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The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America’s Wars

“...indifference to the suffering of the natives,” Tirman writes. Tirman goes on to critique strategic bombing in the “Good War,” echoing the criticisms of Howard Zinn and John Kenneth Galbraith. And he then provides a detailed dissection of the Korean War. According to Tirman, the U.S. intervention in Korea was mainly a product of anticommunist fervor made even more intense by Mao’s triumph in China (and linked by Tirman to America’s gunslinger frontier mentality).

“The intellectual discourse about the Korean War’s meaning, apart from predictable lamentations about the limits of U.S. power, never grappled with the magnitude of loss,” he writes about a war that was among the bloodiest in the post-World War II era. “This, too, is the apparent fate of the failed venture in Iraq.” The Korean toll would have been far worse if General MacArthur and President Eisenhower had made good on their repeated threats to use nuclear weapons against China and North Korea. They chose not to, Tirman reveals, out of a fear that the Soviets would retaliate.

Racism played a major part then, as it has done in more recent times.
“At times of national stress,” Tirman writes, America reverts to “the malevolent stereotyping of outsiders.”
A strength of the book is the way Tirman goes through each war and analyzes the
many ways that U.S. tactics brought about death and destruc-

By Amitabh Pal

The Deaths of Others is an incredibly important venture. I know of no other book that so comprehensively catalogues the victims of U.S. wars. Tirman opens with an arresting image: He walks to the Vietnam and Korean War memorials in Washington, D.C., and becomes conscious of a gaping hole in both places: There isn’t a single mention of the millions of non-American civilians who were killed in these conflicts.

“One of the most remarkable aspects of American wars is how little we discuss the victims who are not Americans,” Tirman writes. “As a nation that has long thought of itself as built on Christian ethics, even as an exceptionally compassionate people, this coldness is a puzzle.” The book is an attempt to solve that puzzle.

Tirman begins his analysis in earnest with the U.S. conquest of the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, which set the tone for every war since then. “The pattern of the American public’s response to the war was repeated in every subsequent conflict abroad— the righteous cause, the brave American soldiers, the brutish enemy, and in the consequent horror of the war, the deep mourning for fallen Americans, and the cold Amitabh Pal, the managing editor of The Progressive, is the author of the new book “‘Islam’ Means Peace: Understanding the Muslim Principle of Nonviolence Today” (Praeger). ERIK RUIN - JUSTSEEDS.ORG

tion. This makes horrifying reading, such as for Vietnam. “When we went out, I would say about 50 percent of the villages we passed
through would be burned to the ground," he quotes one Marine. But all of this astonishingly did not make any difference to Americans, with one survey cited by Tirman showing statistically 0 percent of the U.S. population motivated in their opposition to the war due to Vietnamese casualties alone.

Tirman has a number of perceptive things to say even on the Iraq War, a conflict I thought I had read almost too much about. For one, he shrewdly recognizes the enormous toll taken by the sanctions placed on Iraq in between the 1991 Gulf War and the Iraq War. He combines all three into what he calls a "twenty-year foreign venture for the United States and a devastating reality for the Iraqis."

For another, he points out that the United States culpability in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion should not be limited to the direct toll U.S. forces exacted; instead, the United States deserves a good deal of the blame for overall fatalities due to its failure to provide adequate security. Tirman tallies the different ways that Iraqis were killed, maimed, and made refugees during the U.S. occupation. And, yet, among the American public, there was no recognition of the bloodbath that had been wrought.

“When in February 2007, the American people were asked, for the first and only time, how many Iraqis they thought had died in the war, the response was both disheartening and unsurprising: 9,890 was the median answer, a figure that was likely low by several hundred thousands,” Tirman writes. “The lack of knowledge or concern about the war’s victims was an outcome of several reinforcing tendencies in American political culture:“
news media that only occasionally reported the costs of the war to Iraqis, the Bush Administration’s insistence on how the war effort was benefitting Iraq, a general avoidance of the war’s consequences apart from the U.S. casualty rate, and the longstanding tendency to view the ‘enemy’ population as a dispensable side effect of the American global mission.”

Tirman devotes a chapter to the Afghanistan intervention, too.

“Based on reports of the U.N., Human Rights Watch, and a few others, the total for civilian deaths ranges from 15,000 to 35,000, including nonviolent, ‘excess’ deaths, with about 9,000 directly from U.S. military action, through the first half of 2010,” writes Tirman. “The number of deaths of those not considered civilians or official Afghan soldiers is unknown but is likely to be three or four times higher.” (Emphasis in the original.)

The Bush Administration’s response was sheer callousness. “We did not start this war,” exclaimed Donald Rumsfeld. “So understand, responsibility for every single casualty in this war, whether they’re innocent civilians or innocent Americans, rests at the feet of the Al Qaeda and the Taliban.”

Tirman has an insightfully detailed analysis toward the end of the book of three major U.S. war atrocities: No Gun Ri during the Korean War, My Lai in the Vietnam War, and Haditha during the Iraq War. They reveal underlying similarities.

“The Haditha massacre followed the pattern from the earlier wars—initial shock at the revelations, military lying and cover-up, investigations in response to the media coverage, rightwing backlash against prosecuting or blaming soldiers, very
little legal culpability achieved, and ultimate public indifference,” Tirman writes.

Why such indifference? Tirman offers a number of reasons: racism, the frontier mentality, and something he calls “just world theory”—the delusional denial that everything is right with the world. “The combination of these three explanations forms a structure, an architecture of indifference, accounting for the silence and the animus the American public displays toward the civilian victims of U.S. wars,” Tirman writes. “It is a sturdy forbidding structure, a fortress that protects its denizens from the chaos outside.”

This indifference leads to the absence of necessary checks on U.S. atrocities. An added consequence is the anti-American sentiment this attitude inflames in the rest of the world. Where Tirman ventures into dubious territory is in his assertion that the constant American penchant for wars (and its perfervid anti-communism) is in good part a result of a frontier mentality deeply embedded in the American psyche.

“Especially after 1945, the ‘Indians’ were Soviet communists and their allies,” writes Tirman. “The ‘wilderness’ was any country under the sway of Marxism–Leninism and the global south generally, just then released from European colonialism and hence reverting to a kind of political and moral wildness to match its physical and demographic attributes. The ‘bonanza’ of the frontier was domination of the world economic system itself.”

All through the book, Tirman hammers this thesis home, which imbues his analysis of every conflict from Korea to Iraq (with even the Arab Muslim, according to him, acting as a modern stand-in for the
Native American).
To me, the analogy seems a bit of a stretch. Is the cowboy-and-Indian mentality a part of the American psyche? Yes. But is it a significant determinant of U.S. foreign policy? The other place where the book doesn’t quite work is that it becomes too statistically rigorous for a lay audience. Regardless, Tirman has given us the definitive study of an extremely important but neglected subject. It’s a must-read for anyone concerned with the lethal impact of U.S. policy on people in all corners of the world.

High praise for this book on the “poison” of “America’s vast indifference” toward the millions killed by the many illegal, unnecessary, brutal US invasions, occupations, and interventions. (Dick)

--Hedges, Chris and Laila Al-Arian. Collateral Damage: America’s War Against Iraqi Civilians.
http://thebloodycrossroads.com/tag/chris-hedges/
1.

Chris Hedges - Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi ...
www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHqYOUk84iA
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Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian on "Collateral Damage: America's ... 
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3.

Hedges - Collateral Damage: America's War on Iraqi Civilians ...
www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL3ToWgtfDA
Strategic terror: the politics and ethics of aerial bombardment

By Beau Grosscup

HISTORY OF US BOMBING CIVILIANS

Sherwood Ross. “How the United States Reversed Its Policy on Bombing Civilians.” Ross runs Anti-War News Service. sherwoodrl@yahoo.com The War Crimes Times (Summer 2011). Veterans for Peace, WarCrimesTimes.org (This is an outstanding anti-war newspaper.)
May Is Deadliest Month for Afghan Civilians Since 2007: U.N.

By BBC News 10 June 11

The UN says May was the deadliest month for civilians in Afghanistan since 2007, when the organisation started recording civilian casualties. The UN said "anti-government elements" were responsible for 82% of the 368 "conflict-related civilian deaths".

"Pro-government forces", including Nato, caused 45 of the deaths. The news came as several deadly insurgent attacks killed at least 18 people, most of them civilians, in the volatile south and east of the country.

Fifteen people, including eight children and four women, were killed when a bomb blast hit their vehicle in the southern province of Kandahar, the Interior Ministry said. READ MORE http://readersupportednews.org/news-section2/330-131/4961-rocking-the-cradle

Afghan Civilians Dying in Record Numbers

Laura King, Los Angeles Times
Intro: "Buried bombs killed 30 Afghan civilians in a 48-hour span in the latest grim illustration of the dangers faced by noncombatants as the season's fighting heats up. Insurgents routinely seed roads and pathways with IEDs, or improvised explosive devices - their favored weapon against Western troops. But most often, those killed and injured by the hidden bombs are civilians." READ MORE http://readersupportednews.org/news-section2/309-13/6471-afghan-civilians-dying-in-record-numbers

“May Is Deadliest Month for Afghan Civilians Since 2007: U.N.”

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Transforming Terror
Remembering the Soul of the World
Karin Lofthus Carrington and Susan Griffin, eds.

READ AN EXCERPT

- Read an Excerpt (PDF)

Paperback, 392 pages June 2011
From the publisher: This inspired collection offers a new paradigm for moving the world beyond violence as the first, and often only, response to violence. Through essays and poetry, prayers and mediations, Transforming Terror powerfully demonstrates that terrorist violence—defined here as any attack on unarmed civilians—can never be stopped by a return to the thinking that created it. A diverse array of contributors—writers, healers, spiritual and political leaders, scientists, and activists, including Desmond Tutu, Huston Smith, Riane Eisler, Daniel Ellsberg, Amos Oz, Fatema Mernissi, Fritjof Capra, George Lakoff, Mahmoud Darwish, Terry Tempest Williams, and Jack Kornfield—considers how we might transform the conditions that produce terrorist acts and bring true healing to the victims of these acts. Broadly encompassing both the Islamic and Western worlds, the book explores the nature of consciousness and offers a blueprint for change that makes peace possible. From unforgettable firsthand accounts of terrorism, the book draws us into awareness of our ecological and economic interdependence, the need for connectedness, and the innate human capacity for compassion.