

How many countries do you have to be at war with to be disqualified from receiving the Nobel Peace Prize?

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“It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.” — Voltaire

Question: How many countries do you have to be at war with to be disqualified from receiving the Nobel Peace Prize?

Answer: Five. Barack Obama has waged war against only Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. He’s holding off on Iran until he actually gets the prize.

Somalian civil society and court system are so devastated from decades of war that one wouldn’t expect its citizens to have the means to raise serious legal challenges to Washington’s apparent belief that it can drop bombs on that sad land whenever it appears to serve the empire’s needs. But a group of Pakistanis, calling themselves “Lawyers Front for Defense of the Constitution”, and remembering just enough of their country’s more civilized past, has filed suit before the nation’s High Court to make the federal government stop American drone attacks on countless innocent civilians. The group declared that a Pakistan Army spokesman claimed to have the capability to shoot down the drones, but the government had made a policy decision not to. [1]

The Obama administration, like the Bush administration, behaves like the world is one big lawless Somalia and the United States is the chief warlord. On October 20 the president again displayed his deep love of peace by honoring some 80 veterans of Vietnam at the White House, after earlier awarding their regiment a Presidential Unit Citation for its “extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry”. [2] War correspondent Michael Herr has honored Vietnam soldiers in his own way: “We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality. Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop.” [3]

What would it take for the Obamaniacs to lose any of the stars in their eyes for their dear Nobel Laureate? Perhaps if the president announced that he was donating his prize money to build a monument to the First — “Oh What a Lovely” — World War? The memorial could bear the inscription: “Let us remember that Rudyard Kipling coaxed his young son John into enlisting in this war. John died his first day in combat. Kipling later penned these words:

“If any question why we died,

Tell them, because our fathers lied.”

“The Constitution supposes what the history of all governments demonstrates, that the executive is the branch of power most interested in war, and most prone to it. It has accordingly with studied care vested the question of war in the legislature.” — James Madison, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, April 2, 1798.

A wise measure, indeed, but one American president after another has dragged the nation into bloody war without the approval of Congress, the American people, international law, or world opinion. Millions marched against the war in Iraq before it began. Millions more voted for Barack Obama in the belief that he shared their repugnance for America’s Wars Without End. They had no good reason to believe this — Obama’s campaign was filled with repeated warlike threats against Iran and Afghanistan — but they wanted to believe it.

If machismo explains war, if men love war and fighting so much, why do we have to compel them with conscription or pain of imprisonment? Why do the powers-that-be have to wage advertising campaigns to seduce young people to enlist in the military? Why do young men go to extreme lengths to be declared exempt for physical or medical reasons? Why do they flee into exile to avoid the draft? Why do they desert the military in large numbers in the midst of war? Why don’t Sweden or Switzerland or Costa Rica have wars? Surely there are many macho men in those countries.

“Join the Army, visit far away places, meet interesting people, and kill them.”

War licenses men to take part in what would otherwise be described as psychopathic behavior.

“Sometimes I think it should be a rule of war that you have to see somebody up close and get to know him before you can shoot him.” — Colonel Potter, M*A*S*H

“In the struggle of Good against Evil, it’s always the people who get killed.” — Eduardo Galeano

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a Taliban leader declared that “God is on our side, and if the world’s people try to set fire to Afghanistan, God will protect us and help us.” [4]

“I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn’t do my job.” — George W. Bush, 2004, during the war in Iraq. [5]

“I believe that Christ died for my sins and I am redeemed through him. That is a source of strength and sustenance on a daily basis.” — Barack Obama. [6]

Why don’t church leaders forbid Catholics from joining the military with the same fervor they tell Catholics to stay away from abortion clinics?

God, war, the World Bank, the IMF, free trade agreements, NATO, the war on terrorism, the war on drugs, “anti-war” candidates, and Nobel Peace Prizes can be seen as simply different instruments for the advancement of US imperialism.

Tom Lehrer, the marvelous political songwriter of the 1950s and 60s, once observed: “Political satire became obsolete when Henry Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.”

Perhaps each generation has to learn anew what a farce that prize has become, or always was. Its recipients include quite a few individuals who had as much commitment to a peaceful world as the Bush administration had to truth. One example currently in the news: Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Medecins Sans Frontieres which won the prize in 1998. Kouchner, now France's foreign secretary, has long been urging military action against Iran. Last week he called upon Iran to make a nuclear deal acceptable to the Western powers or else there's no telling what horror Israel might inflict upon the Iranians. Israel "will not tolerate an Iranian bomb," he said. "We know that, all of us." [7] There is a word for such a veiled threat — "extortion", something normally associated with the likes of a Chicago mobster of the 1930s ... "Do like I say and no one gets hurt." Or as Al Capone once said: "Kind words and a machine gun will get you more than kind words alone."

The continuing desperate quest to find something good to say about US foreign policy

Not the crazy, hateful right wing, not racist or disrupting public meetings, not demanding birth certificates ... but the respectable right, holding high positions in academia and in every administration, Republican or Democrat, members of the highly esteemed Council on Foreign Relations. Here's Joshua Kurlantzick, a "Fellow for Southeast Asia" at CFR, writing in the equally esteemed and respectable Washington Post about how — despite all the scare talk — it wouldn't be so bad if Afghanistan actually turned into another Vietnam because "Vietnam and the United States have become close partners in Southeast Asia, exchanging official visits, building an important trading and strategic relationship and fostering goodwill between governments, businesses and people on both sides. ... America did not win the war there, but over time it has won the peace. ... American war veterans publicly made peace with their old adversaries ... A program [to exchange graduate students and professors] could ensure that the next generation of Afghan leaders sees an image of the United States beyond that of the war." [8] And so on.

On second thought, this is not so much right-wing jingoism as it is ... uh ... y'know ... What's the word? ... Ah yes, "pointless". Just what is the point? Germany and Israel are on excellent terms ... therefore, what point can we make about the Holocaust?

As to America not winning the war in Vietnam, that's worse than pointless. It's wrong. Most people believe that the United States lost the war. But by destroying Vietnam to its core, by poisoning the earth, the water, the air, and the gene pool for generations, the US in fact achieved its primary purpose: it left Vietnam a basket case, preventing the rise of what might have been a good development option for Asia, an alternative to the capitalist model; for the same reason the United States has been at war with Cuba for 50 years, making sure that the Cuban alternative model doesn't look as good as it would if left in peace.

And in all the years since the Vietnam War ended, the millions of Vietnamese suffering from diseases and deformities caused by US sprayings of the deadly chemical "Agent Orange" have received from the United States no medical care, no environmental remediation, no compensation, and no official apology. That's exactly what the Afghans — their land and/or their bodies permeated with depleted uranium, unexploded cluster bombs, and a witch's brew of other charming chemicals — have to look forward to in Kurlantzick's Brave New World. "If the U.S. relationship with Afghanistan eventually resembles the one we now have with Vietnam, we should be overjoyed," he writes. God Bless America.

One further thought about Afghanistan: The suggestion that the United States could, and should, solve its (self-created) dilemma by simply getting out of that god-forsaken place is dismissed out of hand by the American government and media; even some leftist critics of US policy are reluctant to embrace so bold a step — Who knows what horror may result? But when the Soviet Union was in the process of quitting Afghanistan (during the period of May 1988-February 1989) who in the West insisted that they remain? For any reason. No matter what the consequences of their withdrawal. The reason the Russians could easier leave than the Americans can now is that the Russians were not there for imperialist reasons, such as oil and gas pipelines. Similar to why the US can't leave Iraq.

Washington's eternal "Cuba problem" — the one they can't admit to

"Here we go again. I suppose old habits die hard," said US Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, on October 28 before the General Assembly voted on the annual resolution to end the US embargo against Cuba. "The hostile language we have just heard from the Foreign Minister of Cuba," she continued, "seems straight out of the Cold War era and is not conducive to constructive progress." Her 949-word statement contained not a word about the embargo; not very conducive to a constructive solution to the unstated "Cuba problem", the one about Cuba inspiring the Third World, the fear that the socialist virus would spread.

Since the early days of the Cuban Revolution assorted anti-communists and capitalist true-believers around the world have been relentless in publicizing the failures, real and alleged, of life in Cuba; each perceived shortcoming is attributed to the perceived shortcomings of socialism — It's simply a system that can't work, we are told, given the nature of human beings, particularly in this modern, competitive, globalized, consumer-oriented world.

In response to such criticisms, defenders of Cuban society have regularly pointed out how the numerous draconian sanctions imposed by the United States since 1960 have produced many and varied scarcities and sufferings and are largely responsible for most of the problems pointed out by the critics. The critics, in turn, say that this is just an excuse, one given by Cuban apologists for every failure of their socialist system. However, it would be very difficult for the critics to prove their point. The United States would have to drop all sanctions and then we'd have to wait long enough for Cuban society to make up for lost time and recover what it was deprived of, and demonstrate what its system can do when not under constant assault by the most powerful force on earth.

In 1999, Cuba filed a suit against the United States for \$181.1 billion in compensation for economic losses and loss of life during the first 39 years of this aggression. The suit held Washington responsible for the death of 3,478 Cubans and the wounding and disabling of 2,099 others. In the ten years since, these figures have of course all increased. The sanctions, in numerous ways large and small, make acquiring many kinds of products and services from around the world much more difficult and expensive, often impossible; frequently, they are things indispensable to Cuban medicine, transportation or industry; simply transferring money internationally has become a major problem for the Cubans, with banks being heavily punished by the United States for dealing with Havana; or the sanctions mean that Americans and Cubans can't attend professional conferences in each other's country.

These examples are but a small sample of the excruciating pain inflicted by Washington upon the body, soul and economy of the Cuban people.

For years American political leaders and media were fond of labeling Cuba an “international pariah”. We don’t hear much of that any more. Perhaps one reason is the annual vote in the General Assembly on the resolution, which reads: “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba”. This is how the vote has gone:

Year

Votes (Yes-No)

No Votes

1992

59-2

US, Israel

1993

88-4

US, Israel, Albania, Paraguay

1994

101-2

US, Israel, Uzbekistan

1995

117-3

US, Israel, Uzbekistan

1996

138-3

US, Israel, Uzbekistan

1997

143-3

US, Israel

1998

157-2

US, Israel

1999

155-2

US, Israel, Marshall Islands

2000

167-3

US, Israel, Marshall Islands

2001

167-3

US, Israel, Marshall Islands

2002

167-3

US, Israel, Marshall Islands

2003

173-3

US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau

2004

179-3

US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau

2005

182-4

US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau

2006

183-4

US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau

2007

184-4

US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau

2008

185-3

US, Israel, Palau

2009

187-3

US, Israel, Palau

How it began, from State Department documents: Within a few months of the Cuban revolution of January 1959, the Eisenhower administration decided “to adjust all our actions in such a way as to accelerate the development of an opposition in Cuba which would bring about a change in the Cuban Government, resulting in a new government favorable to U.S. interests.” [9]

On April 6, 1960, Lester D. Mallory, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, wrote in an internal memorandum: “The majority of Cubans support Castro ... The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship. ... every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba.” Mallory proposed “a line of action which ... makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.” [10] Later that year, the Eisenhower administration instituted the suffocating embargo.

Notes

1. The Nation (Pakistan English-language daily newspaper), October 10, 2009 ←
2. Washington Post, October 20, 2009 ←
3. Michael Herr, “Dispatches” (1991), p.71 ←
4. New York Daily News, September 19, 2001 ←

5. Washington Post, July 20, 2004, p.15, citing the New Era (Lancaster, PA), from a private meeting of Bush with Amish families on July 9. The White House denied that Bush had said it. (Those Amish folks do lie a lot you know.) ↵
6. Washington Post, August 17, 2008 ↵
7. Daily Telegraph (UK), October 26, 2009 ↵
8. Washington Post, October 25, 2009 ↵
9. Department of State, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume VI, Cuba" (1991), p.742 ↵
- 10 Ibid., p.885 ↵

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