

The Shifting Strategies of Empire

Remarks at the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) Conference

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Global Research, March 24, 2012

<http://warisacrime.org/content/shifting-strategies-empire> 24 March 2012

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

President Obama this week declared the war on Iraq to be an honorable success that has given us a brighter future. Are you fired up? Ready to go?

Eric Holder this month explained that it's legal for a president to kill anyone anywhere, or to imprison them, or to spy on them. I started to get upset about this, but then I remembered that Holder is a Democrat. That made me feel much better.

Leon Panetta told Congress this month that a president can launch a war without Congress and without the United Nations and without any legal restrictions, that a NATO decision to go to war makes a war legal, that a decision by an ad hoc coalition to go to war makes a war legal, and that in fact there's no way for a war launched by a U.S. president not to be legal. At first this sounded like a dangerous doctrine, until I remembered that the president is not a Republican, and no Republican is going to be president for at least several months. So, there's nothing to worry about.

Hillary Clinton this week said that we couldn't end the war on Afghanistan without first protecting women's rights. Already we've set up a government that endorses wife-beating. Perhaps when it mandates invasive ultrasounds we'll be able to leave with honor.

In the past three years, largely in the absence of a peace movement, we've seen military spending rise. We've seen drone wars burst onto the scene in a major way. We've seen murder become the new torture. We've seen wars launched without even bothering to lie to Congress, and in fact with the intentional avoidance of any Congressional authorization. We've seen Special Forces active in over 100 countries. We've seen a massive escalation of the war on Afghanistan. We've seen bases imposed on more countries. We've seen an intense effort to surround China, and the people of Okinawa be damned, the people of Jeju Island be damned. We're sending the Marines into Australia. We're ruining Vicenza, Italy. We're weaponizing space.

And we're being told that the wars must continue so that our troops, dying more from suicide than anything else, will not have been killing themselves in vain. We're told that more wars are needed as generous humanitarian philanthropy. We must bomb more nations because we care. We must have good wars instead of bad wars. We must send a brutal cop to lead the oppression of the nonviolent people of Bahrain, but send weapons to help the people of Syria because we love them — or — as John McCain recently put it, overthrowing the Syrian government would be a blow to Iran, which also needs to be overthrown.

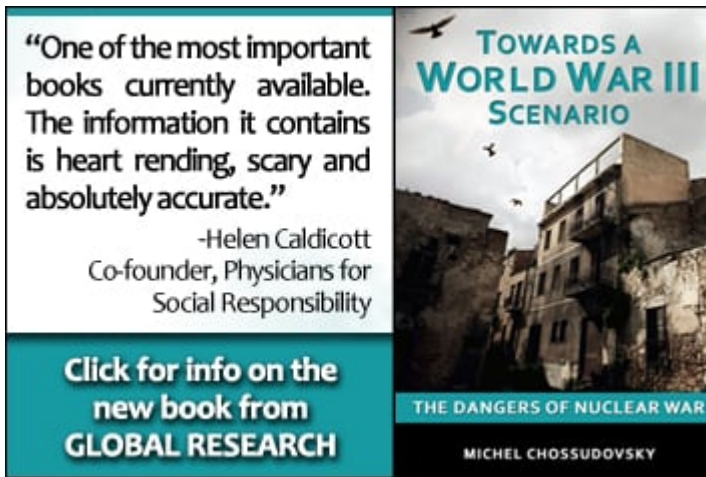
I don't know about you, but I've had enough. I've had enough of calling the war department the defense department. I've had enough of war criminals going on book tour instead of trial. I've had enough of asking the wars to follow the rules of wars, like asking rapists to wear condoms. I've had enough of calling by the name "service" anything a member of the so-called service does other than resistance and conscientious objection. I've had enough of being told I should be outraged by urination on corpses. I'm outraged by the murder that produces the corpses. I've had enough of being told the environmental crisis is separate from the single biggest destroyer of our natural environment which must be patriotically supported. I've had enough of efforts to protect civil liberties, jobs, education, healthcare, retirement, the rule of law, and basic human decency without taking on the monstrosity that means death to all of the above, namely the military industrial complex. It's a trillion-dollar banker bailout every year that we never get back.

Belief in humanitarian war keeps the dollars flowing into the beast that produces all the actual wars, the non-humanitarian wars, the murderous wars. We don't distinguish between good and bad rape, just and unjust slavery. When our great-great grandparents outgrew dueling as a means of settling individual disputes, they didn't ban aggressive dueling and keep defensive dueling around. When a movement to abolish war grew up at the turn of the last century, and then World War I convinced virtually everybody that the time to abolish war had come, a lawyer in Chicago named Samuel Oliver Levinson (Yale class of 1888) got his friends together and created an international movement for Outlawry, a movement to outlaw war. By 1928, the wealthy armed nations of the world, and some of the poorer nations too, had signed a treaty banning all war. Recognition of gains made through war ceased. Some wars were prevented. World War II was followed by trials for the brand new crime of war. And the rich nations have not made war on each other since. They just make war on poor countries.

And they lose. And they destroy themselves in the process. And the nobility and courage and sacrifice and solidarity that used to be found, or at least sought, in war, is now found in nonviolent activism, in the Arab Spring, in Wisconsin, in Occupy. In Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C., this past fall, the police gave us a deadline to leave. We threw a dance party instead. And the police came back with a new offer. We could stay and they'd give us a permit for the next four months. In those moments it is possible to see people come to believe they have the power to end war. We're back in DC starting March 30th.

This May we need to be in Chicago when NATO is there. Our grandparents in the 1920s rejected the League of Nations and other alliances as the sort of entanglement that had led to World War I. NATO is just such an entanglement, a solution to war that facilitates war. We need to go to Chicago in the name of S.O. Levinson, the Chicago activist who decided that war could not be ended with the threat of war, that war could only be ended by ending war. In 1927 a Republican Secretary of State was cursing peace activists. In 1928 he was doing exactly what they told him to do, organizing the nations of the world, including Persia, to formally renounce war. That happened because a small group of people made a moral case against mass murder and persuaded the rest of the country that war was good for absolutely nothing.

David Swanson's books include "War Is A Lie." 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](#)



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