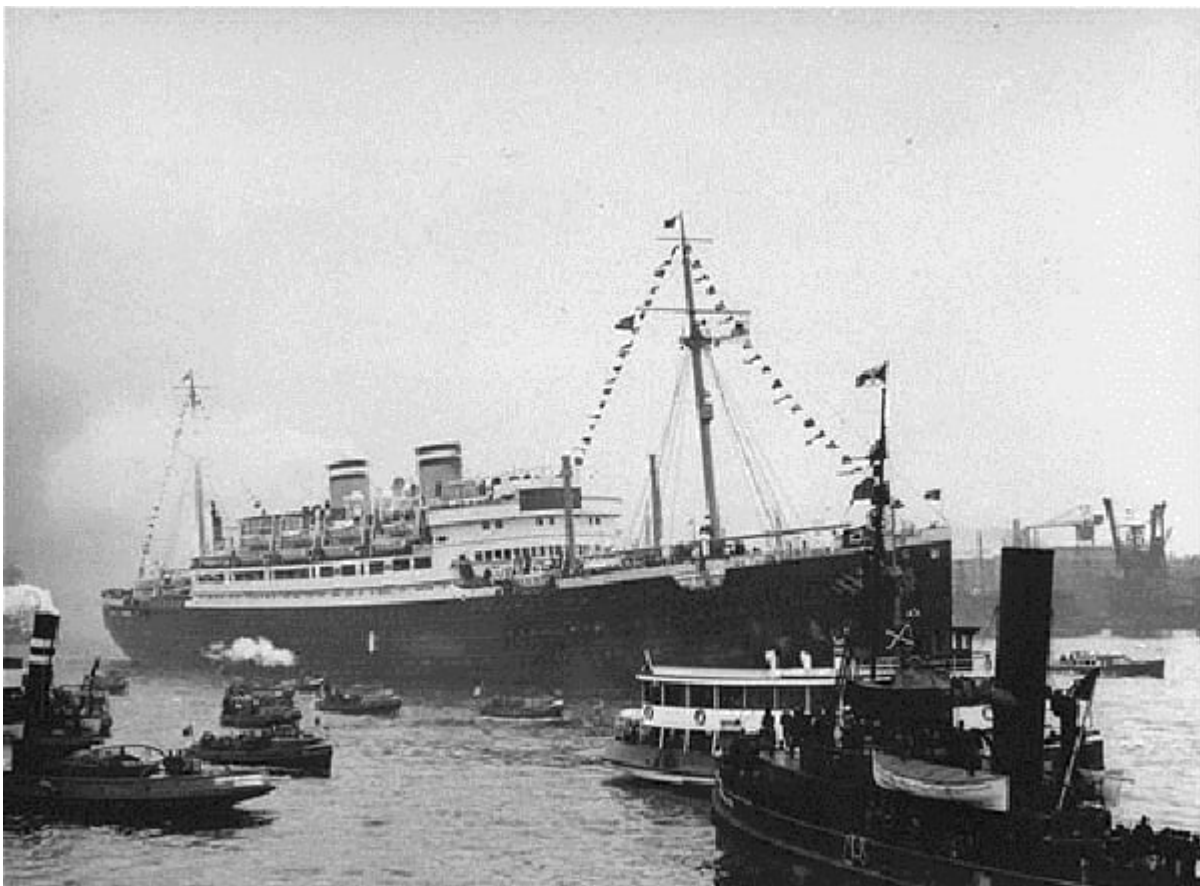


Image: Wikimedia commons

The lies about World War II being defensive have been overtaken in U.S. mythology by lies about a war fought for the Jews (and presumably also the millions of other victims of the Nazi camps). But let me quote a few lines from [my book](#):

“(Y)ou won’t find any recruitment posters of Uncle Sam saying, ‘I Want You...to Save the Jews.’ When a resolution was introduced in the U.S. Senate in 1934 expressing “surprise and pain” at Germany’s actions, and asking that Germany restore rights to Jews, the State Department ‘caused it to be buried in committee.’ By 1937 Poland had developed a plan to send Jews to Madagascar, and the Dominican Republic had a plan to accept them as well. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain came up with a plan to send Germany’s Jews to Tanganyika in East Africa. Representatives of the United States, Britain, and South American nations met at Lake Geneva in July 1938 and all agreed that none of them would accept the Jews. On November 15, 1938, reporters asked President Franklin Roosevelt what could be done. He replied that he would refuse to consider allowing more immigrants than the standard quota system allowed. Bills were introduced in Congress to allow 20,000 Jews under the age of 14 to enter the United States. Senator Robert Wagner (D-NY) said, ‘Thousands of American families have already expressed their willingness to take refugee children into their homes.’ First lady Eleanor Roosevelt set aside her anti-Semitism to support the legislation, but her husband successfully blocked it for years. In July, 1940, Adolf Eichman, ‘architect of the holocaust,’ intended to send all Jews to Madagascar, which now belonged to Germany, France having been occupied. The ships would need to wait only until the British, which now meant Winston Churchill, ended their blockade. That day never came. On November 25, 1940, the French ambassador asked the U.S. secretary of state to consider accepting German Jewish refugees then in France. On the 21st of December, the secretary of state declined. By July 1941, the Nazis had determined that a final solution for the Jews could consist of genocide rather than expulsion.”

It’s worth adding to that quote that U.S. officials were obeying majority U.S. opinion. Most people in the United States did not want to allow Jewish immigrants from Germany to enter the country. While the news had been reported from Germany of growing brutality toward Jews and others, the U.S. media, including famously the New York Times, had downplayed it, as had U.S. politicians – both out of anti-Semitism and out of a desire to maintain good relations with the German government. In fact, following the disastrous treaty of Versailles that ended World War I in a manner predicted at the time to create World War II, the United States invested heavily in Nazi Germany as a preferable alternative to communists. Our peace movement hero Smedley Butler was locked up in Quantico when he publicly said something disfavorable about Benito Mussolini.

The myth of the evil Nazis is not a myth because they were not evil, but because the U.S. government fundamentally did not give a damn, engaged in eugenics and human experimentation before, during, and after the war, ran an Apartheid state for African Americans, locked Japanese Americans in camps, pursued global empire, and pointlessly slaughtered during the war many more civilians than died in Nazi camps – something that can be said of most parties to that war, a war that killed 50 to 70 million people, while the German camps killed some 9 million.

By 1942 word was leaking out about the Nazis’ plans. Peace activists like Jessie Wallace Hughan argued that,

“It seems that the only way to save thousands and perhaps millions of European Jews from destruction would be for our government to broadcast the promise [of an] armistice on condition that the European minorities are not molested any further ... It would be very terrible if six months from now we should find that this threat has literally come to pass without our making even

a gesture to prevent it.”

In 1942 peace activist Abraham Kaufman argued that the United States needed to negotiate with Hitler. To those who argued that you couldn't negotiate with Hitler, he explained that the Allies were already negotiating with Hitler over prisoners of war and the sending of food to Greece. In 1943 Hughan wrote to the New York Times and the U.S. State Department that “two million (Jews) have already died (and) 2 million more will be killed by the end of the war.” She urged a negotiated peace.

The end of the war liberated prisoners, but no military or diplomatic effort had been made to liberate them prior. The war did not become a war about saving them until after it was over. This is why we should keep a close eye on the U.S. government's ongoing rehabilitation of World War I and the Korean and Vietnamese and Iraqi wars. Imagine years from now what those wars will turn out to have been fought for.

Now, of course, you can switch back to the idea that World War II was defensive, or create some other argument for it, but you'll still have to make a difficult case that it's somehow relevant to 2016 and beyond – apart from U.S. officials calling various foreign leaders “Hitler” – before I'll be persuaded that we should dump our future down the drain of military spending.

3. In October 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the best secretary of state we've had according to Henry Kissinger, had a good laugh. During an interview with CBS News just after the president of Libya was publicly sodomized with a knife and eventually murdered, Clinton proclaimed, in a rip-off of Roman Emperor Julius Caesar, “We came, we saw, he died!” Giggle. Giggle.



Image: EFE

Libya was a model humanitarian war, a perfect use of the Responsibility to Protect, a practical engagement of the entire U.S. academic genocide studies industry which imagines war as a tool for preventing something worse and bitterly laments Rwanda as a missed opportunity for a war, rather than the result of war-making and a step toward even more horrific war making. The war on Libya was launched without Congress and without the U.S. public. But it was launched with the pretense of United Nations backing.

The White House claimed that Ghadafi had threatened to massacre the people of Benghazi with “no mercy,” but the New York Times reported that Ghadafi’s threat was directed at rebel fighters, not civilians, and that Ghadafi, consistent with past behavior, had promised amnesty for those “who throw their weapons away.” Ghadafi also offered to allow rebel fighters to escape to Egypt if they preferred not to fight to the death. Yet President Obama warned of imminent genocide, as did some prominent and generally antiwar U.S. leftists, while others screamed for bloody revenge for newly remembered grievances.

In March 2011, the African Union had a plan for peace in Libya but was prevented by NATO, through the creation of a “no fly zone” and the initiation of bombing, to travel to Libya to discuss it. In April, the African Union was able to discuss its plan with Ghadafi, and he expressed his agreement. NATO, which had obtained U.N. authorization to protect Libyans alleged to be in danger but no authorization to continue bombing the country or to overthrow the government, continued bombing the country and overthrowing the government. Libya was destroyed, weapons proliferated to Syria and around the region, anti-Western terrorist groups energized, and such a gloomy shadow cast over humanitarian wars that Samantha Power later saw the need to urge on people the duty not to look too closely at Libya in order to be properly willing to bomb Syria.

Well, every well-meaning humanitarian makes mistakes, right?

Wrong. Clinton’s once private, now partially public, emails focused much more on oil and business concerns than on human rights in the lead up to the overthrow of the Libyan government — and overthrow was the goal from the start, with her adviser Sidney Blumenthal going so far as to recommend “shock and awe.” And when the war was underway, Blumenthal focused his attention on concocting arguments to keep the war going in order to “win” it (or to conquer in the usual translation of Julius Caesar’s phrase), under the belief that doing so would be good for Obama in opinion polls. Blumenthal recommended dropping any more talk of the supposed rescue of people in Benghazi. He proposed no new humanitarian arguments, only geopolitical, balance of power stuff. He also pointed out that the overthrow could likely result in a “jihadist resurgence” and growth for al-Qaida. And he expressed awareness of summary executions by the rebels the U.S. was backing, but neither he nor Clinton expressed any concern about those atrocities. Also not mentioned, as far as I know, in any emails, though generally included in most public arguments for wars, was any mention of the need to fight in Libya in order to “support the troops.”

We don’t actually need private emails in order to debunk the lies of humanitarian war making. A survey of behavior makes it clear. And often the truth is openly stated in a manner that is intended to go unremarked upon. A few weeks ago, as the U.N. was trying in vain to drop food anywhere near starving people in Syria, a U.S. Air Force expert told a reporter about a system that allowed more precise drops from high altitude in high wind. It cost US\$60,000, he said, and therefore, “You wouldn’t use it for a purely humanitarian drop.” The missiles that the United States tosses at foreign countries like confetti cost over

US\$1 million each.

4. On May 23, 2013, President Barack Obama packed a baker's dozen of lies into a few sentences about his drone murders when he said,

"America does not take strikes when we have the ability to capture individual terrorists; our preference is always to detain, interrogate, and prosecute. America cannot take strikes wherever we choose; our actions are bound by consultations with partners, and respect for state sovereignty. America does not take strikes to punish individuals; we act against terrorists who pose a continuing and imminent threat to the American people, and when there are no other governments capable of effectively addressing the threat. And before any strike is taken, there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured – the highest standard we can set."



Image: EFE

Obama has in fact shifted U.S. policy from lawless imprisonment to murder. We know in detail of numerous cases in which the victim of a drone murder could certainly have been apprehended, but the option of killing was preferred. We know of no cases in which it has been established that a victim could not have been arrested. Obama tossed on the word "prosecute" to suggest that by murdering people and anyone too close to them – and mostly, by the way, people never identified by name or background – he is acting as a global policeman. In fact, we know of no cases where his victims have been charged or indicted, their extradition sought, or a legal case brought against them in absentia. There is no evidence of any desire to prosecute them for anything. Obama adds the condition that "no other governments (be) capable of effectively addressing the threat," yet we know of cases in which the local governments of the territories attacked, such as in Yemen, have inquired after the fact, "Why weren't we simply asked to arrest the person?"

Obama's supposed respect for state sovereignty relies on the idea that vicious and antidemocratic governments and exiled dictators can grant him the legal right to blow up men, women, and children in certain parts of the globe. This is actually to engage in a conspiracy to violate state sovereignty, a concept he of course has no use for in certain states, like Libya or Syria. "Consultations with partners" has never been a valid criminal defense.

Obama's "near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured" is a disgusting insult to the hundreds and thousands of people he kills, most of whom he has not identified, many of whom he has labeled "combatants" because they are male, and many of whom are civilian by any definition, including numerous children and grandparents and attendees of weddings and rescuers of the wounded and those seeking to bury the dead.

There is no such thing as a "continuing and imminent threat to the American people." A threat is either imminent or continuing, but let's assume it can be both, that it is imminent and just goes on and on being imminent. There is in fact not a single example of a U.S. drone murder in which the victim has been shown to have constituted an imminent threat to the people of the United States. In the drone propaganda film "Eye in the Sky" a fantasy is invented in which the victims actually are an imminent threat to others. But even then, in a scenario that has never happened and will almost certainly never happen, they are not a threat to the United States or even to its imperial forces.

The lie of the drone is a lie of progressivism. The truth is barbarism.

5. In 1931, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Republican from Idaho, Senator William Borah remarked:

"Much has been said, and will continue to be said, for the doctrine of force dies hard, about implementing the peace pact. It is said that we must put teeth into it – an apt word revealing again that theory of peace which is based upon tearing, maiming, destroying, murdering. Many have inquired of me: What is meant by implementing the peace pact? I will seek to make it plain. What they mean is to change the peace pact into a military pact. They would transform it into another peace scheme based upon force, and force is another name for war. By putting teeth into it, they mean an agreement to employ armies and navies wherever the fertile mind of some ambitious schemer can find an aggressor ... I have no language to express my horror of this proposal to build peace treaties, or peace schemes, upon the doctrine of force."



Image: Wikimedia commons

Borah wanted peace through peace, which in the United States today is generally deemed naive and foolish. President Obama and the Pentagon claim to want peace through war, which in today's United States is generally deemed wise and reasonable. Borah referred to the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact of 1928 which banned all war. Why exactly did it fail? Well, why exactly did the first steps taken to abolish slavery fail until additional steps were taken that advanced that cause to its current far from perfect position? Why did the first guy to propose ending dueling as a ridiculous institution probably take a bullet to the head? Why have so many international treaties banning so many weapons and cruelties not achieved the support of every nation yet? Because change takes time and must press against resisting inclinations.

While nations signed the peace pact, they engaged in an arms race, funded fascism, and thought in the same patterns as before. But the peace movement thought very differently from how it does today, and it banned all war with a vision of war abolition that many today don't dare contemplate. At least one-sided justice punished World War II makers, and the wealthy nations haven't gone to war with each other since; they've just waged war on poor nations of the world. We need disarmament. We need courts. We need aid. We need generosity. We need diplomacy. But we have to start with the unacceptability of war and stop insisting that drone murders be transparent and wars follow Geneva Conventions. Imagine requiring transparency in cruelty to animals or Geneva Conventions for proper child abuse. We have to stop accepting war and stop demanding that everything have teeth put into it.

6. In December 2015, in a CNN presidential debate, one of the moderators asked this:

“We’re talking about ruthless things tonight. Carpet bombing, toughness, war, and people wonder, could you do that? Could you order airstrikes that would kill innocent children, not scores but hundreds and thousands. Could you wage war as a commander in chief?”

There is, as far as I know, only one nation on earth where something like this could happen. Other nations wage war, but not as a matter of routine, not as the primary duty of a publicly elected official whose willingness to slaughter children by the thousands is required by a representative of a massive communications corporation hoping to air the footage with, of course, tasteful discretion in showing any of the bugsplat. This incident wasn’t a lie but a truth telling about how Washington, D.C., views war. The lies are the 90% of public statements on war that pretend it’s not a one-sided slaughter of innocents.

7. A couple of weeks ago a U.S. State Department spokesperson [was asked](#) if the United States favored Syria reclaiming the city of Palmyra from the Islamic State group or favored the Islamic State group holding onto it. He found this a very difficult question to answer and made clear he did not want to see the Islamic State group weakened if it meant any sort of gain for Syria. If any ordinary war supporter were shown this video, they might find it confusing. The U.S. government has prioritized one enemy, whom it has utterly failed to scare the U.S. public with, while the U.S. government has made a distant second priority of attacking another enemy that most people in the United States are so terrified of they can hardly think straight. President Obama and Secretary Kerry did what they could in 2013 to persuade us to want war with the Syrian government, but they failed. ISIS videos in 2014 succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of ISIS, the Obama administration, and the weapons makers. But the U.S. government jumped into the war in 2014 with the same priority it had had in 2013 and had been developing for years, and which had even helped motivate the 2003 attack on Iraq, namely the goal of overthrowing Syria, a goal for which it has been arming the al-Qaida affiliate in Syria for years now. This example should help people recognize that public and government motivations for a war are not always the same.

8. Former CIA Bin Laden Unit Chief Michael Scheuer [says](#) the more the U.S. fights terrorism the more it creates terrorism. U.S. Lt. General Michael Flynn, who quit as head of the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency in 2014, [says](#) blowing people up with missiles is generating more blowback, not less. The CIA’s own report [says](#) drone killing is counterproductive. Admiral Dennis Blair, the former director of National Intelligence, [says](#) the same. Gen. James E. Cartwright, the former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, [says](#) drone strikes could be undermining long-term efforts: “We’re seeing that blowback. If you’re trying to kill your way to a solution, no matter how precise you are, you’re going to upset people even if they’re not targeted.” Dozens of just retired top officials [agree](#). There is little question that the war on terrorism is not ending terrorism. There should be little question that ending terrorism is not the goal of the wagers of this series of wars, and not even the goal of many of its ordinary supporters.

9. If you watch an advertisement for the U.S. National Guard, it appears to be eight parts helping people during natural disasters, one part doing something vague in distant lands to somehow protect the best nation on earth from all those other nations, and one part summer camp. If you watch a video of a comedian in one of those other countries opposing U.S. wars you find it hard to imagine they’re talking about the same enterprise. Here’s Frankie Boyle explaining the advantages of Scottish independence:

“Scotland would no longer have to invade places like Afghanistan for American interests ... I don’t support America’s wars. I don’t even think they are wars. They’re one-way traffic, mass-murder. There’s never been a time when a shepherd has beaten a helicopter. You never switch on the news to see ‘A shock result in Afghanistan today when a missile was destroyed by a wedding.’ Because not only will America go into your country and kill all your people. But what’s worse I think is they’ll come back twenty years later and make a movie about how killing your people made their soldiers feel sad. Oh boo hoo hoo. Americans making a movie about what Vietnam did to the soldiers is like a serial killer telling you what stopping suddenly for hitchhikers did to his clutch.”

Of course the sadness is very real. Of course many more U.S. soldiers kill themselves after a war than died in it. But look at the world’s perspective. One-sided slaughters of civilians cannot be all about the sadness of the soldiers. There has to be more to the story. Yet, the chief thing the U.S. military does, slaughtering people, could never be included in an advertisement for the U.S. military. And when polls find that people around the globe consider the United States the biggest threat to peace on earth, people in the United States could be forgiven for concluding that the world is simply crazy and ungrateful.

10. In 2013, public pressure was key in preventing a massive bombing campaign on Syria, and that public pressure rested on a decade of protest of the war on Iraq. Last year, public pressure was key in upholding a nuclear agreement with Iran. Nobody announces these events as victories, and when they can be they are hidden entirely. Lawrence Wittner’s book, [Working for Peace and Justice](#), describes his first political demonstration in 1961. The USSR was withdrawing from a moratorium on nuclear testing.

A protest at the White House urged President Kennedy not to follow suit:

“Picking up what I considered a very clever sign (‘Kennedy, Don’t Mimic the Russians!’), I joined the others (supplemented by a second busload of students from a Quaker college in the Midwest) circling around a couple of trees outside the White House. Mike and I – as new and zealous recruits – circled all day without taking a lunch or a dinner break. For decades I looked back on this venture as a trifle ridiculous. After all, we and other small bands of protesters couldn’t have had any impact on U.S. policy, could we? Then in the mid-1990s, while doing research at the Kennedy Library on the history of the world nuclear disarmament movement, I stumbled onto an oral history interview with Adrian Fisher, deputy director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

He was explaining why Kennedy delayed resuming atmospheric nuclear tests until April 1962. Kennedy personally wanted to resume such tests, Fisher recalled, ‘but he also recognized that there were a lot of people that were going to be deeply offended by the United States resuming atmospheric testing. We had people picketing the White House, and there was a lot of excitement about it – just because the Russians do it, why do we have to do it?’”

Yes, Kennedy delayed a horrible action. He didn’t, at that time, block it permanently. But if the picketers in 1961 had had the slightest notion that Kennedy was being influenced by them, their numbers would have multiplied 10-fold, as would the delay have correspondingly lengthened. Yes, our government was more responsive to public opinion in the 1960s than now, but part of the reason is that more people were active then. And another reason is that government officials are doing a better job now of hiding any responsiveness to public sentiment, which helps convince the public it has no impact, which

reduces activism further. The biggest lie is that nonviolent public pressure doesn't work. We could expose that lie by trying it.

David Swanson is an author, activist, journalist, and radio host. He is director of WorldBeyondWar.org and campaign coordinator for RootsAction.org. Swanson's books include "[War Is A Lie](#)." He is a 2015 [Nobel Peace Prize Nominee](#).

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