

# The Lord of Chaos. “The Politicians Who Lied to Us Extinguished Millions of Lives”. Chris Hedges

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*The politicians and shills in the media who orchestrated 20 years of military debacles in the Middle East, and who seek a world dominated by U.S. power, must be held accountable for their crimes.*

Two decades ago, I sabotaged my career at The New York Times. It was a conscious choice. I had spent seven years in the Middle East, four of them as the Middle East Bureau Chief. I was an Arabic speaker. I believed, like nearly all Arabists, including most of those in the State Department and the CIA, that a “preemptive” war [against](#) Iraq would be the most costly strategic blunder in American history. It would also constitute what the [International Military Tribunal](#) at Nuremberg [called](#) the “supreme international crime.” While Arabists in official circles were muzzled, I was not. I was invited by them to speak at The State Department, The United States Military Academy at West Point and to senior Marine Corps officers scheduled to be deployed to Kuwait to prepare for the invasion.

Mine was not a popular view nor one a reporter, rather than an opinion columnist, was permitted to express publicly according to the rules laid down by the newspaper. But I had experience that gave me credibility and a platform. I had reported extensively from Iraq. I had covered numerous armed conflicts, including the first Gulf War and the Shi’ite uprising in southern Iraq where I was taken prisoner by The Iraqi Republican Guard. I easily dismantled the lunacy and lies used to promote the war, especially as I had reported on the destruction of Iraq’s chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspection teams. I had detailed knowledge of how degraded the Iraqi military had become under U.S. sanctions. Besides, even if Iraq did possess “weapons of mass destruction” that [would not](#) have been a legal justification for war.

The death threats towards me exploded when my stance became public in numerous interviews and talks I gave across the country. They were either mailed in by anonymous

writers or expressed by irate callers who would daily fill up the message bank on my phone with rage-filled tirades. Right-wing talk shows, including Fox News, pilloried me, especially after I was [heckled and booed off](#) a commencement stage at Rockford College for denouncing the war. The Wall Street Journal [wrote](#) an editorial attacking me. Bomb threats were called into venues where I was scheduled to speak. I became a pariah in the newsroom. Reporters and editors I had known for years would lower their heads as I passed, fearful of any career-killing contagion. I was issued a written reprimand by The New York Times to cease speaking publicly against the war. I [refused](#). My tenure was over.

What is disturbing is not the cost to me personally. I was aware of the potential consequences. What is disturbing is that the architects of these debacles have never been held accountable and remain ensconced in power. They continue to promote permanent war, including the ongoing [proxy war](#) in [Ukraine](#) against Russia, as well as a [future war](#) against [China](#).

The politicians who [lied](#) to us — [George W. Bush](#), [Dick Cheney](#), [Condoleezza Rice](#), [Hillary Clinton](#) and [Joe Biden](#) to name but a few — [extinguished](#) millions of lives, including thousands of American lives, and left Iraq along with Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Libya and Yemen in chaos. They exaggerated or fabricated conclusions from intelligence reports to mislead the public. The [big lie](#) is taken from the playbook of totalitarian regimes.

The cheerleaders in the media for war — [Thomas Friedman](#), [David Remnick](#), [Richard Cohen](#), [George Packer](#), [William Kristol](#), [Peter Beinart](#), [Bill Keller](#), [Robert Kaplan](#), [Anne Applebaum](#), [Nicholas Kristof](#), [Jonathan Chait](#), [Fareed Zakaria](#), [David Frum](#), [Jeffrey Goldberg](#), [David Brooks](#) and [Michael Ignatieff](#) — were used to amplify the lies and discredit the handful of us, including [Michael Moore](#), [Robert Scheer](#) and [Phil Donahue](#), who opposed the war. These courtiers were often motivated more by careerism than idealism. They did not lose their [megaphones](#) or lucrative speaking fees and book contracts once the lies were exposed, as if their crazed diatribes did not matter. They served the centers of power and were rewarded for it.

Many of these same pundits are pushing further escalation of the war in Ukraine, although most know as little about Ukraine or NATO's [provocative](#) and [unnecessary expansion](#) to the borders of Russia as they did about Iraq.

"I told myself and others that Ukraine is the most important story of our time, that everything we should care about is on the line there," George Packer [writes](#) in The Atlantic magazine. "I believed it then, and I believe it now, but all of this talk put a nice gloss on the simple, unjustifiable desire to be there and see."

Packer views war as a purgative, a force that will jolt a country, including the U.S., back to the core moral values he supposedly found amongst American volunteers in Ukraine.

"I didn't know what these men thought of American politics, and I didn't want to know," he writes of two U.S. volunteers. "Back home we might have argued; we might have detested each other. Here, we were joined by a common belief in what the Ukrainians were trying to do and admiration for how they were doing it. Here, all the complex infighting and chronic disappointments and sheer lethargy of any democratic society, but especially ours, dissolved, and the essential things — to be free and live with dignity — became clear. It almost seemed as if the U.S. would have to be attacked or undergo

some other catastrophe for Americans to remember what Ukrainians have known from the start.”

The Iraq war [cost](#) at least \$3 trillion and the 20 years of warfare in the Middle East [cost](#) a total of some \$8 trillion. The occupation [created](#) Shi’ite and Sunni death squads, [fueled](#) horrific [sectarian](#) violence, gangs of kidnappers, mass killings and [torture](#). It gave rise to al-Qaeda cells and spawned ISIS which at one point controlled a third of Iraq and Syria. ISIS carried out rape, enslavement and mass executions of Iraqi ethnic and religious minorities such as the [Yazidis](#). It [persecuted](#) Chaldean Catholics and other Christians. This mayhem was accompanied by an orgy of [killing](#) by U.S. occupation forces, [such as](#) the gang rape and murder of Abeer al-Janabi, a 14-year-old girl and her family by members of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne. The U.S. routinely engaged in the torture and execution of detained civilians, including at [Abu Ghraib](#) and [Camp Bucca](#).

There is no accurate count of lives lost, estimates in Iraq alone [range](#) from hundreds of thousands to [over](#) a million. Some 7,000 U.S. service members died in our post 9/11 wars, with over 30,000 later committing suicide, [according](#) to Brown University’s Costs of War project.

Yes, Saddam Hussein was brutal and murderous, but in terms of a body count, we far [outstripped](#) his killings, including his genocidal campaigns against the Kurds. We destroyed Iraq as a unified country, devastated its modern infrastructure, wiped out its thriving and educated middle class, gave birth to rogue militias and installed a kleptocracy that uses the country’s oil revenues to enrich itself. Ordinary Iraqis are impoverished. Hundreds of Iraqis protesting in the streets against the kleptocracy have been [gunned](#) down by police. There are frequent [power outages](#). The Shi’ite majority, closely allied with Iran, dominates the country.

The occupation of Iraq, beginning 20 years ago today, turned the Muslim world and the Global South against us. The enduring images we left behind from two decades of war include President Bush standing under a “[Mission Accomplished](#)” banner onboard the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier barely one month after he invaded Iraq, the bodies of Iraqis in Fallujah that were [burned](#) with white phosphorus and the [photos](#) of torture by U.S. soldiers.

The U.S. is desperately attempting to use Ukraine to repair its image. But the rank hypocrisy of calling for “a rules-based international order” to justify the \$113 billion in arms and other aid that the U.S. has [committed](#) to send to Ukraine, won’t work. It ignores what we did. We might forget, but the victims do not. The only redemptive path is charging Bush, Cheney and the other architects of the wars in the Middle East, including Joe Biden, as war criminals in the International Criminal Court. Haul Russian President Vladimir Putin [off to](#) The Hague, but only if Bush is in the cell next to him.

Many of the apologists for the war in Iraq seek to justify their support by arguing that “mistakes” were made, that if, for example, the Iraqi civil service and army were not disbanded after the U.S. invaded, the occupation would have worked. They insist that our intentions were honorable. They ignore the hubris and lies that led to the war, the misguided belief that the U.S. [could be](#) the sole major power in a unipolar world. They ignore the massive military expenditures spent annually to achieve this fantasy. They ignore that the war in Iraq was only an episode in this demented quest.

A national reckoning with the military fiascos in the Middle East would expose the self-delusion of the ruling class. But this reckoning is not taking place. We are trying to wish the nightmares we perpetuated in the Middle East away, [burying](#) them in a collective amnesia. “World War III Begins With Forgetting,” [warns](#) Stephen Wertheim.

The celebration of our national “virtue” by pumping weapons into Ukraine, by sustaining [at least](#) 750 military bases in more than 70 countries and by expanding our naval presence in the South China Sea, is meant to fuel this dream of global dominance.

What the mandarins in Washington fail to grasp is that most of the globe does not believe the lie of American benevolence or support its justifications for U.S. interventions. China and Russia, rather than passively accepting U.S. hegemony, are building up their militaries and strategic alliances. China, last week, [brokered](#) an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to re-establish relations after seven years of hostility, something once expected of U.S. diplomats. The rising influence of China creates a self-fulfilling prophecy for those who call for war with Russia and China, one that will have consequences far more catastrophic than those in the Middle East.

There is a national weariness with permanent war, especially with inflation ravaging family incomes and 57 percent of Americans [unable](#) to afford a \$1,000 emergency expense. The Democratic Party and the establishment wing of the Republican Party, who peddled the lies about Iraq, are war parties. Donald Trump’s [call](#) to end the war in Ukraine, like his lambasting of the war in Iraq as the “worst decision” in American history, are attractive political stances to Americans struggling to stay afloat. The working poor, even those whose options for education and employment are limited, are [no longer](#) as inclined to fill the ranks. They have far more pressing concerns than a unipolar world or war with Russia or China. The isolationism of the far right is a potent political weapon.

The [pimps of war](#), leaping from fiasco to fiasco, cling to the chimera of U.S. global supremacy. The dance macabre will not stop until we publicly hold them accountable for their crimes, ask those we have wronged for forgiveness and give up our lust for uncontested global power. The day of reckoning, vital if we are to protect what is left of our anemic democracy and curb the appetites of the war machine, will only come when we build [mass anti-war organizations](#) that demand an end to the imperial folly threatening to extinguish life on the planet.

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