

Peace or War?

But logic, let alone common sense, does not always prevail when vested interests are at stake...

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The world breathed a sigh of relief when Iran undertook to give the Americans a symbolic 'slap in the face' as a response to the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani. Stepping back from the precipice of war, President Trump responded by intensifying economic sanctions rather than choosing military escalation of the conflict. The 'slap' was more than symbolic however. It was a bold demonstration that Iran could hit any U.S. base in the Middle East where American troops are sitting ducks. More significantly, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei took the historical long view by stating that Iran's ultimate goal was the ejection of U.S. troops from the entire region.

The first troop ejection may begin in Iraq as the parliament recently voted to remove all [U.S. forces](#) from the beleaguered country in light of the grim assassinations of General Soleimani and an Iraqi commander of popular militia forces, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, that took place on Iraqi soil.

With the potential withdrawal of troops from Iraq, those stationed in Syria would be placed on thin ice and despite the promises of Defense Secretary Esper to maintain their deployment to protect Syrian oil from ISIS, common sense would dictate that those troops should be withdrawn sooner rather than later for their own protection.

A similar logic would indicate that the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan is also a matter of time due to the tenacious and unceasing guerrilla war waged by the Taliban. As in Vietnam, a segment of the political leadership in the United States may come to the realization that America's longest war cannot be won.

But logic, let alone common sense, does not always prevail when vested interests are at stake, especially the material interest coveted by imperialism. Secretary Esper has already indicated that U.S. troops will remain in Iraq indefinitely to 'fight ISIS' and President Trump has threatened Iraq with loss of access to key [U.S. Federal Reserve](#) bank accounts and economic sanctions if the troops are ejected. It should also be noted that Esper's rationale for keeping troops in Syria to 'protect Syrian oil from ISIS' is a transparent lie meant to justify illegal occupation of territory in a sovereign nation for the purpose of stealing its resources.

The American ruling class will never relinquish any portion of the empire unless forced to do so by popular struggle at home and abroad.

Consequently, the removal of U.S. troops from the Middle East becomes a monumental issue facing the American people. How long will they fuel the empire with their blood and taxes? Judging from recent presidential elections a significant portion of the population is plainly

tired of foreign wars. Presidential candidates recognize this sentiment and manipulate it to their advantage.

Candidate Bush received enough votes to steal the 2000 election from Al Gore by promising a realistic foreign policy that would restrain the United States from engaging in [nation building](#) only to break that promise once elected by launching major conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of a 'war on terror' that spilled a sea of blood, unleashed an ocean of tears and wasted trillions of dollars.

Candidate Obama skillfully parleyed the anti-war sentiments generated by Bush's obscene wars to his advantage by successfully giving voters the impression that he was an [anti-war candidate](#) only to proceed as president to expand those wars to seven Muslim countries. Obama was so successful at spinning pacifist illusions, that he actually won a Noble Peace Prize before proceeding to launch a secret program of [drone warfare](#) in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen.

Although he formally ended Bush's mis-named 'Operation Iraqi Freedom', Obama maintained 5,000 troops in Iraq to 'fight ISIS'. At the same time that he was drawing down troop levels in Iraq, Obama ordered a 30,000 troop surge in Afghanistan in 2009. The Noble Laureate also destroyed Libya with the help of his NATO puppets in 2011 and waged proxy war in Syria beginning in 2012. Additionally, Obama increased [defense spending](#) for the 'war on terror' and allocated \$1 trillion to [modernize America's nuclear weapons](#) over the next 30 years. Quite a commitment to militarism for someone who gave the appearance of opposing war.

When attempting to understand the division of labor that exists between America's Republican and Democratic rulers, it is important to fully appreciate the latter's role of shock absorber in the homeland of imperialism, an undertaking that is designed to co-opt dissent thereby stabilizing the dominant social relations of class and race inequality. Obama performed the task superbly as evidenced by the fact that during his entire two terms in office there was not one major anti-war protest in the streets of the United States despite the fact that his administration waged war every single day of his presidency. That is no small accomplishment in a country that spends on average \$1 Trillion a year on the military while allowing its public and industrial infrastructure to deteriorate to levels that are beginning to resemble those found in third world countries.

Exit Obama stage left, enter Trump stage right. Candidate Trump, recognizing the mass discontent that exists in the land of shrinking opportunities, promised rather explicitly to stop waging [unnecessary wars](#) in the Middle East whose cost in lives and treasure has become too costly to ignore. Social reality has a way of eventually invalidating lies and illusions, even in a country that the persistently irreverent and sorely missed writer [Gore Vidal](#) once referred to as the "United States of Amnesia". Once elected, President Trump discovered to his dismay, that American presidents are not allowed to make peace with Russia or summarily withdraw troops from Syria or Afghanistan without serious push back from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the national security autocracy and even the [Democratic party](#). Russia-gate, Ukraine-gate and a looming impeachment trial in the U.S. senate stand as prominent examples. Nevertheless, Trump loves the military as evidenced by his advocacy for the third largest sequential increase in [defense spending](#) since World War II, Reagan's being first and Bush Jr.'s being second.

Another question arises with Trump. How would the United States respond to a lethal attack on its military forces in the Middle East? Despite sharing many similarities with former President Reagan, not the least of which is the ability to brush off criticism, the current president lacks the pragmatic realism of his predecessor and instead demonstrates a lethal combination of ignorance and arrogance that may, in a time of crisis, override his impulse to avoid war. It should be recalled that Reagan ordered all U.S. troops out of Lebanon in 1984, several months after a truck bomb attack killed 241 marines in Beirut in October 1983. Trump's ego, his tendency to personalize political attacks and massive pressure from the entire military, security and foreign policy establishments, not to mention the militarists in his own party and that of the Democrats, would not allow him to exercise Reagan's flexibility. Massive retaliation would be in order. The stakes are high in a unipolar world where the U.S. hegemon is constrained by asymmetrical warfare.

Turning to those Democrats who currently pose as pacifists, we have presidential candidate Bernie Sanders who, after wandering for months in the never-never-land of media marginalization, sees his campaign beginning to surge after [forcefully condemning](#) Trump's assassination of Soleimani. For his part, Sanders says the right things by promising to stop war with Iran, bring the troops home from Afghanistan, end the war in Yemen and effect an orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East.

Yet, when the proverbial push comes to shove, he does the opposite by consistently lending support for [imperialist war](#). As an 'independent' senator from Vermont, he voted for the 'Iran and Libya Sanctions Act' in 1996, the 'Iraqi Liberation Act' in 1998 and the U.S. bombing of Kosovo in 1999. He voted for the Authorization for Unilateral Military Force Against Terrorists (AUMF) in 2001 that gave Bush a congressional blank check to wage the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan. Although he voted against the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution in 2002, he consistently voted for the annual military budgets needed to fight the war. In 2011 he voted for a Senate resolution condemning human rights violations by Libya and demanded the resignation of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi whom he called a "thug" and a "murderer." The Senate resolution also requested the United Nations Security Council to freeze Libya's assets and establish a no-fly zone over the country to protect civilians. NATO's subsequent enforcement of this no-fly zone and its slaughter of Libyan civilians it meant to 'protect' is a matter of historical record. In this particular drama, Sanders played the soft cop to Hillary Clinton's hard cop. It was Clinton who openly advocated military intervention in Libya to accomplish the same result that Sanders advocated by diplomatic and economic means, namely, regime change. In the occupied territories of Palestine, Sanders periodically criticizes Israel's behavior but votes to give military aid to the apartheid state. Most significantly, he voted for resolutions of support for Israel during its wars in Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2014. And so it goes with Sander's [historically](#).

Candidate Elizabeth Warren made similar noises by criticizing what she called Trump's "dangerous" and "reckless" action in Iraq by ordering the assassination of General Soleimani so that she could woo progressive voters. She was of course, careful to identify Soleimani as a "murderer" who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans thereby properly genuflecting before the alter of the national security state. She made no mention of how those 'Americans' were functioning as an army of occupation in Iraq in the same way that Trump made no mention of the fact that the "American citizen" recently killed in Iraq was a military contractor. Once upon a time in this country, there was recognition of the fact that some of our countrymen were not behaving nicely in foreign

lands. Hence, the concept of the '[Ugly American](#)' was recognized and condemned. No more.

The United States is a militarized warfare state with a [permanent war economy](#) as Seymour Melman demonstrated decades ago. The U.S. military empire protects the U.S. corporate empire and the 51st state of Israel. The problem is systemic. In a militarized state, the rhetoric of peace always gives way to the reality of war. Why? Institutionalized power. The military industrial complex, the national security autocracy, the Israel lobby and most fundamentally, the American corporate plutocracy all exert powerful influences that determine the use of state power.

One thing is certain. American troops will be coming home from the Middle East. The question is whether they will be returning in body bags, with seriously injuries, or with body and mind fully intact. Will they be brought home as the result of war or will they arrive as the result of a peace initiative?

There is an even more profoundly vexing existential question facing the American people. Will American troops have a country to come home to? Given the hysterical Russophobia and demonization of Vladimir Putin that exists in this country, how long will it be before a U.S. provocation, possibly in the Middle East, pushes the world to hypersonic nuclear war?

The monumental questions of peace and war in the United States are not going to be decided by electoral politics. They will ultimately be decided by the revolutionary politics of anti-imperialism. The [game of American politics](#), namely, the use of populist rhetoric to conceal plutocratic governance underscores the urgency of resurrecting a militant anti-war movement that will confront an American imperialist system that fights perpetual wars for perpetual profits.

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