WHY SO LITTLE OPPOSITION TO US WARS? WHY IS THE PUBLIC SILENT?
By Dick Bennett
Several explanations of German public support of Nazi wars and occupations give us material for analysis of public support of—or at least acquiescence to-- recurrent US wars and occupations.
Public support for the Afghan war, once high, now is declining. A new CNN/Opinion Research poll (PDF) (Dec. 2010) shows support for the conflict continuing to wane. “The poll now shows 63 percent of the American public opposed to the war. The breakdown showed strong opposition across race, gender, regional and age lines. President Obama’s claims of progress in the Afghan War don’t seem to be cutting into the realities of record death tolls and official predictions of more record death tolls to come. A secondary question asked the public how “things are going” in Afghanistan and showed 56 percent of Americans believe the war is going either “moderately badly” or “very badly.” An interesting aspect of this is that the poll was taken in the days (Dec. 17-19, 2010) immediately following the president’s Afghanistan speech (December 16).”.

Of course one nation was a dictatorship and the other is a republic, but the issue is the aggression of their foreign policies and why the public went along.

How did the Nazis gain such broad support from the German population?
One view is that the Third Reich was a nightmare of fear and intimidation, created by the Gestapo, the prisons for dissenters, and torture. .
A much stronger explanation is that the German populace was already extremely anti-Semitic needing only a little incentive to be willing executioners.
A third view marshals the evidence of the power of Hitler’s personality greatly magnified by an extraordinary national propaganda machine.
And a forth explanation is that the Nazis satisfied the economic self-interest of the people, by decent wages, a graduated income tax, a pension system, and the plunder from the occupied territories, which enabled the Nazis to keep their own populace and their soldiers content, and their occupied territories quiescent.

A historian has written, “The Nazis were not only the most notorious murderers in history but also the greatest thieves.” In comparison, the US is a child. But one historian does claim that “…a few million people have died in the American holocaust, and many more millions have been condemned to lives of misery and torture as a result of US interventions [against the alleged international communist conspiracy] extending from China and Greece in the 1940s to Afghanistan and Iraq in the 1990s” (Blum 1995). So the question gathers to this point: How did the U.S. elected rulers gain such broad support for its longest war against Afghanistan, fought simultaneously with a second war against Iraq, and additional wars emerging after ten years?
Of the four explanations listed above, only the first three seem to apply to the U. S.

Fear does permeate our country. The communist and socialist parties have been virtually eradicated extra-legally. “Liberals” are now under similar attack. The FBI has revived aspects of their 1960s COINTELPRO. Many of the US populace do not want to sign petitions or in support of some group for fear of being placed on an “un-American” or “terrorist” list. The FBI is not the Gestapo, and the Marion super-max prison is not Buchenwald, but they’re enough, maybe, to explain partly why so few “citizens” publicly decry the imperial leaders and policies of the government.

Replace Jews with Muslims and you see the parallel scapegoating today. Over a thousand Muslims were detained after 9-11, hundreds for extended periods without charge, and reports of bigoted actions against Muslims are numerous to the present. Invading and occupying Muslim nations and killing tens of thousands of Muslim civilians, and assassinating and torturing thousands of suspected terrorists without benefit of trial, have not produced more than the outcry of the peace movement. The U.S. willing executioners are small numerically compared to the Nazi slaughter, but intrinsically it’s similar behavior.

Presidents Bush and Obama are cardboard cutouts compared to Hitler; their rallies possessing the drama of a boy scout gathering compared to the spectacles organized by the Nazis at Nuremberg for Hitler’s rants, but combined with the fear and bigotry their speeches and persistence helped to carry the Congress and the populace forward to continued war. Only one member of the House of Representatives voted against the resolution (not Declaration of War) supporting the invasion of Afghanistan, but that was much more the shock of the 9-11 plane bombings and the pre-existent hatred of “ragheads” than from any cult of personality surrounding President G. W. Bush.

The fourth, economic, explanation—the German population benefitted until near the end of WWII--does apply in that US jobs have been supplied through our militarized economy, through borrowing the government avoided direct taxation for the war, and the war industry capitalists made and are making money, but the income of the general population has continued to decline, along with social services and infrastructures, and their children and grandchildren will be paying the costs for many years to come..

Have we then answered the question why the U.S. public generally is so acquiescent against its governments’ illegal, unjust, financially disastrous wars? Citizens who want peace can get to work especially to extricate their neighbors and countrymen/women from the fear and bigotry which fuels their support or their passivity? But these explanations don’t seem adequate to me. The public does not seem so timorous or so prejudiced; the presidents lack Hitler’s charisma. Other motives and causes seem also to be in play.
Have the people of the United States become so cynical or exhausted by endless war that they cannot recognize and feel the suffering of the victims of our wars? Are too many people unfeeling toward anybody outside their small circle, and too few individuals possessing the compassion of Julian Assange? “Try as I may I can not escape the sound of suffering. Perhaps as an old man I will accept suffering with insouciance. But not now; men in their prime, if they have convictions, are tasked to act on them” (2007 blog entry).

Or is public acceptance of these wars caused by something else, distinctly different from fear, hatred, cynicism, numbness, or callousness? Is it simple distance? The wars are over there and outside our peripheral vision. What’s happening to jobs, to income, to mortgage and credit rates—these engross attention. Is it that we ourselves tasked as were our parents and grandparents during WWII? We don’t pay directly—we are not taxed directly—for the wars, but our government hides the reality by borrowing. The wars therefore affect these personal matters only tangentially. We don’t feel complicit in the deaths of innocent Iraqi and Afghan children. Even though we believe in a government of the people, by the people, for the people, few people feel responsible for the harms perpetrated against innocent people abroad, even though we pay and our children and grandchildren will pay the taxes that fund the harms?

We are permanently at war and the public so acquiescent because we are now a warfare state, thoroughly militarized for empire? That our wars have been numerous and the tradition of warriors and war-making is thoroughly American have been too little acknowledged. William Blum and William Quigley’s books examine over 40 illegal interventions and invasions by the US following WWII, resulting in millions of deaths, veterans, and cemeteries. The veteran family is common, and many of our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq come from those families.

These explanations would seem to be exhaustive. But Andrew Bacevich adds another persuasive explanation. He examines the cluster of assumptions and practices that have driven US foreign policy since WWII. They have become so deeply accepted by the public that few are aware of them. Bacevich divides this tenacious warrior consensus into two parts to shine a light on them, which he labels *credo* and *trinity*.

The US “credo” is a system of purposes by which the world should work and for which the US is responsible. These norms summon the US alone to transform the world as the US sees fit, since the US is fundamentally benign and good for the world. It has become virtually unquestioned dogma, which explains why US global leadership and primacy have become the prerequisite for political office and public approval. Question “the troops” under God, and political defeat is certain.

And the credo’s means is hard power, coercion above all. Thus the US must maintain military forces not for defense but for overwhelming armed force projected around the world. The sacred “trinity” has become the second part of the US foreign policy cluster of iron assumptions: the US must maintain a global military dominance, must organize its forces for global power projection, and must counter real or imagined threats by global intervention and invasion. And the public believes it. The credo/trinity military might is now essential to the public’s identity. We are permanently at war because we
“support the troops” no matter how great the brutality and carnage because not only the Pentagon, President, and Congress cover up and whitewash the slaughter, but the culture not only accepts it but reinforces it?

“Together, credo and trinity—the one defining purpose, the other practice—constitute the essence of the way that Washington has attempted to govern and police the American Century.” Given this ingrained consensus during seventy years of imperial expansion, other explanations of US public conformity are clearly seen as functions of sustaining the consensus. And the similarity, at least of German and US assumptions of national superiority justifying conquest, becomes clearer.

Is our question clear now? We understand why most people are silent, even those who in anonymous polls say we should leave Afghanistan?

Or is public support explained simply by the absence of the draft? Douglas Kriner and Francis Shen in *The Casualty Gap: The Causes and Consequences of American Wartime Inequalities* compare official casualty records in four US wars (WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq) with Census data, and conclude that “when America goes to war, it is the poorer and less educated in society who are more likely to die in combat,” except during WWII. Is the most powerful explanation so simple? If, instead of a volunteer army, drawn largely from the poor in a nation of economic inequality (that include the numerous military families in a nation of endless wars), soldiers were drafted, the public would defy the rulers, and the wars would end?

Are we done yet?


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ARE WE DONE YET? Mary Dudziak in *War Time* (2012) explains that war does not bother everyday
Americans because it is a permanent condition of US culture, and in a reverse Orwellian situation, the leaders obscure the real causes and consequences war to perpetuate themselves and the state.

*An Enduring Condition: On War Time*

Peter Maass

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[Dick: Maass reviews two books: Dudziak shows US leaders and public economically, psychologically, and politically enmeshed permanently in war-making; Horgan argues that at least we are not genetically hardwired for war.]

The phrase “war on terror” is rarely heard these days. Our fight in Iraq ended last year with the pullout of the remaining troops. Combat forces are set to be withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2014, and their fade-away has been highlighted by the fact that more private contractors are getting killed in the country than GIs. President Obama has declared, with apparent justification, that the end of our post-9/11 wars is near. Quite soon, Dover Air Force Base, where the fallen are brought home, will no longer have its grim intake of Americans who have seen the true end of war. The flow of flag-draped coffins ceased long ago; although Obama overturned a Bush-era ban on photos of them, they have been infrequently shown in newspapers or even on the web. No one cares to look.

*War Time*

*An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences.*

By Mary L. Dudziak.

[Buy this book.]

*The End of War*

By John Horgan.

[Buy this book.]

*About the Author*

*Peter Maass*

Peter Maass, author of Love Thy Neighbor and Crude World, is working on a book about war imagery in the era of...

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That does not mean we’re done with war, however. There is talk of attacking Iran and Syria; American forces all but led the NATO assault in Libya, drone strikes are taking place from Pakistan to Somalia and Yemen, prisoners continue to be held at Guantánamo Bay, a shadowy game of cyber-war rages around the globe and the US government, in the name of national security, is prosecuting more whistleblowers than ever before while accumulating (or trying to accumulate) wide powers to conduct domestic surveillance of computers and cellphones. The paradox is that although war is waning in the classic configuration of brigades fighting an enemy on foreign shores, we are not rid of its specter, burdens, threats, costs and restrictions. What should we make of wartime that has the appearance of peacetime?

Mary Dudziak’s new book, War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences, is a crucial document. Dudziak, a legal historian at the University of Southern California, argues that we are experiencing “not a time without war, but instead a time in which war does not bother everyday Americans.” Her smooth foray into legal and political history reveals that in not just the past decade but the past century, wartime has become a more or less permanent feature of the American experience, though we fail to recognize it. She doesn’t say so explicitly, but we are experiencing a reverse Orwellian situation, in which the state, rather than elevating war to perpetuate itself, obscures war to perpetuate itself.

Dudziak assembles an intellectual Rubik’s Cube, playing with ideas of time, law, killing and politics, and arranging them into a pattern that all but eliminates the distinctions we long assumed to have existed between war and peace. “We tend to believe that there are two kinds of time, wartime and peacetime, and history consists of moving from one kind of time to the next,” she writes. “Built into the very essence of our idea of wartime is the assumption that war is temporary…. When we look at the full time line of American military conflicts, however,
including the ‘small wars’ and the so-called forgotten wars, there are not many years of peacetime. This shows us that war is not an exception to normal peacetime, but instead an enduring condition.”

For a country that considers itself an enlightened force for progress, a belief invoked with particular frequency in this election season, it seems odd to suggest at this moment of post-9/11 drawdown that the nation is, as ever, a Sparta at arms with soldiers, tanks, drones, nukes, spooks, hackers and every other method and manner of combat. But early in her book, Dudziak pre-empts this response by playing a visual trump card of sorts. The Defense Department has awarded combat medals for conflicts of the twentieth century in which soldiers served. The medals were plotted in a timeline by John E. Strandberg and Roger James Bender in their book *The Call of Duty* (2005), and Dudziak puts them into a user-friendly chart. The big wars of the twentieth century are of course represented in the timeline—World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam and Kuwait—but so too are smaller conflicts, from Abyssinia and Bocas del Toro to Nicaragua, Mexico, Mayaguez, Grenada, Lebanon, El Salvador and Bosnia. In almost every year of the last century, American soldiers served in a conflict that qualified for a combat medal. The military criteria for wartime, Dudziak notes, “swallow much of American history.”

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I reported on the Iraq invasion as a “unilateral” journalist, which meant I rented an SUV from Hertz in Kuwait and sneaked across the border with the first US tanks. I wound up in Baghdad on April 9, 2003, and watched Marines tear down the iconic statue of Saddam Hussein at Firdos Square. I returned to Iraq on several occasions to work on lengthy stories about the dismal turn of events as the occupation turned into a war of Americans against Iraqis, and
Iraqis against Iraqis. The carnage, though heartbreaking, was almost the least shocking experience of my journeys between war in the Mideast and my home in New York City.

While Americans killed and got killed in Iraq, Americans back home shopped at Walmart and watched reality television. I had covered a lot of wars and thought I had grown accustomed to peaceful countries being unconcerned by other people’s quarrels. My unsentimental education had begun in the 1990s in Bosnia, where I often had a Matrix-like experience. In the morning, I would wake up in Sarajevo or another cursed town that was blasted by bombs, frozen by winter and deprived of food. I would then begin my effort to get the hell out of hell. I would hope for a seat on what was known as Maybe Airlines. These were the UN relief flights that brought food into besieged Sarajevo. Maybe the shelling would be light enough for flights to land and take off, maybe not. If the flights were grounded, I could try to escape by driving along Sniper Alley and through a creepy no man’s land that constituted the only border that mattered in a nation cut and quartered by war.

Distances are small in Europe. By the afternoon, I could be in Vienna or Budapest or London, enjoying the comfortable life that Europe offered many of its citizens: hot showers, good food, clean sheets, the certainty that I would not be killed by a mortar as I slept. I had a hard time believing these altered states existed in such close proximity. The contented Europeans eating apple strudel or shopping at Harrods on those 1990s afternoons—didn’t they realize a war was being fought in their backyard? The answer was that they knew and didn’t care. Proximity isn’t destiny. Bosnia, though close, wasn’t their home. Other people were killing and dying, not their people.

I had understood only half of it and learned the other half a decade later, on my returns to America after sojourns in Iraq. Outside the tight-knit community of military families who cared
so deeply about the wars, nearly everyone in America went about his or her life as though Iraq and Afghanistan didn’t matter much. Nor had Americans been asked to change their way of life. It had become possible, I realized, for a nation to be at war without suffering the inconveniences associated with war—including the inconvenience of thinking about it. As Dudziak makes clear, this is not a recent condition created by remote-controlled bombs equipped with cameras that render their destructive power appear as fantastic and innocuous as a video game. Its origins go back much further.

World War II was a classic war in the sense of rationing, of drives for war bonds, of a draft the elite could not avoid with college deferments (here’s looking at you, Dick Cheney) and of a ceaseless drumbeat in almost every sector of society that a great conflict was being fought that required great sacrifices of everyone. Even for families spared the loss of a loved one overseas, World War II was a visible—intentionally visible—aspect of life in the homeland; the nation’s leaders made it so. It was a conflict that required total support, and the sacrifices civilians had to make could not be obscured. Life as it was before the war had to be suspended.

The blurring of the difference between wartime and peacetime truly got under way with the cold war. A crucial oddity of the chart of combat medals in Dudziak’s book is that one of the biggest wars of the century is absent from it. Although a cold war medal was proposed in Congress as recently as 2007, it has not been approved and likely never will be. Dudziak suggests a teaching moment was missed. “The Cold War’s ambiguity might have signaled that the conventional categories no longer fit—that wartime and peacetime coexisted or had merged together,” she writes. Her chapter on the cold war offers an intellectual frame for understanding our post-9/11 condition. Just as President Truman faced the post–World War II challenge of fighting the Soviet Union without waging a shooting war against it, President
Obama wishes to continue a war against Islamic radicals without engaging in the sort of protracted follies that President Bush began in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Historian Michael Hogan has described Truman’s challenge as an attempt to “advance the nation’s security and its new role as the defender of democracy everywhere without at the same time subverting democracy at home and transforming the republic into a garrison state.” It was an impossible task: the red baiting of the McCarthy era, the building of a massive nuclear arsenal and a huge conventional force, the outsourcing of actual war to superpower proxies—all of these demonstrated that the absence of blood-and-guts combat (or atomic warfare) between the American and Soviet armies did not mean we were at peace. The garrison state remained fully operational. Domestic politics remained on a war footing long after McCarthy was shamed into silence; the slur of “being soft on communism” ensured that most politicians would hew to the line or risk being voted out of office.

The division between peacetime and wartime was blurred even more by Vietnam. Unlike World War II, it was an unpopular conflict that American politicians wished the voters would not even consider a proper conflict; famously, there was no Congressional declaration of war. Of course, no one was fooled: the body bags made sure of that, as did the evening news. To adapt Justice Potter Stewart’s remark about pornography, we know a war when we’re in it. But our involvement was of so long a duration, and there was so much else of great drama occurring in the country—the civil rights movement, for one—that the war in Vietnam festered like a chronic disease. It was not existential. Though we didn’t quite realize it, wartime mixed with peacetime, becoming a partner to it, rather than its opposite.

* * *

A new kind of wartime emerged on September 11, 2001. The country had been attacked and,
as a result, would attack others; references were made to its being our generation’s Pearl Harbor. But the method was strange. While President Bush emphasized that the “war on terror” was existential, that Al Qaeda and its sympathizers wanted to destroy us and would use nuclear weapons if they could, Americans who were not in the military were asked to live as though we were at peace. There would be no draft, no taxes, no war bonds. The solemnity of funerals at Arlington cemetery would not be broadcast. And there was Rudy Giuliani, as smoke still billowed from the destroyed World Trade Center, recommending that we respond to the terrorists by going shopping. The point was that aside from longer security lines at airports, the government would do its best to ensure that we experienced no inconvenience from the wars waged on our behalf. We wouldn’t even have to pay for them.

The understandable exceptionalism of genuine wartime—wartime of the we-have-just-been-attacked-and-must-counterattack variety—tends to involve exceptional legal action. During World War II, citizens of Japanese ancestry were interned (unjustifiably, as we now realize). As Dudziak notes, “Pushing the boundaries during military conflict is of course not new in the American experience.” Or in the experience of any nation at war, one might add. Dudziak, who does not appear to sympathize with the most extreme actions taken by the Bush administration, evenhandedly situates them in historical context. John Yoo, the Justice Department lawyer who drafted some of the key documents that purported to find constitutional justification for the torture of prisoners of war (rebranded as “enhanced interrogation” of “enemy combatants”), may have shocked us with his legal briefs, but for all their misbegotten logic, his arguments were consistent with the idea of wartime as a temporary period of unusual measures. “Wartime works as a shorthand, invoking the traditional notion that the times are both exceptional and temporary,” Dudziak writes. As problematic as the legal controversies were during the Bush era, they are even more
problematic now, because as Dudziak notes, “It is one thing to suspend the rule of law during a time-limited war” and quite another to extend it into an unlimited future.

One of the scariest developments of the post-9/11 era isn’t the challenge to constitutional principles by the Bush administration—though many of these challenges were indeed quite worrisome—but their extension by the Obama administration, when one of Bush’s land wars is already over and the other looks to be wound down relatively soon. The organization that attacked the country, Al Qaeda, has been all but dismantled and its leader killed. If the war that began on 9/11 might have had a surrender-on-the-deck-of-the-Missouri moment, the death of Osama bin Laden should have been it. Yet that moment has passed. The New York Police Department has felt no need to apologize for its recently revealed surveillance of Muslim students during a whitewater rafting trip upstate.

Indeed, how can we explain the wartime-like secrecy about the use of weaponized drones? The government refuses to explain attacks that have been widely reported, even attacks in Yemen that, in a remarkable challenge to constitutional notions of due process, killed three American citizens (Anwar al-Awlaki, AbdulRahman al-Awlaki and Samir Khan). Dudziak provides a clue in her observation that the cold war was perpetuated not only by the activities of the Soviet Union but also by domestic politics. “National security became a tool of partisan politics,” she writes. “Domestic and often partisan political discourse can be more important to public opinion on military conflict than international events themselves.” The Obama administration may believe that there is a genuine national security need to continue Bush-era policies, but there’s also a domestic political benefit to doing so. By perpetuating the wartime of 9/11, Obama cannot be accused of failing to perpetuate it. The only way Republicans can criticize him for being “soft” on Muslim terrorism is to pivot to Iran and urge an attack on its nuclear facilities. The position is so extreme that, though useful in the primaries, it may hurt
the Republican nominee in the general election. These days, we prefer that wartime not involve a land war.

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Dudziak offers little hope for escaping the clutch of wartime. An exit strategy is proposed by John Horgan, who argues that the end of war is not only possible but imminent. Horgan is a science journalist who teaches at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, where he teaches a course called War and Human Nature. His book *The End of War* is written in a style that appears to be aimed at younger readers; it is folksy, heartfelt, basic and a bit simple-minded. He starts off by noting that war casualties have dropped significantly since the “cataclysmic first half of the twentieth century”—but I don’t know how much solace can be taken from the fact that humans are killing considerably fewer of one another than they did in World War I and World War II, among the worst slaughters in history. Horgan suggests that war “could end tomorrow through a simple act of will on the part of a relatively small number of leaders and combatants around the world”—if only they would get together and declare an end to war and the abolition of nuclear weapons. I am sure some leaders would like to do this, but I’m less sure that America is ready for Obama to attend a war-banning conference with Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad anytime soon.

As a science journalist, Horgan likes to cite experiments. Is violence innate in human nature? He points to studies showing that chimpanzees are not terribly violent. “Chimps often hug and kiss each other and share food both to avoid fights and to make up after them,” Horgan writes. There has been a debate about chimp violence for many decades, and I’m willing to concede, for the sake of argument, that most chimps are pacifists. But humans are not chimps. We have shown, in our control of the planet and over the living things on it, and with
our power to wipe out plant and animal species, that we are unlike any previous form of animal life. We have developed sophisticated weapons, political alliances, machines of propaganda and economic forces that make our societies utterly different from groups of chimpanzees.

Horgan acknowledges the complexity of human society, but he circles back to his basic point: “We have the ways to end war. We need only the will.” He cites a 1954 experiment in which twenty-two fifth-grade boys at Robbers Cave State Park were split into two groups that were kept apart for a week. Each team was then set against the other in a variety of sport contests like tug-of-war and swimming races. There was much insulting and some violence. That was the first part of the experiment. In the second part, the same teams were put together in situations that required cooperation—such as a truck breaking down and everyone needing to push to get it moving again. Guess what—the kids cooperated with one another. “Leaders can…drum up support for persecution, repression, war and genocide,” Horgan writes. “But we can clearly also learn to overcome our hostility towards others.” True, but the reason Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. were such exceptional leaders is that they were… exceptional.

Horgan’s book is the inverse of Chris Hedges’s *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (2002). Whereas Hedges, a former war correspondent, presents an argument based to a great extent on his foxhole understanding of human passion and the powerful role of opportunistic politicians as well as the armaments industry, Horgan offers a sunnier outlook based on what he calls empirical evidence that suggests our drive to fight is not that deeply rooted. “We are not hardwired for war,” he asserts. “What was once a faith based on moral conviction has become a belief based on empirical evidence…. I believe war will end for scientific reasons; I believe war must end for moral reasons.” But the empirical evidence he
cites is limited. He trumpets early in his book, for instance, that proof of lethal group violence dates back less than 13,000 years. For an evolutionary paleontologist, those are recent times, but 13,000 years strikes me as a relatively lengthy period during which humans have become culturally, politically and economically enmeshed with warfare in ways that make nearly irrelevant what happened (or more correctly, what didn’t happen) in the preceding hundreds of thousands of years.

Horgan’s book is useful, if only to stimulate our imagination and instill a bit of hope. Can a dictatorship be toppled without violence? Horgan rightly champions the sort of nonviolent action that Gene Sharp has advocated in his books since 1960, and that was practiced by many participants in the Arab revolutions of the past year (though not in Libya or Syria—notable exceptions). Horgan rightly expresses frustration with the United States, which he acknowledges pays “lip service to the principles of national sovereignty and international law while secretly carrying out deadly commando raids and drone attacks around the world.” He calls for cuts to our “bloated” military, the cessation of arms sales to other countries and the elimination of our nuclear arsenal. I agree with him about all those proposals—and I suppose Dudziak would support the same—but they are not an exit strategy from our peculiar and permanent wartime.

Peter Maass

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SUPPORT THE TROOPS?

From Veterans for Peace. Posted by: "david sladky" spotshere@hotmail.com
Fri Jan 27, 2012 10:59 am (PST)
http://blackagendareport.com/content/us-military-global-force-not-good
Wed, 01/25/2012 - 02:04 — Bruce A. Dixon
A Black Agenda Radio commentary by BAR managing editor Bruce A. Dixon

In official folklore, the US armed forces are the virtuous repositories of honor, probity and moral
virtue. But the real history and culture of the US military, from invading Spanish Florida to prevent its being a refuge for escaped slaves, to Wounded Knee, to massacres in Haiti and Central America, to Fallujah and marines pissing on Afghan corpses, are something else altogether.

The US Military: A Global Force, But Not For Good
A Black Agenda Radio commentary by BAR managing editor Bruce A. Dixon

“On November 19, 2005 a squad of US Marines murdered 24 unarmed Iraqi civilians including 9 children...”

No State of the Union address is complete without multiple standing-ovation references to the steadfast courage, self-sacrifice and honor of the men and women serving in the uniform of these United States. But while some or all of these characteristics can doubtless be found among active duty members of the US military, they are notably absent among its military and civilian leaders, and consistently contradicted by the military's own longstanding traditions.

[Haditha Massacre-D] On November 19, 2005 a squad of US Marines murdered 24 unarmed Iraqi civilians including 9 children, in cold blood, not with shrapnel or random crossfire, but mostly with well-aimed rifle shots to the head and chest indoors and at close range. Three officers received written reprimands for actions after the incident, and charges were filed, then dropped against seven of eight marines. On January 24 staff sergeant Frank Wuteridge, the only remaining marine charged in the case accepted a plea deal that lets him off with a reduction in rank to private.

At the same time that killers are released with perfunctory wrist slaps, US army private Bradley Manning, a genuine hero, endures persecution and solitary confinement for releasing documentary evidence of numerous diplomatic and military atrocities, including actual film of a US helicopter gunship mowing down unarmed Iraqi civilians including two Reuters cameramen and the children of a man who stopped his family car to help the people he saw bleeding in the street.

“That's what he gets,” oinks a self-righteous American military voice on the tape, “for bringing his kids...” to a firefight.”

“The navy currently runs an ad campaign branding itself “a global force for good.” Few claims could be more deceitful”

Lying, justifying and covering up, not honor and self-sacrifice, seem to be guiding principles of US military and political leadership, the sure and certain paths to a successful career. When up-and-coming army Major Colin Powell was detailed to look into reports of atrocities committed by the Americal Division, he knew what was expected of him. Powell minimized and dismissed the reports, overlooking among other things the massacre of hundreds of Vietnamese civilians at a place called My Lai. Twenty years later, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the US invasion of Panama, Powell ordered the bombing from the air of an undefended, largely black civilian neighborhood of Panama City in which hundreds were killed, in order to prevent them from coming into the streets to support Panamanian president Noriega.

Since Wounded Knee, since the slave and Indian-hunting expeditions of Andrew Jackson, these have been the real traditions of the US military. The navy currently runs an ad campaign branding itself “a global force for good.” Few claims could be more deceitful. The military has plenty of doctors, engineers and even chaplains. But its main jobs aren't building things, healing people or telling the truth. The core job descriptions of the US military and their civilian leaders are breaking things, killing people, and lying about it. They are indeed a global force. But not an honorable one. And not for good.