

Tell Us Why We're At War, President Trump

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Global Research, March 05, 2018

[Antiwar.com](#) 24 April 2017

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),
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Relevant article selected from the GR archive, first published on GR in April 2017.

People speak of Afghanistan as "our generation's" Vietnam, a quagmire, a war that goes on simply because it has been going on.

The Afghan war is dragging into being our generation's, and soon the next generation's Vietnam as well, over a decade and a half old. There are troops deploying now that were two years old when the conflict started. There are fathers and sons deploying [together](#). Bin Laden's been dead for years.

With a slight break, the current war in Iraq has been ongoing for some 14 years. If you want to think of it in a longer view, Trump is now the fifth consecutive president to make war on that country. Saddam's been dead for years.

And though of more recent vintage, the war in Syria appears both open-ended in duration and ramping up in U.S. involvement. If Assad died tomorrow, the war would likely only intensify, as the multiple parties in the fight vie to take over after him.

The reason we're fighting all of these places and more can't still be "terrorism," can it? That has sort of been the reason for the past 16 years so you'd think we would have settled that. Regime change? A lot of that has also happened, without much end game, and nobody seems to know if that does or ever did apply in Syria to begin with. America can't be under threat after all these years, right? I mean, world's most powerful military and all that.

So maybe it's time for the current president to tell us why we're still fighting in all of these wars. Because previous presidents' track records on explaining to the ever-bloodthirsty American public why we are fighting is poor. Perhaps history has a lesson for us?

- When I was a kid, successive presidents told us we had to fight in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, because if we didn't fight them over there, we'd have to fight them on the beaches of California. We believed. It was a lie.
- I was a teenager during the Cold War, several presidents told us we needed to create massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons, garrison the world, maybe invade Cuba, fight covert wars and use the CIA to overthrow democratically elected governments and replace them with dictators, or the Russians would destroy us. We believed. It was a lie.
- When I was in college our president told us that we needed to fight in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua or the Sandinistas would come to

the United States. He told us Managua was closer to Washington DC than LA was. He told us we needed to fight in Lebanon, Grenada and Libya to protect ourselves. We believed. It was a lie.

- When I was a little older our president told us how evil Saddam Hussein was, how his soldiers bayoneted babies in Kuwait. He told us Saddam was a threat to America. He told us we needed to invade Panama to oust a dictator to protect America. We believed. It was a lie.
- Another president told us we had to fight terrorists in Somalia, as well as bomb Iraq, to protect ourselves. We believed. It was a lie.
- The one after him told us that because a bunch of Saudis from a group loosely tied to Afghanistan attacked us on 9/11, we needed to occupy that country and destroy the Taliban, who had not attacked us. The Taliban are still there 15 years later, ISIS now too, and so is the American military. We believed. It was a lie.
- After that the same President told us Saddam Hussein threatened every one of our children with weapons of mass destruction, that the smoking gun would be a mushroom cloud, that Saddam was in league with al Qaeda. We believed. It was a lie.
- In 2011 the president and his secretary of state told us we needed regime change in Libya, to protect us from an evil dictator. We believed. It was a lie.
- In August 2014 the same president told us we needed to intervene again in Iraq, on a humanitarian mission to save the Yazidis. No boots on the ground, a simple, limited act only the United States could conduct, and then we'd leave. We believed. It was a lie.
- That same president later told us Americans will need to fight and die in Syria. He says this is necessary to protect us, because if we do not defeat Islamic State over there, they will come here, to what we now call without shame or irony The Homeland. We believed. It was a lie.

So with a new guy in the White House, maybe it's time to renew the question. Perhaps the media can take a day off from what borders on sexual pleasure gushing over the latest super bomb and ask the president a few simple questions: why are we fighting, what is the goal, when will we get there? Someone should have asked a long time ago, but since no one did, this is as good a time as any.

Peter Van Buren blew the whistle on State Department waste and mismanagement during Iraqi reconstruction in his first book, [We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People](#). His latest book is [Ghosts of Tom Joad: A Story of the #99 Percent](#). Reprinted from the [his blog](#) with permission.

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