

When We Were the ‘Good Guys’: US Keeps Invoking World War II to Validate New Wars

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Global Research, May 09, 2019

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

Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Americans are sick of fighting a 20-year war against an undefined enemy they can't seem to beat. With morale and recruitment scraping bottom, the world's best-funded military reckons that, if it can't win, it can at least look like a winner.

The US Army looked to World War II, the last war the US could decisively be said to have “won,” for inspiration when designing its new service uniform to invoke “the most prominent time the Army’s service to our nation was universally recognized,” as sergeant major Daniel Dailey, the Army’s highest-ranking enlisted soldier, [told](#) the New York Times. But the specter of World War II – when Americans were hailed as “the good guys” – was conjured up long before the military decided to reenact its golden age through cosplay. Indeed, the US has been borrowing from the WWII playbook since before the War on Terror officially began.

Like WWII, the US’ forever-war, which has long since spilled beyond the Middle East, is being fought on multiple fronts against countries that, left alone, would pose no threat to the US. In both cases, the American people had to be tricked into supporting long, bloody, expensive conflicts that served little strategic purpose for the US – but strongly benefited their allies.

Neocon think tank Project for a New American Century (PNAC) infamously [called](#) for a “new Pearl Harbor” to advance its foreign policy goals, and the attacks of September 11 were used to shred the Constitution and pitch the country headlong into nearly two decades of unparalleled destruction, destabilizing the Middle East for generations and bankrupting the US. Neither attack happened without plenty of warning, however, and both were arguably permitted – if not encouraged – to take place in order to manufacture consent for extremely unpopular wars.

With the US barely out of World War I, President Franklin Roosevelt faced a population 80 to 90 percent opposed to entering another global conflict; he even ran on the promise that “your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” Not only did Roosevelt deliberately place the US’ Pacific fleet in harm’s way by anchoring it in Pearl Harbor against the advice of fleet commander Admiral James Richardson; he relieved Richardson of his command for complaining, [reportedly](#) telling him “Sooner or later the Japanese will commit an overt act against the United States and the nation will be willing to enter the war.” US military intelligence, which had cracked the Japanese encryption codes, intercepted radio messages [indicating](#) Japan planned to attack Hawaii. The attack was allowed to happen, and overnight, a population allergic to war was baying for Japanese blood.

Several government agents, including FBI Minneapolis field office chief counsel Coleen Rowley and FBI Special Agent Robert Wright, came forward before September 11, troubled by [evidence](#) that seemed to point to a foreign group planning an attack on American soil. Saudi nationals conspicuously training at flight schools and Israeli “art students” probing [security](#) vulnerabilities in government buildings set off alarms in government agencies all over the country. But the administration of President George W. Bush, packed with PNAC alumni, ignored and even punished these whistleblowers. The Twin Towers were destroyed, the PATRIOT Act (pre-written and ready to go) was rammed through a docile Congress and, less than a month later, according to General Wesley Clark, the decision to invade Iraq had been made, even as hostilities had barely commenced in Afghanistan. Clark was told of a classified [memo](#) from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that described how “We’re going to take out seven countries in five years,” and while their timetable is a little behind, Iran is the only country on that list where the US and its allies haven’t attempted a regime change.

It’s worth looking at what triggered the Pearl Harbor attack, because it is happening again. When Japan refused to pull its forces out of China, the US imposed an oil embargo on Japan, cutting the nation off from 80 percent of its oil supply and leaving it no choice but to seek fuel elsewhere. The closest oil was in then-Dutch Indonesia, but US-controlled Philippines physically barred the way. The US had thus almost guaranteed Japan would have to attack the US, allowing Washington to enter the war with the American people’s approval in order to fight Germany, whom Roosevelt perceived as the “*real*” enemy.

The US has imposed the strictest sanctions on Iran yet, repealing the last waivers last week in the hope of forcing the country into a similarly suicidal act. Iran has threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz if it is blocked from using the waterway, which sees 20 percent of the world’s oil traffic. US officials have deemed such a move “*unacceptable*,” suggesting massive retaliation would follow, and a US carrier strike group is on its way to the region, supposedly acting on a “credible threat” that Iran plans to target US interests. Regardless of who fires the first shot – and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has warned Trump a false flag attack is extremely likely – war with Iran would be the result, and Americans would be cheering it on. The question is not if, but when.

War with Iran wouldn’t benefit the US at all – a 2002 Pentagon [wargame](#) simulation has even indicated the US would lose. But Iran is the strongest enemy of Israel left standing, and Trump’s inner circle – like the neocons at PNAC (whose members included John Bolton) – has made it clear where his priorities lie. Just as laying waste to Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen only created an endless supply of enemies for the US while crossing Israel’s regional rivals off the list, attempting to destroy Iran will have devastating repercussions for the US while ensuring no one is left to challenge Israel’s regional dominance. It is no coincidence that the intel suggesting Iran was plotting an attack on American targets in the Middle East – the tip that triggered the deployment of the carrier strike group *Abraham Lincoln* to the region last month – came from the Mossad, the Israeli intel agency whose motto is “by deception, thou shalt do war.” Israel has been lying about Iran’s ambitions for [decades](#). In the same way, Britain, not the US, stood to benefit from the US attacking Germany in WWII. While the US did eventually profit from Germany’s defeat, splitting a destroyed Europe with the Soviets, Britain *needed* US intervention if it hoped to survive at all.

World War II was a golden era for propagandists on both sides, and the US’ reliance on the

art has only grown since the days when buck-toothed racist Japanese caricatures spoke to American civilians in broken English: “Please, take day off!” Hitler remains the exemplar of evil in the American mind only because history is written by the victors – Stalin, whose body count was significantly greater, was cast as kindly Uncle Joe, until the military-industrial complex required a new enemy to maintain military spending levels and the Soviet Union was transformed from powerful friend into formidable foe. Anti-Nazi propaganda has flourished since the war’s end, with lurid tales of [lampshades](#) and [soap](#) made from concentration camp victims, and “Nazi” itself has become shorthand for anyone we disagree with politically.

Americans are told again and again that military intervention is the only way to “save” the people of Libya, Syria, or Iraq, especially their women and children. While Libya may have taken the cake for most bizarre propaganda narrative yet, with [stories](#) that Muammar Gaddafi was doling out Viagra to his soldiers to ensure they were at the top of their rape game, the [terrorist](#) White Helmets in Syria won an Oscar for their convincing portrayal of a noble civil defense force, convincing the folks back home that Bashar Assad was a gas-happy monster instead of the cosmopolitan statesman who’d received the French Medal of Honor just a few years before.

An important part of both eras’ successful propaganda campaigns was bringing the war closer to home. Most Americans couldn’t care less about what is happening halfway around the world, no matter how many babies are supposedly being thrown into ovens or out of incubators. During WWII, this was accomplished with a speculative [story](#) in Life magazine on how the Nazis might invade the US. One of the routes took the Nazis up through Mexico. The narrative hasn’t changed much since then, except now it’s ISIS camped out at the border, lustily eyeing our “freedoms.”

Trump isn’t the only American aware that the US is no longer “winning.” But enacting the rituals of the last time it tasted victory is not going to catapult the world back into the golden age of the American empire. Those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it – worse, they are doomed to think repeating it is a good idea.

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