

Lies and Consequences in Our Past 15 Wars

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"Pretending generally, if not always, that the good of the people was their object. This, our Convention understood to be the most oppressive of all Kingly oppressions; and they resolved to so frame the Constitution that no one man should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us."—Abraham Lincoln

AFGHANISTAN

Prior to 2001, the Taliban was willing to turn Osama bin Laden over to a third country if he was promised a fair trial and no death penalty, and if some evidence of his guilt of crimes were offered. In 2001, the Taliban warned the United States that bin Laden was planning an attack on American soil. In July 2001 the United States was known to have plans to take military action against the Taliban by mid-October.

When the United States attacked Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, the Taliban again offered to negotiate for the handing over of bin Laden. When President George W. Bush refused, the Taliban dropped its demand for evidence of guilt and offered simply to turn bin Laden over to a third country. Bush rejected this offer and continued bombing. At a March 13, 2002, press conference, Bush said of bin Laden "I truly am not that concerned about him."[\[i\]](#) When President Barack Obama announced, in May 2011, that he had killed bin Laden, the war didn't even slow down.

Bin Laden, as a justification for the longest war in U.S. history, had always had weaknesses. As with Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi or Manuel Noriega, past U.S. support for bin Laden had to be kept out of the discussion. And a crime had to be transformed into an act of war. A crime by a non-state group was used to implicate the nation of Afghanistan, even though 92% of Afghans not only didn't support the crime of 9-11, but they have to this day never heard about it.[\[ii\]](#)

If bin Laden was not the reason for over a decade of war in Afghanistan, perhaps al Qaeda more generally was the cause. When President Obama continued the war in 2009 and tripled the number of U.S. troops in it, he and his subordinates argued that if the Taliban had power it would work with al Qaeda, and that would allow al Qaeda to endanger the United States. Some of the same officials who made this claim, including Richard Holbrooke, at other times admitted that al Qaeda had virtually no presence in Afghanistan, that the Taliban was not likely to work with al Qaeda, and that al Qaeda could easily plan attacks on the United States in a dozen nations other than Afghanistan, just as the 911 attack had been planned, in part, in Europe and the United States.[\[iii\]](#)

And of course recruitment for such attacks could only be boosted by the continuation of a U.S. war on Afghanistan. Most experts believe that the war is making the United States less

liked and less safe. From 2001 to 2007, there was a sevenfold increase in fatal jihadist attacks around the world, a predictable if tragic result of the Global War on Terror. The U.S. State Department responded to this dangerous escalation in terrorism by discontinuing its annual report on terrorism.[\[iv\]](#) By 2012, Obama was proposing to include the Taliban in a peace process.

If bin Laden and al Qaeda and terrorism were not the reasons for the war, maybe the war was intended to spread democracy, human rights, and economic benefits. Maybe the war was philanthropy. But the United States has claimed to be building nations in dozens of places and never succeeded yet.[\[v\]](#) The Afghan government propped up by the U.S. occupation supports wife-beating and barely even pretends to hold legitimate elections. It is extremely difficult to bring people rights and freedoms while bombing them and kicking in their doors at night. While U.S. media only mentions U.S. deaths and suffering, never showing images of the suffering of Afghans in this war, the pretense that the war is for the benefit of Afghans is thin. Nearly 2,000 U.S. troops have died in Afghanistan, as compared to tens of thousands of Afghan men, women, and children. The United States doesn't even count the number of people it kills, a seemingly necessary step if we actually wanted to calculate whether we are bestowing more benefit than harm. In fact, a strong majority of the people of the United States wants the war ended, as does a majority of Afghans. But racial and religious bigotry allow many in the United States to hold the self-deceptive belief that Afghans can gain from a war they oppose, since they just don't know any better. In fact, many Americans blindly accept that the U.S. government or president knows best even if their policies appear to us to be the most extreme folly.

If the war is based on lies and making us less safe, at least we can take comfort in the fact that it is succeeding. Or can we? Why is it taking so long? In April 2012, echoing numerous other reports, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis made public the results of 250 interviews with U.S. soldiers and Afghans around the country over two year-long deployments. Davis concluded that all claims of success and progress have been dishonest: "Senior ranking U.S. military leaders have so distorted the truth," he wrote, "when communicating with the U.S. Congress and American people in regards to conditions on the ground in Afghanistan that the truth has become unrecognizable."

As the U.S. public has turned against the war, many members of Congress have depicted themselves as opponents and critics of the war, while still in many cases continuing to vote for its funding. A Congressional report in 2010 documented payoffs made by the U.S. to the Taliban for the safe passage of goods through Afghanistan, payoffs that amounted to either the first or second largest source of income for the Taliban, the other being opium. Afghans, including those fighting for the Taliban, often signed up for training and pay from the United States and then departed, sometimes repeating the process a number of times. The United States has been funding, training, and arming both sides of the war.[\[vi\]](#)

Every week or two there has been an atrocity story in the media. Soldiers cut off fingers. Or they shot children from a helicopter. Or they shot up a bunch of women and then dug the bullets out with knives to cover up the crime. Or they urinated on corpses or burned corpses or burned Korans. It is always something. And it is always lied about to the extent possible by the United States and NATO, with NATO serving as protection from Congressional oversight. A pattern has developed of the U.S. military passing the buck to NATO, NATO denying everything, NATO revising its lies as new evidence emerges, and NATO finally admitting the crime, with the blame going to a few rogue "bad apples." But you cannot have a war without atrocities, and the atrocities are the least of it. The urination on

corpses is not as serious a crime as the creation of the corpses in the first place.

The U.S. military lied about football star Pat Tillman's death to his family at his funeral, for purposes of propaganda, but what would have been unusual would have been telling the truth.^[vii] Wars cannot exist without lies, and lying is the norm.

Myths about how a recent escalation in Iraq had turned a bad war into a good and successful war were applied by Obama to the completely different context of Afghanistan, in combination with familiar rhetoric about supporting troops, as if the war were for their benefit, and as if they had volunteered to be in it, even though they were being endlessly redeployed to a war that had nothing to do with the responsibilities they had signed up for and sworn an oath to, and even though their top cause of death was suicide. Sending more troops into war so that previous troops should not have killed themselves in vain is a hopeless endeavor. Escalating hopeless wars, supposedly in order to end them, actually serves only two purposes: it allows a president to appear more militaristic, and it enriches war profiteers. The escalation in Afghanistan has not improved the situation, quite the reverse.

"We did not choose this war," said Obama on May 1, 2012, as if the crime of 9-11 had been continually compelling him to fight a war in Afghanistan year after year. But the war was not defensive. Afghanistan was not attacking the United States. The war was not authorized by the United Nations. And it was not declared by Congress, as no war has been since 1941. When Russia began talking about a preemptive strike against U.S. missile bases on Russia's western border in May of 2012, there was nothing the United States could say against the justifiability of such an act. Not after Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and the threats being made toward Iran.

The tissue of lies surrounding the war on Afghanistan is typical. Libya, despite its use as a model for future "humanitarian wars," is no different.

LIBYA

The United States and Europe had been arming and working with Muamar Gadaffi in Libya for years, up to shortly before "intervening" against him in 2011. U.S. and British spy agencies had worked with Gadaffi's torturers and killers.

Gadaffi had given up his nuclear program. His subsequent fate (butchered and displayed in a meat locker), along with the fate of the nation of Iraq, sends a strong message to other nations already inclined to believe that only nuclear weapons will protect them.

But Gadaffi had displeased the West and displeased the Arab dictatorships. He was unreliable. He wanted too much of Libya's wealth for Libyans. He was too independent. He even called the Saudi monarch the worst thing in the book: "made by Britain and protected by the U.S." And he made that remark in Qatar, another nation that became his enemy.

The Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt was out of control. Nonviolent movements were overthrowing dictators. Something had to be done. Violence by protesters in Libya provided an opening — for the Gulf dictatorships and for U.S.A./NATO. Violent engagement in Libya, supposedly on behalf of the Arab Spring, provided cover for violent crackdowns on nonviolent protesters in Bahrain and Yemen. It was opponents of the Arab Spring who helped to arm the rebels in Libya — and later in Syria — but not just to arm them, also to

control them. This began under the banner of humanitarianism.

Between February 15th and 19th, according to Human Rights Watch, 104 protesters were killed in Libya. Protests did not remain nonviolent. Rebels burned down a police station in Derna and executed 50 “African mercenaries” in Al Bayda’. On February 21st the Libyan air force attacked Benghazi. Reports vary as to whether the targets were military or civilian. By February 24th Benghazi residents were lining up to be issued guns looted from the army and police. Gadaffi’s troops tried to take Az Zawiya on March 1st and Misrata on March 6th but the rebels held off the attacks. Gadaffi’s troops did take Az Zawiya on March 7th, and the loss of life was about eight people. Thirty-three died on March 5th in Az Zawiya, eight of them Gadaffi’s soldiers. And 21 were killed in Misrata on March 6th by Gadaffi’s army shelling. But Gulf and NATO nations’ media began talking about 50,000 dead and a genocide underway. The number came from Sayed al-Shanuka, a Libyan member of the International Criminal Court who had defected. There was no explanation of where or how the 50,000 had been killed.

On April 10th, Human Rights Watch reported on the dead in Misrata. The highest numbers came from Dr. Muhammad el-Fortia who claimed there were 257 dead, with only 22 percent of them women — suggesting that fighters had been targeted rather than homes. By the middle of June credible reports claimed 10,000 had been killed over four months by both sides, including by NATO’s bombing. NATO, dominated by the United States, entered the war on the pretext of protecting civilians from mass slaughter. There is no solid evidence that slaughter would have occurred. Some observers believe the rebels had the upper hand. The rebels were, in any event, very well armed. There were other options available, as well. The African Union had been proposing a peace settlement, one that Gadaffi might have agreed to.

But NATO immediately abandoned humanitarian rescue as the goal of its mission, replacing it with the need to overthrow Gadaffi. General Khalifa Belqasim Hifter was brought in from his home in Virginia by the CIA to lead the rebels, along with other CIA-friendly Libyans. Obama, Sarkozy, and Cameron published an essay on April 15th announcing their plan to overthrow Gadaffi, something the United Nations did not authorize. U.S. Navy Admiral Samuel Locklear admitted in May to Congressman Mike Turner (R., Ohio) that NATO was trying to assassinate Gadaffi.

The *New York Times* admitted to “scores” of dead from NATO strikes unacknowledged by NATO. Over 600,000 civilians fled the country, including 100,000 Libyans, while another 200,000 Libyans were internally displaced. NATO had bombed the city of Tripoli for months, occasionally apologizing for the deaths of civilians, but leaving many observers with the impression that the goal was “shock and awe” — or “terror bombing” as opposed to “precision bombing.” Among the targets were media outlets, in which journalists were killed by NATO’s missile strikes.

Because cruise missiles and drones did the dirty work, U.S. Department of State Legal Adviser Harold Koh told Congress that the war was neither a war nor even “hostilities” (the language in the War Powers Act). If no U.S. pilots or soldiers were at risk, then the bombs were not hostile. They were friendly explosions.

There are echoes here of the first aerial bombing in world history, the Italian bombing of Tajura and Ain Zara in 1911. The bombing, the Italian air force said, had “a wonderful effect on the morale of the Arabs.” The 2011 version had a less-than-wonderful effect on the U.S.

Constitution, because of course Congress did not offer any resistance. Discussions of a possible war on Iran in 2012 left both Congress and the United Nations to one side. Pentagon head Leon Panetta told the U.S. Senate that President Obama could go to war in Syria or elsewhere without Congress, without the United Nations, and with or without NATO.

The ICC disgraced itself as well. Lead investigator Luis Moreno-Ocampo made statements as if they were indisputable about alleged crimes by Gadaffi, including claims about mass-rape and the handing out of Viagra to troops, stories pushed at the same time by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice. Eventually Amnesty International investigated and found no grounds for the accusations. Moreno-Ocampo did not investigate NATO's crimes in Libya, any more than he has ever done so in Iraq or Afghanistan. On January 19, 2012, the Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, and the International Legal Assistance Consortium reported that NATO had targeted civilian areas and committed war crimes.

Toward the end of the war, the rebels displaced the entire population of the town of Tawergha. All 30,000 people are now gone. The rebels had deemed the town's residents' skin too dark. Libya is now smuggling arms to Syrian rebels. Tribes are at war in Southern Libya. The new transitional Libyan government is not representative, democratic, stable, protective of civil rights, or productive of economic rights. Libya is plagued by the resentment and instability that come with violent change. Gadaffi's death did nothing to prevent this inevitable outcome. And unlike the outcome of homegrown violence, which would have been bad enough, the current state of affairs in Libya is one in which the nation suffers from foreign control.

The West could have left Libya alone in 2011. Or it could have left Libya alone for decades. Or it could have done good by Libya, economically and politically rather than seeking to exploit Libya's oil. Come the crises of 2011, the United States could have aided the nonviolent protesters in Bahrain rather than approving of a Saudi crackdown and sending over a U.S. cop to lead the cracking of skulls. Instead, the people of the nations of Western Asia learned that the West will only aid violent campaigns, and then only if it, too, favors the overthrow of one of its former puppets. Oil now flows from Libya to the West for free, as repayment apparently for "regime change services."[\[viii\]](#)

DRONE WARS

The bombing of Libya was intense and sustained, but U.S. drones are also being used to kill in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere. They are used to kill individuals, including U.S. citizens, including children, including both identified individuals and people targeted because of a pattern of behavior that is deemed suspicious, and of course including many people who simply happen to be too close to an intended or accidental target. If drone strikes are law enforcement, the president or his designate is judge, jury, and executioner. The U.S. Congress and public are left in the dark. The nation where the strike is made is violated. If drone strikes are war, they are war with one army safely ensconced thousands of miles from the battlefield, and the other army blindfolded and handcuffed on the battlefield with their wives and children and grandparents along.

In February 2002, a drone pilot thought he'd killed Osama bin Laden, but it turned out to be an innocent man. Expert observers, including Shahzad Akbar, a Pakistani lawyer representing drone victims, believe the vast majority of drone victims are not the individuals who were targeted. Noor Behram, who photographs drone victims, says, "For every 10 to

15 people, maybe they get one militant.” President Obama has instructed the government of Yemen to keep a reporter locked up whose crime appears to be having reported on the victims of a U.S. drone strike. Over a million people, by Amnesty International’s estimate, have fled the areas of heavy drone bombing in Pakistan.

Drones have killed Americans in “friendly fire,” including on April 6, 2011, in Afghanistan. Afghans have killed CIA drone pilots and other U.S. officials inside their offices. Even drone “pilots” working in the United States can commit suicide. They are suffering extremely high rates of stress and burnout, according to the Air Force. A Pakistani who tried to blow up a car in Times Square in 2010 said it was revenge for drone attacks. Eventually, blowback for drone attacks may come in the form of drone attacks. U.S. companies sell drones to democracies and dictatorships alike. Al Qaeda stole a crashed U.S. drone from Yemeni police in February 2011. And in December 2011, Iran captured a U.S. drone a decade after the CIA had given Iran plans to build a nuclear bomb, any possible progress on which the drone was no doubt supposed to be spying on.

While initially cheaper than manned planes, unmanned drones require many more personnel: 168 people to keep a Predator drone in the air for 24 hours, plus 19 analysts to process the videos created by a drone. And to make matters worse, they tend to crash. They even “go rogue,” lose contact with their “pilots” and fly off on their own. The U.S. Navy has a drone that self-destructs if you accidentally touch the space bar on the computer keyboard. Drones also tend to supply so-called enemies with information, including the endless hours of video they record, and to infect U.S. military computers with viruses. But these are the sorts of SNAFUs that come with any project lacking oversight, accountability, or cost controls. The companies with the biggest drone contracts did not invest in developing the best technologies but in paying off the most Congress members.[\[ix\]](#)

IRAQ II

The normalization of war lies in recent years, and the acceptance of the idea that war criminals should go on book tour rather than on trial, of course begins with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. And that war began with the promise that it would be free and easy. Dick Cheney said U.S. troops would be greeted as liberators, while Ken Adelman promised a cake walk.

President George W. Bush had decided on the war and sought ways to get it started for many months, while publicly pretending to be striving to avoid a war. Vice President Cheney pressured the CIA to fudge the facts, and set up an even more compliant “intelligence” operation within the Pentagon. Secretary of State Colin Powell made a war sales pitch to the United Nation despite his own staff having warned him that many of the claims he would be making were not backed up by the evidence. The U.N. refused to authorize the war, but Bush launched it anyway, resulting in over a million deaths and over 4 million people displaced from their homes, along with such complete devastation of Iraqi society that commentators began popularizing the term “sociocide.” This disaster cost the U.S. trillions of dollars in direct expense and indirect economic impact.[\[x\]](#)

This war, like all wars since 1928, violated the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and like most wars since 1945, violated the U.N. Charter. But it went further than that in damaging the rule of law. Bush persuaded Congress to issue vague and general “authorizations to use military force,” violating the limitations placed on presidential war making by the Constitution and even by

the War Powers Act. Bush also violated the authorization by submitting false information to Congress, not to mention by claiming in a “signing statement” that Congress had no power to authorize him to do anything. Those and many other false claims about Iraqi weapons and ties to terrorism, made by Bush and his subordinates, violated the Anti-Conspiracy Statute, as well as the False Statements Accountability Act. It is also illegal under treaties the United States is party to for one nation to invade another in order to control its resources.[\[xi\]](#)

And then there were all the subordinate war crimes that came along with the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq: targeting civilians, journalists, hospitals, and ambulances, using antipersonnel weapons including cluster bombs in densely settled urban areas, using white phosphorous as a weapon, using depleted uranium weapons, employing a new form of napalm found in Mark 77 firebombs, collectively punishing populations including by blocking roads and electricity and water, by planting bombs in farm fields, by demolishing houses, by plowing down orchards, by detaining people without charge, imprisoning children, torturing, raping, and murdering captives. An increased use of mercenaries created a force lacking even the pretense of accountability to any body of law.[\[xii\]](#)

Equal to the mendacity of the public relations campaign that launched the Iraq war was the campaign that escalated it and claimed some benefit from that “surge” in 2007-2008. Just as the Vietnamese would have agreed to the same terms prior to the saturation bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong as after, the Iraqis would have accepted the treaty that Bush and Maliki finally came up with had it been proposed prior to the escalation. The “benchmarks” that Congress expected Bush to meet by 2007 were not met by then or by 2008 or by 2009. There was no oil law, no de-baathification law, no constitutional review, no provincial elections, and no improvement in electricity, water, or other basic measures of well-being. Only agreement to leave produced what the escalation had merely delayed. Claims for the “surge” were downsized to include only a reduction in violence, but the timing coincided with a long-term downward trend in violence, the relatively small “surge” actually increased violence in some areas, and violence went down most dramatically where troops were withdrawn, or where they ceased provocative raids on homes, not where troops were added. Violence really dropped off when Bush committed the United States to full withdrawal in 2011.[\[xiii\]](#)

BOSNIA

Dishonesty about wars did not begin with our 43rd president. In 1995, President Clinton announced that he would “help the people of Bosnia to secure their own peace.” Almost two decades later, U.S. and other foreign troops have never left, and the place is governed by a European-backed Office of High Representative.[\[xiv\]](#) U.S. involvement in Yugoslavia gave NATO a reason to exist after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was also not unrelated to lead, zinc, cadmium, gold, and silver mines, cheap labor, and a deregulated market. In 1996 U.S. Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown died in a plane crash in Croatia along with top executives for Boeing, Bechtel, AT&T, Northwest Airlines, and several other corporations that were lining up government contracts for “reconstruction.” Enron, the famously corrupt corporation that would implode in 2001, was a part of so many such trips that it issued a press release to state that none of its people had been on this one. Enron gave \$100,000 to the Democratic National Committee in 1997, six days before accompanying new Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor to Bosnia and Croatia and signing a deal to build a \$100 million power plant. The annexation of Kosovo created a militarized buffer between Yugoslavia and the projected route of an oil pipeline through Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania. The pipeline

is being built, with U.S. government support, to provide the United States and Western Europe with access to oil from the Caspian Sea. Energy Secretary Bill Richardson said in 1998: “This is about America’s energy security. It’s very important to us that both the pipeline map and the politics come out right.” [\[xv\]](#)

IRAQ I

Far-fetched claims of humanitarian intention did not begin with Bill Clinton either. On October 9, 1990, a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl told a U.S. congressional committee that she’d seen Iraqi soldiers take 15 babies out of an incubator in a Kuwaiti hospital and leave them on the cold floor to die. Some congress members, including the late Tom Lantos (D., Calif.), knew but did not tell the U.S. public that the girl was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States, that she’d been coached by a major U.S. public relations company paid by the Kuwaiti government, and that there was no other evidence for the story. President George H. W. Bush used the dead babies story 10 times in the next 40 days, and seven senators used it in the Senate debate on whether to approve military action. Thus was born the Gulf War, a war that would never really end, but would be radically expanded in 2003. [\[xvi\]](#)

PANAMA

When Bush the Elder had first sought, among other things, to prove he was no “wimp” by attacking Panama in 1989, the most prominent justification was that Panama’s leader was a mean, drug-crazed, weirdo with a pockmarked face who liked to commit adultery. An article in the *New York Times* on December 26, 1989, began:

“The United States military headquarters here, which has portrayed General Manuel Antonio Noriega as an erratic, cocaine-snorting dictator who prays to voodoo gods, announced today that the deposed leader wore red underwear and availed himself of prostitutes.”

Never mind that Noriega had worked for the CIA, including at the time he’d stolen the 1984 election in Panama. Never mind that his real offense was refusing to back U.S. war making against Nicaragua. Never mind that the United States had known about Noriega’s drug trafficking for years and continued working with him. This man snorted cocaine in red underwear with women not his wife. “That is aggression as surely as Adolf Hitler’s invasion of Poland 50 years ago was aggression,” declared Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger of Noriega’s drug trafficking. The invading U.S. liberators even claimed to find a big stash of cocaine in one of Noriega’s homes, although it turned out to be tamales wrapped in banana leaves. And what if the tamales really had been cocaine? Would that, like the discovery of actual “weapons of mass destruction” in Baghdad in 2003 have justified war? [\[xvii\]](#)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND GRENADA

Often one of the initial excuses for military action is to defend Americans in a foreign country who have supposedly been put at risk by recent events. This excuse was used, along with the usual variety of other excuses, by the United States when invading the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983, and Panama in 1989. In the case of the Dominican Republic, U.S. citizens who wanted to leave (1,856 of them) had been evacuated prior to the military action. Neighborhoods in Santo Domingo where Americans lived were free of violence and the military was not needed in order to evacuate anyone. All the major

Dominican factions had agreed to help evacuate any foreigners who wanted to leave.

In the case of Grenada (an invasion that the United States banned the U.S. media from covering) there were supposedly U.S. medical students to rescue. But U.S. State Department official James Budeit, two days before the invasion, learned that the students were not in danger. When about 100 to 150 students decided they wanted to leave, their reason was fear of the U.S. attack. The parents of 500 of the students sent President Reagan a telegram asking him not to attack, letting him know their children were safe and free to leave Grenada if they chose to do so.

In the case of Panama, a real incident could be pointed to, one of a sort that has been found anywhere foreign armies have ever occupied someone else's country. Some drunk Panamanian soldiers had beaten up a U.S. navy officer and threatened his wife. While President Bush claimed that this and other new developments prompted the war, the war plans had actually begun months prior to the incident.[\[xviii\]](#)

President Lyndon B. Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 used the pretense of American lives at risk. But that justification had been cooked up as a substitute for a claim of combating communism, which Johnson knew to be baseless and couldn't be sure would fly. In a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann later explained that the U.S. ambassador had asked the head of the Dominican military if he'd be willing to play along with the alternative lie:

"All we requested was whether he would be willing to change the basis for this from one of fighting communism to one of protecting American lives."[\[xix\]](#)

VIETNAM

The greatest war fraud perpetrated by LBJ was, of course, Vietnam. He built on what had already been done during President John F. Kennedy's presidency. Kennedy's subordinates in Vietnam wanted an expansion of the U.S. presence there, but believed the public and the president would resist. General Maxwell Taylor and Walt W. Rostow wondered how the United States could go to war while appearing to preserve the peace. While they were pondering this, Vietnam was suddenly struck by flooding. The U.S. quickly sent in troops to save Vietnam from natural disaster.[\[xx\]](#)

The big escalation, however, came after a fictional attack on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 4, 1964. These were U.S. war ships off the coast of North Vietnam that were engaged in military actions against North Vietnam. President Johnson knew he was lying when he claimed the August 4th attack was unprovoked. Had it happened, it could not have been unprovoked. The same ship that was supposedly attacked on August 4th, had damaged three North Vietnamese boats and killed four North Vietnamese sailors two days earlier, in an action where the evidence suggests the United States fired first, although the opposite was claimed. In fact, in a separate operation days earlier, the United States had begun shelling the mainland of North Vietnam. But the supposed attack on August 4th was actually, at most, a misreading of U.S. sonar. The ship's commander cabled the Pentagon claiming to be under attack, and then immediately cabled to say his earlier belief was in doubt and no North Vietnamese ships could be confirmed in the area. President Johnson was not sure there had been any attack when he told the American public there had been. Months later he admitted privately: "For all I know, our navy was just shooting at whales out there." But by then Johnson had the authorization from Congress for the war he'd

wanted.[\[xxi\]](#)

Vietnam is a prominent example of another type of war lie as well. Peace offers have been rejected and hushed up prior to or during World War II, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, and many other wars. In Vietnam, peace settlements were proposed by the Vietnamese, the Soviets, and the French, but rejected and sabotaged by the United States. The last thing you want when trying to start or continue a war — and when trying to sell it as a reluctant action of last resort — is for word to leak out that the other side is proposing peace talks.[\[xxii\]](#)

The War on Vietnam may have killed 4 million civilians or more, plus 1.1 million North Vietnamese troops, 40,000 South Vietnamese troops, and 58,000 U.S. forces.

KOREA

The forgotten war in Korea, however, was the war that did away with Congressional declarations and established war as a permanent industry and global project, with the heavy taxes that go along with funding that. Americans were told that North Korea had attacked South Korea and had done so at the behest of the Soviet Union as part of a plot to take over the world for communism. In fact, the evidence suggests that the South was the aggressor. But, whichever side attacked, this was a civil war. The Soviet Union was not involved, and the United States ought not to have been. South Korea was not the United States, and was not in fact anywhere near the United States, yet this war was advertised as “defensive.”

The War on Korea saw the deaths of an estimated 500,000 North Korean troops; 400,000 Chinese troops; 245,000 – 415,000 South Korean troops; 37,000 U.S. troops; and an estimated 2 million Korean civilians.

WORLD WAR II

The war that has been used to justify later wars more than any other, and to justify massive military spending in anticipation of its repetition, is World War II. More than a few paragraphs are needed to persuade most Americans that there were better alternatives that could have been taken immediately prior to, in the decades preceding, and during the conduct of World War II. What can be easily reviewed is the fact that the war propaganda was chock full of lies.

On September 4, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a “fireside chat” radio address in which he claimed that a German submarine, completely unprovoked, had attacked the United States destroyer *Greer*, which — despite being called a destroyer — had been harmlessly delivering mail. Really? The Senate Naval Affairs Committee questioned Admiral Harold Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, who said the *Greer* had been tracking the German submarine and relaying its location to a British airplane, which had dropped depth charges on the submarine’s location without success. The *Greer* had continued tracking the submarine for hours before the submarine turned and fired torpedoes.

A month and a half later, Roosevelt told a similar tall tale about the *USS Kearny*. And then he really piled on. Roosevelt claimed to have in his possession a secret map produced by Hitler’s government that showed plans for a Nazi conquest of South America. The Nazi government denounced this as a lie, blaming of course a Jewish conspiracy. The map, which Roosevelt refused to show the public, in fact actually showed routes in South America flown by American airplanes, with notations in German describing the distribution of aviation fuel.

It was a British forgery, and apparently of about the same quality as the forgeries President George W. Bush would later use to show that Iraq had been trying to purchase uranium.

Roosevelt also claimed to have come into possession of a secret plan produced by the Nazis for the replacement of all religions with Nazism: “The clergy are to be forever silenced under penalty of the concentration camps, where even now so many fearless men are being tortured because they have placed God above Hitler.” Such a plan sounded like something Hitler would indeed draw up had Hitler not himself been an adherent of Christianity, but Roosevelt of course had no such document.[\[xxiii\]](#)

The people of the United States did not support going into another war until Pearl Harbor, by which point Roosevelt had already instituted the draft, activated the National Guard, created a huge Navy in two oceans, traded old destroyers to England in exchange for the lease of its bases in the Caribbean and Bermuda, and — just 11 days before the “unexpected” attack — he had secretly ordered the creation of a list of every Japanese and Japanese-American person in the United States.

On August 18, 1941, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met with his cabinet at 10 Downing Street. The meeting had some similarity to the July 23, 2002, meeting at the same address, the minutes of which became known as the Downing Street Minutes. Both meetings revealed secret U.S. intentions to go to war. In the 1941 meeting, Churchill told his cabinet, according to the minutes: “The President had said he would wage war but not declare it.” In addition, “Everything was to be done to force an incident.”

In January 1941, eleven months before the attack, the *Japan Advertiser* expressed its outrage over Pearl Harbor in an editorial, and the U.S. ambassador to Japan wrote in his diary: “There is a lot of talk around town to the effect that the Japanese, in case of a break with the United States, are planning to go all out in a surprise mass attack on Pearl Harbor. Of course I informed my government.”

On February 5, 1941, Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner wrote to Secretary of War Henry Stimson to warn of the possibility of a surprise attack at Pearl Harbor.

In November 1940, Roosevelt had loaned China one hundred million dollars for war with Japan, and after consulting with the British, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau made plans to send the Chinese bombers with U.S. crews to use in bombing Tokyo and other Japanese cities. On December 21, 1940, two weeks shy of a year before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, China’s Minister of Finance T.V. Soong and Colonel Claire Chennault, a retired U.S. Army flier who was working for the Chinese and had been urging them to use American pilots to bomb Tokyo since at least 1937, met in Henry Morgenthau’s dining room to plan the firebombing of Japan. Morgenthau said he could get men released from duty in the U.S. Army Air Corps if the Chinese could pay them \$1,000 per month. Soong agreed.

On May 24, 1941, the *New York Times* reported on U.S. training of the Chinese air force, and the provision of “numerous fighting and bombing planes” to China by the United States. “Bombing of Japanese Cities is Expected” read the subheadline. By July, the Joint Army-Navy Board had approved a plan called JB 355 to firebomb Japan. A front corporation would buy American planes to be flown by American volunteers trained by Chennault and paid by another front group. Roosevelt approved, and his China expert Lauchlin Currie, in the words of Nicholson Baker, “wired Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Claire Chennault a letter that fairly

begged for interception by Japanese spies.” Whether or not that was the entire point, this was the letter:

“I am very happy to be able to report today the President directed that sixty-six bombers be made available to China this year with twenty-four to be delivered immediately. He also approved a Chinese pilot training program here. Details through normal channels. Warm regards.”

On July 24, 1941, President Roosevelt remarked, “If we cut the oil off , [the Japanese] probably would have gone down to the Dutch East Indies a year ago, and you would have had a war. It was very essential from our own selfish point of view of defense to prevent a war from starting in the South Pacific. So our foreign policy was trying to stop a war from breaking out there.”

Reporters noticed that Roosevelt said “was” rather than “is.” The next day, Roosevelt issued an executive order freezing Japanese assets. The United States and Britain cut off oil and scrap metal to Japan. Radhabinod Pal, an Indian jurist who served on the war crimes tribunal after the war, called the embargoes a “clear and potent threat to Japan’s very existence,” and concluded the United States had provoked Japan.

In late October, U.S. spy Edgar Mower was doing work for Colonel William Donovan who spied for Roosevelt. Mower spoke with a man in Manila named Ernest Johnson, a member of the Maritime Commission, who said he expected “The Japs will take Manila before I can get out.” When Mower expressed surprise, Johnson replied “Didn’t you know the Jap fleet has moved eastward, presumably to attack our fleet at Pearl Harbor?”

On November 15th, Army Chief of Staff George Marshall briefed the media on something we do not remember as “the Marshall Plan.” In fact we don’t remember it at all. “We are preparing an offensive war against Japan,” Marshall said, asking the journalists to keep it a secret.

Ten days later Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote in his diary that he’d met in the Oval Office with Marshall, President Roosevelt, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Admiral Harold Stark, and Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Roosevelt had told them the Japanese were likely to attack soon, possibly next Monday. It has been well documented that the United States had broken the Japanese’ codes and that Roosevelt had access to them. It was through intercept of a so-called Purple code message that Roosevelt had discovered Germany’s plans to invade Russia. It was Hull who leaked a Japanese intercept to the press, resulting in the November 30, 1941, headline “Japanese May Strike Over Weekend.”

That next Monday would have been December 1st, six days before the attack actually came. “The question,” Stimson wrote, “was how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves. It was a difficult proposition.” The day after the attack, Congress voted for war.[\[xxiv\]](#)

Craig Shirley’s book *December 1941*, published in December 2011, printed a memo from December 4, 1941, that warned Roosevelt of possible Japanese attack. Shirley also reported that, in the words of *U.S. News and World Report*, “On the night of the Pearl Harbor attack, FDR and his war cabinet considered declaring war on all three Axis Powers — Japan, Germany, Italy — but in the end the president only targeted Japan.”

World War II became “the good war” during the unpopular war on Vietnam. In the minds of many Americans today, World War II was justified because of the degree of evilness of Adolf Hitler, an evilness to be found above all in the holocaust. But you 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., N.Y.) 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 Eichmann, “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 December 21st, 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.[\[xxv\]](#)

World War II, is still the deadliest of all time, with military deaths estimated at 20 to 25 million (including 5 million deaths of prisoners in captivity), and civilian deaths estimated at 40 to 52 million (including 13 to 20 million from war-related disease and famine).

World War II was of course capped off by President Truman pretending that Hiroshima was a military base and that bombing the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved lives and shortened the war.[\[xxvi\]](#)

WORLD WAR I

In the case of World War I, the U.S. public was told that Germany had attacked our good and innocent allies, might eventually attack us, and had in fact attacked innocent American civilians aboard a ship called the *Lusitania*. German submarines had been giving warnings to civilian ships, allowing passengers to abandon them before they were sunk. When this exposed the U-boats to counterattacks, however, the Germans began attacking without warning. That was how they sank the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, killing 1,198 people, including 128 Americans. But, through other channels, the Germans had already warned those passengers. The *Lusitania* had been built to specifications of the British Navy which listed it as an auxiliary cruiser. On its final voyage, the *Lusitania* was packed with American-made war materiel, including ten-and-a-half tons of rifle cartridges, 51 tons of shrapnel shells, and a large supply of gun cotton, not to mention 67 soldiers of the 6th Winnipeg Rifles. That the ship was carrying troops and weapons to war was not actually a secret.

Before the *Lusitania* left New York, the German Embassy had obtained permission from the U.S. Secretary of State to publish in New York newspapers a warning that because the ship was carrying war supplies it would be subject to attack.

Upon the sinking of the *Lusitania*, those same newspapers, and all other American newspapers, declared the attack murder and omitted any mention of what the ship had carried. When President Wilson protested to the German government, pretending the *Lusitania* had not contained any troops or weapons, his secretary of state resigned in protest of Wilson. The British and U.S. governments falsified the ship's manifests and lied so effectively that many people today imagine there is doubt over whether the *Lusitania* had weapons on board. Or they imagine that dive crews discovering arms in the wreckage of the ship in 2008 were resolving a long-standing mystery.[\[xxvii\]](#)

SPANISH AMERICAN WAR

Professional public relations campaigns may have come into their own with World War I, but war propaganda was not invented in the 20th century. In 1898 the *USS Maine* blew up in Havana Harbor, and U.S. newspapers quickly blamed the Spanish, crying out "Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain!" Newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst did his best to fan the flames of a war he knew would boost circulation. Who actually blew the ship up? Nobody knew. Certainly Spain denied it, Cuba denied it, and the United States denied it. Spain didn't just casually deny it either. Spain conducted an investigation and found that the explosion had been inside the ship. Realizing that the United States would reject this finding, Spain proposed a joint investigation by both countries and offered to submit to binding arbitration by an impartial international panel. The United States wasn't interested. Whatever caused the explosion, Washington wanted war.

More recent investigations raise the distinct possibility that the *Maine* was indeed sunk by an explosion, whether accidental or intentional, that occurred within it, rather than by a mine outside it. But no experts have proven one theory over another to the satisfaction of all. The Spanish could have found a way to plant a bomb inside the ship. Americans could have found a way to place a mine outside it. Knowing where the explosion took place won't tell us who, if anyone, caused it. But even if we knew for certain who caused it, how, and why, none of that information would change the basic account of what happened in 1898. The nation went mad for war in response to an attack by Spain for which there was no evidence, merely conjecture. This alleged atrocity — the sinking of the *Maine* — was used to launch a war "in defense of" Cuba and the Philippines that involved attacking and occupying Cuba and the Philippines, and Puerto

Rico for good measure.[\[xxviii\]](#)

MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR

U.S. imperialism wasn't new in 1898. The United States had simply run out of land to conquer on the continent by then. Before Abraham Lincoln had become, as president, the celebrated abuser of war powers (suspending *habeas corpus*, etc.) who has served to excuse similar abuses by so many of his successors, he had been a congressman aware that the Constitution had given the power to declare war to the Congress. In 1847, Congressman Lincoln accused President James Polk of lying the nation into a war by blaming Mexico for aggression when that charge rightly should have been made against the U.S. Army and Polk himself. Lincoln joined with former president and then-current congressman John Quincy

Adams in seeking a formal investigation of Polk's actions and the formal sanctioning of Polk for lying the nation into war.[\[xxix\]](#)

Even while denouncing a war based on lies whose blood, Lincoln said, was crying to heaven, Lincoln and his fellow Whigs voted repeatedly to fund that war. On June 21, 2007, Senator Carl Levin (D., Mich.) cited Lincoln's example in the *Washington Post* as justification for his own stance as an "opponent" of the War on Iraq who would continue to fund it through eternity as a means of "supporting the troops."

IT WAS EVER THUS

And so it goes, back through the claim that the Civil War was launched to end slavery and was needed to end slavery, even though so many other nations ended slavery without wars. Back through the endless lies about, and to, Native Americans. Back through the War of 1812 that we like to imagine as a defensive struggle and a continuation of a war for independence, although it was actually launched by the U.S. government three decades after the revolution ended, and launched with the intention of conquering Canada. Back indeed beyond the American Revolution that we justify by averting our eyes from the nonviolent liberation of many other nations.

From war we have acquired taxes and debt. Expenses on war and war preparation in the United States are now over half of federal discretionary spending, more than all other nations of the world combined, and more than at any time during the Cold War. Military spending increases, not with the need for military defense, but with the level of corruption in U.S. elections.

Decreasing in proportion to the rise in military spending are our civil liberties; our representative government; the balance of powers within the government; resistance to policies of warrantless spying, imprisonment without charge, torture, and assassination; and the health of our news media. The war machine has become the greatest destroyer of the natural environment we have. And the shifting of funding from all other areas to the military has had disastrous results in as many fields as we might choose to name.[\[xxx\]](#)

[\[i\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 38.

[\[ii\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 55.

[\[iii\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 56.

[\[iv\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 56.

[\[v\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 94.

[\[vi\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 102.

[\[vii\]](#) *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 164.

[\[viii\]](#) David Swanson, "The Libyan Model and the Oxymoron," <http://davidswanson.org/node/3669>

[\[ix\]](#) *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control*, by Medea Benjamin, 2012.

[x] *Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union*, by David Swanson, 2009, pp. 34-44.

[xi] *Ibid.*

[xii] *Ibid.*

[xiii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 242-249.

[xiv] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 101.

[xv] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 181.

[xvi] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 23.

[xvii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 30-31.

[xviii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 53.

[xix] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 79-80.

[xx] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 100.

[xxi] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 79.

[xxii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 192.

[xxiii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 117-118.

[xxiv] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 57-65.

[xxv] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., p. 36.

[xxvi] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 41-43.

[xxvii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 71-72.

[xxviii] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 68-69.

[xxix] *War Is A Lie*, by David Swanson, 2010, Charlottesville, Va., pp. 65-67.

[xxx] *The Military Industrial Complex at 50*, edited by David Swanson, Charlottesville, VA., 2011.

David Swanson's books include "[War Is A Lie](http://warisacrime.org)." He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org> and works for the online activist organization <http://rootsaction.org>. He hosts [Talk Nation Radio](http://TalkNationRadio.com). Follow him on Twitter: [@davidcswanson](https://twitter.com/davidcswanson) and [FaceBook](https://www.facebook.com/davidswanson).

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