

“Accountability For War Crimes is Imperative”: An Interview With Cindy Sheehan

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Mike Whitney—President Barack Obama recently visited Dover Air Force Base where he was photographed with the flag-draped coffins of soldiers who were killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. Why did Obama do this and what was your reaction?

Cindy Sheehan—“I think Obama did this as a publicity stunt and used the dead troops (that he was responsible for killing) as props to show that he “cares” about the troops. This stunt was in the middle of the “discussions” about how many more troops to send to Afghanistan (after he has already sent about 35,000).

It made me sick.

MW—On Thursday, on orders from President Obama, the US military launched cruise missile attacks on Yemen which were followed by raids by the Yemeni Security forces. An estimated 120 people were killed. Obama’s actions indicate that he accepts the Bush Doctrine, that he thinks the US has the right to assassinate people without due process on the mere suspicion they may be linked to a terrorist organization. Is Obama right? Does the US need to be more aggressive in the “post 9-11” world?

Cindy Sheehan—And Obama reiterated this doctrine during his Nobel acceptance speech—which some are calling the “Obama Doctrine” now.

No, I do not agree with these extra-legal executions. I do not agree that the CIA can be jury, judge and executioner in Pakistan and indiscriminately kill people with their drones.

I adamantly disagree with the doctrine of “pre-emptive” strikes or invasions and I don’t agree that they keep Americans “safer” and, even if they did, innocent people are getting caught in the crossfire and we are creating enemies that we will never be able to kill.

MW—Hugo Chavez has been demonized in the US media as anti-American and a dictator. You’ve met Chavez and seen first-hand what’s going on in Venezuela. What’s your take? Is Chavez a dictator or does he believe in democracy? Have his policies been helpful or harmful to the poor and illiterate?

Cindy Sheehan—Well, statistically, illiteracy and poverty rates have improved since Chavez has been president of Venezuela—although, it is still a very poor country.

I think we should always take governments and politicians with a grain of salt, or with high suspicion. But for a politician, I do think that Chavez cares about the people of Venezuela and democracy movements in South America. His actions have proven that and he has been pretty courageous in trying to spread populism and socialism. He has supported other leaders, like Morales of Bolivia, who have been attacked and marginalized by the ruling class.

Is Chavez a dictator? He's as much a dictator as Obama is. Chavez has put constitutional reforms before the public and has survived CIA coup and recall attempts. I am sure there is always hanky-panky in any election, but Jimmy Carter has certified elections.

MW—Here's a poem by an Iraqi blogger named Layla Anwar, which pretty well sums up the anger and anguish felt by many Iraqis:

"Come and see our overflowing morgues and find our little ones for us...
You may find them in this corner or the other, a little hand poking out, pointing out at you...
Come and search for them in the rubble of your "surgical" air raids, you may find a little leg
or a little head... pleading for your attention.
Come and see them amassed in the garbage dumps, scavenging morsels of food...

Come and see, come..." ("Flying Kites" Layla Anwar)

How important to you is it that the people who are responsible for the destruction of Iraq and the slaughtering of over 1 million Iraqis be brought to justice?

Cindy Sheehan—In my opinion, accountability for war crimes committed on the people of Iraq/Afghanistan and, now Pakistan, is imperative.

The US has been committing war crimes for at least the last 100 years (off the continent) and none of our leaders have ever been held accountable and that's one of the reasons that the empire is able to keep rolling.

I also believe that the way to the rest of the world's heart is for American leaders to be held accountable.

MW— The senate just passed the \$636 billion Pentagon budget on Friday which extends the controversial US Patriot Act. Obama is expected to sign the bill sometime this week. Why is America trying to trying to "liberate" Iraq and Afghanistan, when it is spying on its people at home?

Cindy Sheehan—First of all, "liberation" was not a goal of the invasions. We, the gullible, were told that we were going into Afghanistan to get Osama and Iraq because Saddam had WMD and a connection to al Qaeda. When those rationales were proven false, we were then told that it was to liberate the people. Now in Afghanistan, we are told we are "protecting the women."

The phony war on terror has been used to steal our liberties in a full-frontal assault since 9-11 and Obama voted to reauthorize the USA PATRIOT ACT when he was a Senator, and voted for the FISA modernization act, which gave broad authority to the government to spy

on our electronic communications and gave telecom companies immunity.

I not only see this as passive stealing of our liberties, but the United Police States of America is increasing in physical oppression, also. I'll be interested to see how the Police State will handle my new action: Peace of the Action.

MW—You know a lot of people across the country. What's the mood among Obama supporters? Have they thrown in the towel already or do they still think he'll turn out to be the leader they hoped he would be?

Cindy Sheehan—I lost a lot of friends when B.O. became president and it was a lonely 6 months after he was elected.

I wrote a new book called Myth America (short title) and I started to travel around the country in April doing book events. For the first time since my activism started, people walked out on my presentations because I was telling them that it was the system—not the person who infests the White House. However, by the end of my book tour in August, the crowds were growing and more enthusiastic and less gaga-eyed over Obama.

Then I started touring again in September and the discontent is growing. I am happy about that.

The ones that upset me the most are the so-called leaders of the “progressive” movement like Tom Hayden, CODEPINK and Michael Moore who very enthusiastically endorsed, worked for, voted for, and raised money for Obama, and NOW are beginning to speak out against his carnage, when in fact, Obama has always been very pro-war. Once the horse is out of the barn, it's hard to get him back in. The movement should never have given him a “chance.” Things are so much worse in foreign policy almost a year into his regime.

MW—The media has had a tough time dealing with Cindy Sheehan. On the one hand, they've done everything in their power to glorify the wars and the men and women who serve in uniform. On the other hand, they've gone to great lengths to discredit the mother of a soldier who died fighting in America's wars. Why is the media so afraid of Cindy Sheehan?

Cindy Sheehan—Because I tell inconvenient truths. War is not pretty, ever, but unnecessary wars and needless carnage are even worse.

Also, I realized very early on that the problem didn't rest with a particular political party, but it's a systemic problem and the corporate media is part of it.

MW—Here is a very long question. It's a quote from Obama's Nobel acceptance speech in Oslo: “I come here with an acute sense of the cost of armed conflict — filled with difficult questions about the relationship between war and peace, and our effort to replace one with the other. These questions are not new. War, in one form or another, appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease — the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences.

Over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers, clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of a “just war” emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when it meets certain preconditions: if it

is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence.....

For most of history, this concept of just war was rarely observed. The capacity of human beings to think up new ways to kill one another proved inexhaustible, as did our capacity to exempt from mercy those who look different or pray to a different God. I do not bring with me today a definitive solution to the problems of war. What I do know is that meeting these challenges will require the same vision, hard work and persistence of those men and women who acted so boldly decades ago. And it will require us to think in new ways about the notions of just war and the imperatives of a just peace.

We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations — acting individually or in concert — will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.” (Obama Nobel acceptance speech)

This is a very disturbing quote. What do you think Obama is trying to say here?

Cindy Sheehan—Like I said in my speech in Oslo, the ruling class is telling us by giving Obama that award, and in his speech that “War is Peace” and the only conceivable way to peace is through war.

What is also disturbing, is the kudos he got from the left-right establishment over that speech. Disturbing, yet predictable.

MW—Last question. This is an excerpt from an article you wrote more than a year ago:

Cindy Sheehan— “The most devastating conclusion that I reached this morning, however, was that Casey did indeed die for nothing. His precious lifeblood drained out in a country far away from his family who loves him, killed by his own country which is beholden to and run by a war machine that even controls what we think. I have tried every since he died to make his sacrifice meaningful. Casey died for a country which cares more about who will be the next American Idol than how many people will be killed in the next few months while Democrats and Republicans play politics with human lives. It is so painful to me to know that I bought into this system for so many years and Casey paid the price for that allegiance. I failed my boy and that hurts the most....

Good-bye America ...you are not the country that I love and I finally realized no matter how much I sacrifice, I can't make you be that country unless you want it.”

Do you feel the same way now as when you wrote that, or do you see any glimmer of hope that the country is beginning to change directions?

I wrote this in May of 2007 when I resigned from the movement—I still believe that the people have to wake up on their own, but we can give them some gentle shakes. I am still sacrificing for the enlightenment and am still trying. It was a short retirement-

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