

War By Right : Hollywood's Love Affair with War

By [Lesley Docksey](#)

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'We all have the right to absolutely everything.' Chris Hedges, Empire of Illusion

Language is a dead giveaway. In *Hollywood and the War Machine* (part of the Empire series on Aljazeera TV, December 2010) there was a fascinating debate on Hollywood's love affair with war and the Pentagon's love affair with Hollywood. Hollywood benefits by being given access to all the expensive military kit it needs to create larger-than-life heroic battle-pics. The Pentagon gains because it can write the scripts, rewrite history to suit itself and use the films as a recruiting tool for its endless wars.

This unholy relationship was debated by film makers Oliver Stone and Michael Moore, and journalist Chris Hedges. Hedges suggested that to many Americans war has now become sacred, the Pentagon acting as the church, and the soldiers the priests. Small wonder then, that there is an appetite for films that portray war as a battle against evil, with courageous American heroes that always win against the odds. He then said this:

"We believe that, because we have the capacity to wage war, we have the right to wage war."

Chilling words, words that would seem to exaggerate the case, except... Not when you consider the attitudes displayed in the US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks.

It is not that we learnt much that was completely new, but there it is in very inglorious black and white – the pressure amounting to blackmail to achieve the result the US wanted at the Copenhagen climate talks; UK concerns about US use of British facilities for spy planes and rendition flights resulting in Richard LeBaron, Charges d'Affaires at the London embassy, cabling Washington that human rights concerns could not be allowed to get in the way of counter-terrorism operations. Britain's demands were 'not only burdensome but unrealistic', he said, proposing 'high-level approaches' to call the British to heel. Having refused to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the US managed to get the UK, who had ratified the Convention, to agree the use of a loophole allowing the US to use British territory (both UK bases and Diego Garcia) to store and transfer cluster munitions, such storage and transfer being illegal for those states who have ratified the Convention. Afghanistan, another supporter of the Convention, came under the same pressure.

Cable after cable uses language demonstrating the belief that the US has the *right* to demand that all other states fit in with US policy. The 'diplomatic' language employed is cold and heartless and hungry for power and control. It betrays an attitude that is utterly unshakeable in its belief in its own righteousness. Further, the language and the thinking behind it do not allow for questioning one's motives or acts.

The same attitude is displayed in *Cutting the Fuse*, a book on the causes behind the appalling rise in global suicide terrorism. Written by Robert Pape and James Feldman, it is an exhaustive (and useful) examination of the motives, targets and nationalities of suicide bombers.

Prior to 1993 suicide bombers were a rare phenomenon, and horrifying because of their rarity. It was a symptom of a people in despair, with so little left that a few were driven to use the only weapon they had left – their bodies. Such were the Palestinians, losing ever more of their lands and lives to Israeli occupation. Since then, and particularly since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, global suicide bombing is almost a daily occurrence, damaging countless families and communities, damaging also the very countries the bombers call their own. It is worth remembering that until those invasions neither country had ever suffered from this terrible form of resistance. In the eyes of the bombers it has now become a religious war, a route to martyrdom in a war as holy as that seen in Hollywood films.

Pape and Feldman propose the theory that suicide bombers are reacting to the military occupation of their countries or those to which they have some affiliation. It is a reasonable theory though many Americans are critical, not wanting to think of themselves as ‘occupiers’. After all, the language and thinking is designed to make them believe that they are ‘liberators’ bringing democracy and freedom to benighted states. Blind to the fact that their own society is lacking in democracy they do not, *will* not see that occupation always takes more than it gives. Suicide bombers are the dispossessed, but that is scarcely recognised. Consider the language used by the authors:

Suicide bombing is ‘an extreme strategy for national liberation against democracies with troops that pose an imminent threat to control the territory the terrorists view as their homeland or prize greatly.’ Campaigns are designed ‘to compel democratic societies to abandon the occupation or political control of territory the terrorists view as their national homeland.’ ‘... it (the suicide bombing campaign) has so far failed to compel target democracies to abandon goals central to wealth, security or integrity of core territory.’ The authors see nothing strange in noting that, in the cases they study, the occupiers are always ‘democracies’, whether American or allied to the West. The language reinforces the message that democracies’ goals are always legitimate, while those seeking to rid their lands of invaders and occupiers are always labelled terrorists.

If the authors simply stated that the ‘terrorists’ were fighting in defence of their *homes*, that image would demand that they questioned the legitimacy of military occupation. But this is a book written by Americans for Americans and the US military/arms industry/ corporate thinking influences all of us in the West, whether we agree with it or not. Most European countries also have an unenviable history of colonising other lands and plundering their resources, with scant regard for the people or their land. So it *should* come as no surprise to the British that the authors never question the ‘democratic’ right of the US to put its interests first, wherever it sees those interests to lie, to control other peoples’ resources and lives. This way of thinking quite logically leads to the belief that visiting terror on another people in another land will somehow make your own people and land safe. It is blind to the anger and hatred and terrorism it creates. For there are some genuine terrorists out there, those who are wedded to violence and cruelty, addicted to killing and bloodshed. And some of them sit in high office or wear Western uniforms, and by their acts, create more terrorists.

Pakistan is now suffering from the same terror, with suicide bombers targeting those allied to the government, a government they see as in the US pocket, allowing the US to use drones to kill Pakistanis. But this, according to the conclusions drawn by Pape and Feldman, is as it should be! Having decided that military occupation is responsible for the vast increase in suicide terrorism, they do not suggest that the US should stop interfering with, invading or occupying other countries. No. The occupations should be 'outsourced'. In future the US should attack a country from outside, whether from bases in neighbouring countries, from aircraft carriers, by using drones armed with Hellfire missiles, or by controlling puppet governments, who become the targets of the next generation of suicide bombers. Outsource, but don't stop waging war.

Having steeled myself to watch former Prime Minister Tony Blair, recalled to the Iraq Inquiry last week, give yet more self-justifying 'evidence', seeing him seize the day for more manipulation of the facts, hearing more speeches on the difficulties of being powerful, his raving messianic zeal over the evil that is Iran, his determination that Iran will and must be the next country to be attacked by the West, I heard the same language, the same insistence on the speaker's right to control other people's lives, to take military action, to wage war.

I said that the British, given our history of empire, colonies, exploitation and war, should not be surprised by this way of seeing the world. But the sheer scale, blind arrogance and power-hungry selfishness of this world view doesn't just leave you gasping. You feel as though you have been punched in the gut, again and again, until you are nearly as breathless as Blair's countless victims. Blair will never examine his actions, his lies, his dismissal of laws meant to keep us all safe and at peace with each other. Blair is now a man with a 'mission'. In giving voice to that (and it was very wrong of the Inquiry to allow him to do so) he appeared genuinely manically obsessed. Blair has signed up wholesale to the US way of thinking. Given the vast numbers of dead, damaged, disabled and displaced he has been responsible for, the possibility that he and his friends will try to take us into Iran doesn't bear thinking about.

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