

Provocations as Pretexts for Imperial War: From Pearl Harbor to 9/11

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December 7, 1941. Pearl Harbor. 78 Years Ago.

Incisive analysis by Award Winning author Prof. James Petras

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Wars in an imperialist democracy cannot simply be dictated by executive fiat, they require the consent of highly motivated masses who will make the human and material sacrifices. Imperialist leaders have to create a visible and highly charged emotional sense of injustice and righteousness to secure national cohesion and overcome the natural opposition to early death, destruction and disruption of civilian life and to the brutal regimentation that goes with submission to absolutist rule by the military.

The need to invent a cause is especially the case with imperialist countries because their national territory is not under threat. There is no visible occupation army oppressing the mass of the people in their everyday life. The 'enemy' does not disrupt everyday normal life – as forced conscription would and does. Under normal peaceful time, who would be willing to sacrifice their constitutional rights and their participation in civil society to subject themselves to martial rule that precludes the exercise of all their civil freedoms?

The task of imperial rulers is to fabricate a world in which the enemy to be attacked (an emerging imperial power like Japan) is portrayed as an 'invader' or an 'aggressor' in the case of revolutionary movements (Korean and Indo-Chinese communists) engaged in a civil war against an imperial client ruler or a 'terrorist conspiracy' linked to an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Islamic movements and secular states. Imperialist-democracies in the past did not need to consult or secure mass support for their expansionist wars; they relied on volunteer armies, mercenaries and colonial subjects led and directed by colonial officers. Only with the confluence of imperialism, electoral politics and total war did the need arise to secure not only consent, but also enthusiasm, to facilitate mass recruitment and obligatory conscription.

Since all US imperial wars are fought 'overseas' – far from any immediate threats, attacks or invasions – -US imperial rulers have the special task of making the 'causus bellicus' immediate, 'dramatic' and self-righteously 'defensive'.

To this end US Presidents have created circumstances, fabricated incidents and acted in complicity with their enemies, to incite the bellicose temperament of the masses in favor of war.

The pretext for wars are acts of provocation which set in motion a series of counter-moves by the enemy, which are then used to justify an imperial mass military mobilization leading to and legitimizing war.

State 'provocations' require uniform mass media complicity in the lead-up to open warfare: Namely the portrayal of the imperial country as a victim of its own over-trusting innocence and good intentions. All four major US imperial wars over the past 67 years resorted to a provocation, a pretext, and systematic, high intensity mass media propaganda to mobilize the masses for war. An army of academics, journalists, mass media pundits and experts 'soften up' the public in preparation for war through demonological writing and commentary: Each and every aspect of the forthcoming military target is described as totally evil – hence 'totalitarian' – in which even the most benign policy is linked to demonic ends of the regime.

Since the 'enemy to be' lacks any saving graces and worst, since the 'totalitarian state' controls everything and everybody, no process of internal reform or change is possible. Hence the defeat of 'total evil' can only take place through 'total war'. The targeted state and people must be destroyed in order to be redeemed. In a word, the imperial democracy must regiment and convert itself into a military juggernaut based on mass complicity with imperial war crimes. The war against 'totalitarianism' becomes the vehicle for total state control for an imperial war.

In the case of the US-Japanese war, the US-Korean war, the US-Indochinese war and the post-September 11 war against an independent secular nationalist regime (Iraq) and the Islamic Afghan republic, the Executive branch (with the uniform support of the mass media and congress) provoked a hostile response from its target and fabricated a pretext as a basis for mass mobilization for prolonged and bloody wars.

US-Japan War: Provocation and Pretext for War

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt set high standards for provoking and creating a pretext for undermining majoritarian anti-war sentiment, unifying and mobilizing the country for war. Robert Stinnett, in his brilliantly documented study, *Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl Harbor*, demonstrates that Roosevelt provoked the war with Japan by deliberately following an eight-step program of harassment and embargo against Japan developed by Lt. Commander Arthur H. McCollum, head of the Far East desk of the Office of Naval Intelligence. He provides systematic documentation of US cables tracking the Japanese fleet to Pearl Harbor, clearly demonstrating that FDR knew in advance of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor following the Japanese fleet virtually every step of the way. Even more damaging, Stinnett reveals that Admiral H.E. Kimmel, in charge of the defense of Pearl Harbor, was systematically excluded from receiving critical intelligence reports on the approaching movements of the Japanese fleet, thus preventing the defense of the US base.

The 'sneak' attack by the Japanese, which caused the death over three thousand American service men and the destruction of scores of ships and planes, successfully 'provoked' the war FDR had wanted. In the run-up to the Japanese attack, President Roosevelt ordered the implementation of Naval Intelligence's October 1940 memorandum, authored by McCollum, for eight specific measures, which amounted to acts of war including an economic embargo of Japan, the shipment of arms to Japan's adversaries, the prevention of Tokyo from securing strategic raw materials essential for its economy and the denial of port access, thus provoking a military confrontation.

To overcome massive US opposition to war, Roosevelt needed a dramatic, destructive immoral act committed by Japan against a clearly 'defensive' US base to turn the pacifist US public into a cohesive, outraged, righteous war machine. Hence the Presidential decision to undermine the defense of Pearl Harbor by denying the Navy Commander in charge of its defense, Admiral Kimmel, essential intelligence about anticipated December 7, 1941 attack. The United States 'paid the price' with 2,923 Americans killed and 879 wounded, Admiral Kimmel was blamed and stood trial for dereliction of duty, but FDR got his war. The successful outcome of FDR's strategy led to a half-century of US imperial supremacy in the Asia-Pacific region. An unanticipated outcome, however, was the US and Japanese imperial defeats on the Chinese mainland and in North Korea by the victorious communist armies of national liberation.

Provocation and Pretext for the US War Against Korea

The incomplete conquest of Asia following the US defeat of Japanese imperialism, particularly the revolutionary upheavals in China, Korea and Indochina, posed a strategic challenge to US empire builders. Their massive financial and military aid to their Chinese clients failed to stem the victory of the anti-imperialist Red Armies. President Truman faced a profound dilemma – how to consolidate US imperial supremacy in the Pacific at a time of growing nationalist and communist upheavals when the vast majority of the war wearied soldiers and civilians were demanding demobilization and a return to civilian life and economy. Like Roosevelt in 1941, Truman needed to provoke a confrontation, one that could be dramatized as an offensive attack on the US (and its 'allies') and could serve as a pretext to overcome widespread opposition to another imperial war.

Truman and the Pacific military command led by General Douglas Mac Arthur chose the Korean peninsula as the site for detonating the war. Throughout the Japanese-Korean war, the Red guerrilla forces led the national liberation struggle against the Japanese Army and its Korean collaborators. Subsequent to the defeat of Japan, the national revolt developed into a social revolutionary struggle against Korean elite collaborators with the Japanese occupiers. As Bruce Cumings documents in his classic study, *The Origins of the Korean War*, the internal civil war preceded and defined the conflict prior to and after the US occupation and division of Korea into a 'North' and 'South'. The political advance of the mass national movement led by the anti-imperialist communists and the discredit of the US-backed Korean collaborators undermined Truman's efforts to arbitrarily divide the country 'geographically'. In the midst of this class-based civil war, Truman and Mac Arthur created a provocation: They intervened, establishing a US occupation army and military bases and arming the counter-revolutionary former Japanese collaborators. The US hostile presence in a 'sea' of anti-imperialist armies and civilian social movements inevitably led to the escalation of social conflict, in which the US-backed Korean clients were losing.

As the Red Armies rapidly advanced from their strongholds in the north and joined with the mass revolutionary social movements in the South they encountered fierce repression and massacres of anti-imperialist civilians, workers and peasants, by the US armed collaborators. Facing defeat Truman declared that the civil war was really an 'invasion' by (north) Koreans against (south) Korea. Truman, like Roosevelt, was willing to sacrifice the US troops by putting them in the direct fire of the revolutionary armies in order to militarize and mobilize the US public in defense of imperial outposts in the southern Korean peninsula.

In the run-up to the US invasion of Korea, Truman, the US Congress and the mass media engaged in a massive propaganda campaign and purge of peace and anti-militarist

organizations throughout US civil society. Tens of thousands of individuals lost their jobs, hundreds were jailed and hundreds of thousands were blacklisted. Trade unions and civic organizations were taken over by pro-war, pro-empire collaborators. Propaganda and purges facilitated the propagation of the danger of a new world war, in which democracy was threatened by expanding Communist totalitarianism. In reality, democracy was eroded to prepare for an imperial war to prop up a client regime and secure a military beachhead on the Asian continent.

The US invasion of Korea to prop up its tyrannical client was presented as a response to 'North' Korea invading 'South' Korea and threatening 'our' soldiers defending democracy. The heavy losses incurred by retreating US troops belied the claim of President Truman that the imperial war was merely a police action. By the end of the first year of the imperial war, public opinion turned against the war. Truman was seen as a deceptive warmonger. In 1952, the electorate elected Dwight Eisenhower on his promise to end the war. An armistice was agreed to in 1953. Truman's use of military provocation to detonate a conflict with the advancing Korean revolutionary armies and then using the pretext of US forces in danger to launch a war did not succeed in securing a complete victory: The war ended in a divided Korean nation. Truman left office disgraced and derided, and the US public turned anti-war for another decade.

The US Indochinese War: Johnson's Tonkin Pretext

The US invasion and war against Vietnam was a prolonged process, beginning in 1954 and continuing to the final defeat in 1975. From 1954 to 1960 the US sent military combat advisers to train the army of the corrupt, unpopular and failed collaborator regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem. With the election of President Kennedy, Washington escalated the number of military advisers, commandos (so called 'Green Berets') and the use of death squads (Plan Phoenix). Despite the intensification of the US involvement and its extensive role in directing military operations, Washington's surrogate 'South Vietnam' Army (ARNV) was losing the war to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Army (Viet Cong) and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF), which clearly had the support of the overwhelming majority of the Vietnamese people.

Following the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson took over the Presidency and faced the imminent collapse of the US puppet regime and the defeat of its surrogate Vietnamese Army.

The US had two strategic objectives in launching the Vietnam War: The first involved establishing a ring of client regimes and military bases from Korea, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, Indochina, Pakistan, Northern Burma (via the KMT opium lords and Shan secessionists) and Tibet to encircle China, engage in cross border 'commando' attacks by surrogate military forces and block China's access to its natural markets. The second strategic objective in the US invasion and occupation of Vietnam was part of its general program to destroy powerful national liberation and anti-imperialist movements in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indochina, Indonesia, the Philippines. The purpose was to consolidate client regimes, which would provide military bases, de-nationalize and privatize their raw materials sectors and provide political and military support to US empire building. The conquest of Indochina was an essential part of US empire-building in Asia. Washington calculated that by defeating the strongest Southeast Asian anti-imperialist movement and country, neighboring countries (especially Laos and Cambodia) would fall easily.

Washington faced multiple problems. In the first place, given the collapse of the surrogate ' South Vietnam ' regime and army, Washington would need to massively escalate its military presence, in effect substituting its ground forces for the failed puppet forces and extend and intensify its bombing throughout North Vietnam , Cambodia and Laos . In a word convert a limited covert war into a massive publicly declared war.

The second problem was the reticence of significant sectors of the US public, especially college students (and their middle and working class parents) facing conscription, who opposed the war. The scale and scope of military commitment envisioned as necessary to win the imperial war required a pretext, a justification.

The pretext had to be such as to present the US invading armies as responding to a sneak attack by an aggressor country (North Vietnam). President Johnson, the Secretary of Defense, the US Naval and Air Force Command, the National Security Agency, acted in concert. What was referred to as the Gulf of Tonkin Incident involved a fabricated account of a pair of attacks, on August 2 and 4, 1964 off the coast of North Vietnam by naval forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam against two US destroyers the USS Maddox and the USS Turner Joy. Using, as a pretext, the fabricated account of the 'attacks', the US Congress almost unanimously passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 7, 1964, which granted President Johnson full power to expand the invasion and occupation of Vietnam up to and beyond 500,000 US ground troops by 1966. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized President Johnson to conduct military operations throughout Southeast Asia without a declaration of war and gave him the freedom 'to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of freedom.'

On August 5, 1964 Lyndon Johnson went on national television and radio announcing the launching of massive waves of 'retaliatory' bombing of North Vietnamese naval facilities (Operation Pierce Arrow). In 2005, official documents released from the Pentagon, the National Security Agency and other government departments have revealed that there was no Vietnamese attack. On the contrary, according to the US Naval Institute, a program of covert CIA attacks against North Vietnam had begun in 1961 and was taken over by the Pentagon in 1964. These maritime attacks on the North Vietnamese coast by ultra-fast Norwegian-made patrol boats (purchased by the US for the South Vietnamese puppet navy and under direct US naval coordination) were an integral part of the operation. Secretary of Defense McNamara admitted to Congress that US ships were involved in attacks on the North Vietnamese coast prior to the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Incident .

So much for Johnson's claim of an 'unprovoked attack'. The key lie, however, was the claim that the USS Maddox 'retaliated' against an 'attacking' Vietnamese patrol boat. The Vietnamese patrol boats, according to NSA accounts released in 2005, were not even in the vicinity of the Maddox - they were at least 10,000 yards away and three rounds were first fired at them by the Maddox which then falsely claimed it subsequently suffered some damage from a single 14.5 mm machine gun bullet to its hull. The August 4 'Vietnamese attack' never happened. Captain John Herrick of the Turner Joy cabled that 'many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful...No actual visual sightings (of North Vietnamese naval boats) by Maddox'.

The consequences of the fabrication of the Tonkin Gulf incident and provocation was to justify an escalation of war that killed 4 million people in Indochina, maimed, displaced and injured millions more, in addition to killing 58,000 US service men and wounding a half-

million more in this failed effort in military-driven empire-building. Elsewhere in Asia, the US empire builders consolidated their client collaborative rule: In Indonesia, which had one of the largest open Communist Party in the world, a CIA designed military coup, backed by Johnson in 1966 and led by General Suharto, murdered over one million trade unionists, peasants, progressive intellectuals, school teachers and 'communists' (and their family members).

What is striking about the US declaration of war in Vietnam is that the latter did not respond to the US-directed maritime provocations that served as a pretext for war. As a result Washington had to fabricate a Vietnamese response and then use it as the pretext for war.

The idea of fabricating military threats (the Gulf of Tonkin Incident) and then using them as pretext for the US-Vietnam war was repeated in the case of the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan . In fact Bush Administration policy makers, who launched the Afghan and Iraq wars, tried to prevent the publication of a report by the top Navy commander in which he recounted how the NSA distorted the intelligence reports regarding the Tonkin incident to serve the Johnson Administration's ardent desire for a pretext to war.

Provocation and Pretext: 9/11 and the Afghan-Iraq Invasions

In 2001, the vast majority of the US public was concerned over domestic matters - the downturn in the economy, corporate corruption (Enron, World Com etc..), the bursting of the 'dot-com' bubble and avoiding any new military confrontation in the Middle East . There was no sense that the US had any interest in going to war for Israel , nor launching a new war against Iraq , especially an Iraq , which had been defeated and humiliated a decade earlier and was subject to brutal economic sanctions.

The US oil companies were negotiating new agreements with the Gulf States and looked forward to, with some hope, a stable, peaceful Middle East, marred by Israel 's savaging the Palestinians and threatening its adversaries. In the Presidential election of 2000, George W, Bush was elected despite losing the popular vote - in large part because of electoral chicanery (with the complicity of the Supreme Court) denying the vote to blacks in Florida. Bush's bellicose rhetoric and emphasis on 'national security' resonated mainly with his Zionist advisers and the pro-Israeli lobby - otherwise, for the majority of Americans, it fell on deaf ears.

The gap between the Middle East War plans of his principle Zionist appointees in the Pentagon, the Vice President's office and the National Security Council and the general US public's concern with domestic issues was striking. No amount of Zionist authored position papers, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim rhetoric and theatrics, emanating from Israel and its US based spokespeople, were making any significant impact on the US public. There was widespread disbelief that there was an imminent threat to US security through a catastrophic terrorist attack -which is defined as an attack using chemical, biological or nuclear weapons of mass destruction. The US public believed that Israel 's Middle East wars and their unconditional US lobbyists promotion for direct US involvement were not part of their lives nor in the country's interest.

The key challenge for the militarists in the Bush Administration was how to bring the US public around to support the new Middle East war agenda, in the absence of any visible, credible and immediate threat from any sovereign Middle Eastern country.

The Zionists were well placed in all the key government positions to launch a worldwide offensive war. They had clear ideas of the countries to target (Middle East adversaries of Israel). They had defined the ideology (“the war on terror”, “preventive defense”). They projected a sequence of wars. They linked their Middle East war strategy to a global military offensive against all governments, movements and leaders who opposed US military-driven empire building. What they needed was to coordinate the elite into actually facilitating a ‘catastrophic terrorist incident’ that could trigger the implementation of their publicly stated and defended new world war.

The key to the success of the operation was to encourage terrorists and to facilitate calculated and systematic ‘neglect’ – to deliberately marginalize intelligence agents and agency reports that identified the terrorists, their plans and methods. In the subsequent investigatory hearings, it was necessary to foster the image of ‘neglect’, bureaucratic ineptness and security failures in order to cover up Administration complicity in the terrorists’ success. An absolutely essential element in mobilizing massive and unquestioning support for the launching of a world war of conquest and destruction centered in Muslim and Arab countries and people was a ‘catastrophic event’ that could be linked to the latter.

After the initial shock of 9/11 and the mass media propaganda blitz saturating every household, questions began to be raised by critics about the run-up to the event, especially when reports began to circulate from domestic and overseas intelligence agencies that US policy makers were clearly informed of preparations for a terrorist attack. After many months of sustained public pressure, President Bush finally named an investigatory commission on 9/11, headed by former politicians and government officials. Philip Zelikow, an academic and former government official and prominent advocate of ‘preventative defense’ (the offensive war policies promoted by the Zionist militants in the government) was named executive director to conduct and write the official ‘9-11 Commission Report’. Zelikow was privy to the need for a pretext, like 9/11, for launching the permanent global warfare, which he had advocated. With a prescience, which could only come from an insider to the fabrication leading to war, he had written: “Like Pearl Harbor , this event would divide our past and future into a before and after. The United States (sic) might respond with draconian measures, scaling back civil liberties, allowing wider surveillance of citizens, detention of suspects and use of deadly force (torture)”, (see *Catastrophic Terrorism – Tackling the New Dangers* , co-authored by Philip Zelikow and published by Foreign Affairs in 1998).

Zelikow directed the commission report, which exonerated the administration of any knowledge and complicity in 9/11, but convinced few Americans outside of the mass media and Congress. Polls conducted in the summer of 2003 on the findings of the Commission proceedings and its conclusions found that a majority of the American public expressed a high level of distrust and rejection – especially among New Yorkers. The general public suspected Government complicity, especially when it was revealed that Zelikow conferred with key figures under investigation, Vice President Cheney and Presidential ‘Guru’ Karl Rove. In response to skeptical citizens, Zelikow went on an insane rage, calling the sceptics ‘pathogens’ or germs whose ‘infection’ needed to be contained. With language reminiscent of a Hitlerian Social Darwinist diatribe, he referred to criticisms of the Commission cover up as ‘a bacteria (that) can sicken the larger body (of public opinion)’. Clearly Zelikow’s pseudoscientific rant reflects the fear and loathing he feels for those who implicated him with a militarist regime, which fabricated a pretext for a catastrophic war for Zelikow’s favorite state – Israel .

Throughout the 1990's the US and Israeli military-driven empire building took on an added virulence: Israel dispossessed Palestinians and extended its colonial settlements. Bush, Senior invaded Iraq and systematically destroyed Iraqi's military and civil economic infrastructure and fomented an ethnically cleansed Kurdish client state in the north. Like his predecessor Ronald Reagan, President George H.W. Bush, Senior backed anti-communist Islamic irregulars in their conquest of Afghanistan via their 'holy wars' against a leftist secular nationalist regime.. At the same time Bush, Senior attempted to 'balance' military empire building with expanding the US economic empire, by not occupying Iraq and unsuccessfully trying to restrain Israeli colonial settlements in the West Bank .

With the rise of Clinton , all restraints on military-driven empire building were thrown over: Clinton provoked a major Balkan war, viciously bombing and dismembering Yugoslavia , periodically bombing Iraq and extending and expanding US military bases in the Gulf States . He bombed the largest pharmaceutical factory in Sudan , invaded Somalia and intensified a criminal economic boycott of Iraq leading to the death of an estimated 500,000 children. Within the Clinton regime, several liberal pro-Israel Zionists joined the military-driven empire builders in the key policy making positions. Israeli military expansion and repression reached new heights as US-financed colonial Jewish settlers and heavily armed Israeli military forces slaughtered unarmed Palestinian teenagers protesting the Israeli presence in the Occupied Territories during the First Intifada. In other words, Washington extended its military penetration and occupation deeper into Arab countries and societies, discrediting and weakening the hold of its client puppet regimes over their people.

The US ended military support for the armed Islamic anti-communists in Afghanistan once they had served US policy goals by destroying the Soviet backed secular regime (slaughtering thousands of school teachers in the process). As a consequence of US-financing, there was a vast, loose network of well-trained Islamic fighters available for combat against other target regimes. Many were flown by the Clinton regime into Bosnia where Islamic fighters fought a surrogate separatist war against the secular and socialist central government of Yugoslavia . Others were funded to destabilize Iran and Iraq . They were seen in Washington as shock troops for future US military conquests. Nevertheless Clinton 's imperial coalition of Israeli colonialists, armed Islamic mercenary fighters, Kurdish and Chechen separatists broke up as Washington and Israel advanced toward war and conquest of Arab and Muslim states and the US spread its military presence in Saudi Arabia , Kuwait and the Gulf States .

Military-driven empire building against existing nation-states was not an easy sell to the US public or to the market-driven empire builders of Western Europe and Japan and the newly emerging market-driven empire builders of China and Russia . Washington needed to create conditions for a major provocation, which would overcome or weaken the resistance and opposition of rival economic empire builders. More particularly, Washington needed a 'catastrophic event' to 'turn around' domestic public opinion, which had opposed the first Gulf War and subsequently supported the rapid withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 1990.

The events, which took place on September 11, 2001, served the purpose of American and Israeli military-driven empire builders. The destruction of the World Trade Center buildings and the deaths of nearly 3,000 civilians, served as a pretext for a series of colonial wars, colonial occupations, and global terrorist activities, and secured the unanimous support of the US Congress and triggered an intense global mass media propaganda campaign for war.

The Politics of Military Provocations

Ten years of starving 23 million Iraqi Arabs under the Clinton regime's economic boycott, interspersed with intense bombing was a major provocation to Arab communities and citizens around the world. Supporting Israel's systematic dispossession of Palestinians from their lands, interspersed with encroachment on the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem was a major provocation, which detonated scores of suicide bomb attacks in retaliation. The construction and operation of US military bases in Saudi Arabia, home of the Islamic holy city of Mecca, was a provocation to millions of believers and practicing Muslims. The US and Israeli attack and occupation of southern Lebanon and the killing of 17,000 Lebanese and Palestinians were a provocation to Arabs.

Ruled by pusillanimous Arab regimes, servile to US interests, impotent to respond toward Israeli brutality against Palestinians, Arabs and devout Muslim citizens were constantly pushed by the Bush and especially Clinton regime to respond to their continued provocations. Against the vast disproportion in fire-power between the advanced weaponry of the US and Israeli occupation forces (the Apache helicopter gun ships, the 5,000 pound bombs, the killer drones, the armored carriers, the cluster bombs, Napalm and missiles) the secular Arab and Islamic resistance had only light weaponry consisting of automatic rifles, rocket propelled grenades, short-range and inaccurate Katusha missiles and machine guns. The only weapon they possessed in abundance to retaliate was the suicidal 'human bombs'.

Up to 9/11, US imperial wars against Arab and Islamic populations were carried out in the targeted and occupied lands where the great mass of Arab people lived, worked and enjoyed shared lives. In other words, all (and for Israel most) of the destructive effects of their wars (the killings, home and neighborhood destruction and kinship losses) were products of US and Israeli offensive wars, seemingly immune to retaliatory action on their own territory.

The precise timing of 9/11 coincides with the highly visible takeover of US Middle East war policy by extremist Zionists in the top positions of the Pentagon, the White House and National Security Council and their dominance of Congressional Middle East policies. Arab and Islamic anti-imperialists were convinced that military-driven empire builders were readying for a frontal assault on all the remaining centers of opposition to Zionism in the Middle East, i.e. Iraq, Iran, Syria, Southern Lebanon, the West Bank, Gaza, as well as in Afghanistan in South Asia and Sudan and Somalia in North-East Africa.

This offensive war scenario had been already spelled out by the American Zionist policy elite headed by Richard Pearl for the Israeli Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in a policy document, entitled A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm. This was prepared in 1996 for far-right Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu prior to his taking office.

On September 28, 2000, despite the warnings of many observers, the infamous author of the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, General Ariel Sharon profaned the Al Aqsa Mosque with his huge military entourage – a deliberate religious provocation that guaranteed Sharon's election as Prime Minister from the far right Likud Party. This led to the Second Intifada and the savage response of the Israelis. Washington's total support of Sharon merely reinforced the worldwide belief among Arabs that the 'Zionist Solution' of massive ethnic purges was on Washington's agenda.

The pivotal group linking US military-driven empire builders with their counterparts in Israel was the major influential Zionist public policy group promoting what they dubbed the

‘Project for a New American Century’ (PNAC). In 1998 they set out a detailed military-driven road map to US world domination (the so-called ‘Project for a New American Century’), which just happened to focus on the Middle East and just happened to coincide exactly with Tel Aviv’s vision of a US-Israel dominated Middle East. In 2000 the PNAC Zionist ideologues published a strategy paper ‘Rebuilding America’s Defenses’, which laid down the exact guidelines which incoming Zionist policy makers in the top spheres of the Pentagon and White House would follow. PNAC directives included establishing forward military bases in the Middle East, increasing military spending from 3% to 4% of GNP, a military attack to overthrow Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and military confrontation with Iran using the pretext of the threats of ‘weapons of mass destruction’.

The PNAC agenda could not advance without a catastrophic ‘Pearl Harbor’ type of event, as US military-driven empire builders, Israelis and US Zionist policy makers recognized early on. The deliberate refusal by the White House and its subordinate 16 intelligence agencies and the Justice Department to follow up precise reports of terrorist entry, training, financing and action plans was a case of deliberate ‘negligence’: The purpose was to allow the attack to take place and then to immediately launch the biggest wave of military invasions and state terrorist activities since the end of the Indochina War.

Israel , which had identified and kept close surveillance of the terrorists, insured that the action would proceed without any interruption. During the 9/11 attacks, its agents even had the presumption to video and photograph the exploding towers, while dancing in wild celebration, anticipating Washington’s move toward Israel’s militarist Middle East strategy.

Military-Driven Empire Building : The Zionist Connection

Militaristic empire building preceded the rise to power of the Zionist Power Configuration (ZPC) in the George W. Bush Administration. The pursuit of it after 9/11 was a joint effort between the ZPC and long-standing US militarists, like Rumsfeld and Cheney. The provocations against Arabs and Muslims leading up to the attacks were induced by both the US and Israel . The current implementation of the militarist strategy toward Iran is another joint effort of Zionist and US militarists.

What the Zionists did provide, which the US militarists lacked, was an organized mass-based lobby with financing, propagandists and political backing for the war. The principle government ideologues, media ‘experts’, spokespeople, academics, speechwriters and advisers for the war were largely drawn from the ranks of US Zionism. The most prejudicial aspects of the Zionist role was in the implementation of war policy, namely the systematic destruction and dismantling of the Iraqi state. Zionist policymakers promoted the US military occupation and supported a massive US military build-up in the region for sequential wars against Iran , Syria and other adversaries of Israeli expansion.

In pursuit of military -driven empire building in accord with Israel’s own version, the Zionist militarists in the US government exceeded their pre-9/11 expectations, raising military spending from 3% of GNP in 2000 to 6% in 2008, growing at a rate of 13% per year during their ascendancy from 2001-2008. As a result they raised the US budget deficit to over \$10 trillion dollars by 2010, double the 1997 deficit, and driving the US economy and its economic empire toward bankruptcy.

The Zionist American policy makers were blind to the dire economic consequences for US overseas economic interests because their main strategic consideration was whether US

policy enhanced Israel 's military dominance in the Middle East . The cost (in blood and treasure) of using the US to militarily destroy Israel 's adversaries was of no concern.

To pursue the Zionist-US military-driven imperial project of a New Order in the Middle East, Washington needed to mobilize the entire population for a series of sequential wars against the anti-imperialist, anti-Israeli countries of the Middle East and beyond. To target the multitude of Israeli adversaries, American Zionists invented the notion of a 'Global War on Terrorism'. The existing climate of national and international opinion was decidedly hostile to the idea of fighting sequential wars, let alone blindly following zealous Zionist extremists. Sacrificing American lives for Israeli power and the Zionist fantasy of a US-Israeli 'Co-Prosperity Sphere' dominating the Middle East could not win public backing in the US, let alone in the rest of the world.

Top policymakers, especially the Zionist elite, nurtured the notion of a fabricated pretext – an event which would shock the US public and Congress into a fearful, irrational and bellicose mood, willing to sacrifice lives and democratic freedoms. To rally the US public behind a military-driven imperial project of invasion and occupation in the Middle East required 'another Pearl Harbor '.

The Terror Bombing: White House and Zionist Complicity

Every level of the US government was aware that Arab extremists were planning a spectacular armed attack in the United States. The FBI and the CIA had their names and addresses; the President's National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice publicly admitted that the Executive branch knew that a terrorist hijacking would occur...only they had expected, she claimed, a 'traditional hijacking' and not the use of 'airliners as missiles'. The Attorney General John Ashcroft was acutely aware and refused to fly on commercial airliners. Scores of Israeli spies were living blocks away from some of the hijackers in Florida , informing headquarters on their movements. Overseas intelligence agencies, notably in Germany , Russia , Israel and Egypt claimed to have provided information to their US counterparts on the 'terrorist plot'. The President's office, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the FBI allowed the attackers to prepare their plans, secure funding, proceed to the airports, board the planes and carry out their attacks...all carrying US visas (mostly issued in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – once a prominent site for processing Arabs to fight in Afghanistan) and with 'pilots' who were US-trained. As soon as the terrorists took control of the flights, the Air Force was notified of the hijacking but top leaders 'inexplicably' delayed moves to intercept the planes allowing the attackers to reach their objectives...the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The military-driven empire builders and their Zionist allies immediately seized the pretext of a single military retaliatory attack by non-state terrorists to launch a worldwide military offensive against a laundry list of sovereign nations. Within 24 hours, ultra-Zionist Senator Joseph Lieberman, in a prepared speech, called for the US to attack ' Iran , Iraq and Syria ' without any proof that any of these nations, all full members of the United Nations, were behind the hijackings. President Bush declared a 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT) and launched the invasion of Afghanistan and approved a program of extraterritorial, extrajudicial assassinations, kidnappings and torture throughout the world. Clearly the Administration put into operation a war strategy, publicly advocated and prepared by Zionist ideologues long before 9/11. The President secured nearly unanimous support from Congress for the first Patriot Act, suspending fundamental democratic freedoms at home. He demanded that US client-states and allies implement their own versions of authoritarian

anti-terrorist laws to persecute, prosecute and jail any and all opponents of US and Israeli empire building in the Middle East and elsewhere. In other words, September 11, 2001 became the pretext for a virulent and sustained effort to create a new world order centered on a US military-driven empire and a Middle East built around Israeli supremacy.

Provocations and Pretexts: the Israeli-US War Against Iran

The long, unending, costly and losing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan undermined international and national support for the Zionist-promoted New American Century project. US militarists and their advisers and ideologues needed to create a new pretext for the US plans to subdue the Middle East and especially to attack Iran . They turned their propaganda campaign on Iran 's legal non-military nuclear energy program and fabricated evidence of Iran 's direct military involvement in supporting the Iraqi resistance to US occupation. Without proof they claimed Iran had supplied the weapons, which bombed the American 'Green Zone' in Baghdad. The Israeli lobby argued that Iranian training and weapons had been instrumental in defeating the American-backed Iraqi mercenaries in the major southern city of Basra. Top Zionists in the Treasury Department have organized a worldwide economic boycott against Iran . Israel has secured the support of top Democrat and Republican Congressional leaders for a military attack on Iran . But is Iran 's existence a sufficient pretext or will a 'catastrophic' incident be necessary?

Conclusion: Provocations and Imperial Wars:

'Behind every imperial war there is a Great Lie' One of the most important political implications of our discussion of the US government's resort to provocations and deception to launch imperial wars is that the vast majority of the American people are opposed to overseas wars. Government lies at the service of military interventions are necessary to undermine the American public's preference for a foreign policy based on respect for self-determination of nations. The second implication however is that the peaceful sentiments of the majority can be quickly overturned by the political elite through deception and provocations amplified and dramatized through their constant repetition through the unified voice of the mass media. In other words, peaceful American citizens can be transformed into irrational chauvinist militarists through the 'propaganda of the deed' where executive authority disguises its own acts of imperial attacks as 'defensive' and its opponent's retaliation as unprovoked aggression against a 'peace loving' United States.

All of the executive provocations and deceptions are formulated by a Presidential elite but willingly executed by a chain of command involving anywhere from dozens to hundreds of operatives, most of whom knowingly participate in deceiving the public, but rarely ever unmask the illegal project either out of fear, loyalty or blind obedience.

The notion, put forward by upholders of the 'integrity' of the war policy, that given such a large number of participants, 'someone' would have 'leaked' the deception, the systematic provocations and the manipulation of the public, has been demonstrated to be false. At the time of the 'provocation' and the declaration of 'war' when Congress unanimously approved 'Presidential Authority' to use force, few if any writers or journalists have ever raised serious questions: Executives operating under the mantle of 'defending a peaceful country' from 'unprovoked treacherous enemies' have always secured the complicity or silence of peacetime critics who choose to bury their reservations and investigations in a time of 'threats to national security.' Few academics, writers or journalists are willing to risk their professional standing, when all the mass media editors and owners, political leaders and

their own professional cohorts froth over 'standing united with our President in times of unparalleled mortal threat to the nation – as happened in 1941, 1950, 1964 and 2001.

With the exception of World War Two, each of the subsequent wars led to profound civilian political disillusion and even rejection of the fabrications that initially justified the war. Popular disenchantment with war led to a temporary rejection of militarism...until the next 'unprovoked' attack and call to arms. Even in the case of the Second World War there was massive civilian outrage against a large standing army and even large-scale military demonstrations at the end of the war, demanding the GI's return to civilian life. The demobilization occurred despite Government efforts to consolidate a new empire based on occupation of countries in Europe and Asia in the wake of Germany and Japan 's defeat.

The underlying structural reality, which has driven American Presidents to fabricate pretexts for wars, is informed by a military-driven conception of empire. Why did Roosevelt not answer the Japanese imperial economic challenge by increasing the US economic capacity to compete and produce more efficiently instead of supporting a provocative boycott called by the decaying European colonial powers in Asia ? Was it the case that, under capitalism, a depression-ridden, stagnant economy and idle work force could only be mobilized by the state for a military confrontation?

In the case of the US-Korean War, could not the most powerful post-World War US economy look toward exercising influence via investments with a poor, semi-agrarian, devastated, but unified, Korea, as it was able to do in Germany, Japan and elsewhere after the war?

Twenty years after spending hundreds of billions of dollars and suffering 500,000 dead and wounded to conquer Indochina, European, Asian and US capital entered Vietnam peacefully on the invitation of its government, hastening its integration into the world capitalist market via investments and trade.

It is clear that Plato's not-so 'noble lie', as practiced by America's Imperial Presidents, to deceive their citizens for 'higher purposes' has led to the use of bloody and cruel means to achieve grotesque and ignoble ends.

The repetition of fabricated pretexts to engage in imperial wars is embedded in the dual structure of the US political system, a military-driven empire and a broad-based electorate. To pursue the former it is essential to deceive the latter. Deception is facilitated by the control of mass media whose war propaganda enters every home, office and classroom with the same centrally determined message. The mass media undermine what remains of alternative information flowing from primary and secondary opinion leaders in the communities and erode personal values and ethics. While military-driven empire building has resulted in the killing of millions and the displacement of tens of millions, market-driven empire building imposes its own levy in terms of massive exploitation of labor, land and livelihoods.

As has been the case in the past, when the lies of empire wear thin, public disenchantment sets in, and the repeated cries of 'new threats' fail to mobilize opinion. As the continued loss of life and the socio-economic costs erodes the conditions of everyday life, mass media propaganda loses its effectiveness and political opportunities appear. As after WWII, Korea , Indochina and today with Iraq and Afghanistan , a window of political opportunity opens. Mass majorities demand changes in policy, perhaps in structures and certainly an end to the war. Possibilities open for public debate over the imperial system, which constantly reverts

to wars and lies and provocations that justify them.

Epilogue

Our telegraphic survey of imperial policy-making refutes the conventional and commonplace notion that the decision making process leading up to war is open, public and carried out in accordance with the constitutional rules of a democracy. On the contrary, as is commonplace in many spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life, but especially in questions of war and peace, the key decisions are taken by a small Presidential elite behind closed doors, out of sight and without consultation and in violation of constitutional provisions. The process of provoking conflict in pursuit of military goals is never raised before the electorate. There are never investigations by independent investigatory committees.

The closed nature of the decision making process does not detract from the fact that these decisions were 'public' in that they were taken by elected and non-elected public officials in public institutions and directly affected the public. The problem is that the public was kept in the dark about the larger imperial interests that were at stake and the deception that would induce them to blindly submit to the decisions for war. Defenders of the political system are unwilling to confront the authoritarian procedures, the elite fabrications and the unstated imperial goals. Apologists of the military-driven empire builders resort to irrational and pejorative labeling of the critics and skeptics as 'conspiracy theorists'. For the most part, prestigious academics conform closely to the rhetoric and fabricated claims of the executors of imperial policy.

Everywhere and at all times groups, organizations and leaders meet in closed meetings, before going 'public'. A minority of policymakers or advocates meet, debate and outline procedures and devise tactics to secure decisions at the 'official' meeting. This common practice takes place when any vital decisions are to be taken whether it is at local school boards or in White House meetings. To label the account of small groups of public officials meeting and taking vital decisions in 'closed' public meetings (where agendas, procedures and decisions are made prior to formal 'open' public meetings) as 'conspiracy theorizing' is to deny the normal way in which politics operate. In a word, the 'conspiracy' labelers are either ignorant of the most elementary procedures of politics or they are conscious of their role in covering up the abuses of power of today's state terror merchants.

Professor Zelikow - Where do we go from here?

The key figure in and around the Bush Administration who actively promoted a 'new Pearl Harbor' and was at least in part responsible for the policy of complicity with the 9/11 terrorists was Philip Zelikow. Zelikow, a prominent Israel-Firster, is a government academic, whose expertise was in the nebulous area of 'catastrophic terrorism' - events which enabled US political leaders to concentrate executive powers and violate constitutional freedoms in pursuit of offensive imperial wars and in developing the 'public myth'. Philip Shenon's book, *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation* pinpoints Zelikow's strategic role in the Bush Administration in the lead up to 9/11, the period of 'complicit neglect', in its aftermath, the offensive global war period, and in the government's cover-up of its complicity in the terror attack.

Prior to 9/11 Zelikow provided a 'blueprint' for the process of an executive seizing extreme power for global warfare. He outlined a sequence in which a 'catastrophic terrorist event'

could facilitate the absolute concentration of power, followed by the launching of offensive wars for Israel (as he publicly admitted). In the run-up to 9/11 and the multiple wars, he served as a member of National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's National Security Council transition team (2000-2001), which had intimate knowledge of terrorist plans to seize US commercial flights, as Rice herself publicly admitted ('conventional hijackings' was her term). Zelikow was instrumental in demoting and disabling the counter-terrorism expert Richard Clark from the National Security Council, the one agency tracking the terrorist operation. Between 2001-2003, Zelikow was a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. This was the agency, which had failed to follow-up and failed to pursue the key intelligence reports identifying terrorist plans. Zelikow, after playing a major role in undermining intelligence efforts to prevent the terrorist attack, became the principle author of the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, which prescribed Bush's policy of military invasion of Iraq and targeted Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and other independent Arab and Muslim countries and political entities. Zelikow's 'National Security Strategy' paper was the most influential directive shaping the global state terrorist policies of the Bush regime. It also brought US war policies in the closest alignment with the regional military aspirations of the Israeli state since the founding of Israel. Indeed, this was why the former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu stated at Bar Ilan University that the 9/11 attack and the US invasion of Iraq were 'good for Israel' (see Haaretz, April 16, 2008).

Finally Zelikow, as Bush's personal appointee as the Executive Director of the 9/11 Commission, coordinated the cover-up of the Administration policy of complicity in 9/11 with the Vice President's office. While Zelikow is not considered an academic heavyweight, his ubiquitous role in the design, execution and cover-up of the world-shattering events surrounding 9/11 and its aftermath mark him as one of the most dangerous and destructive political 'influentials' in the shaping and launching of Washington's past, present and future catastrophic wars.

James Petras' forthcoming book, Zionism and US Militarism, is due from Clarity Press, Atlanta, in August 2008.

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