OMNI PENTAGON WATCH NEWSLETTER #5,
June 23, 2012, Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace.
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

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and the many newsletters related to U.S. militarism, empire, violence, torture, waste, war crimes, repression, secrecy, US economy, needs of the world in http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

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By Tom Engelhardt, TomDispatch.com, posted June 5, 2012

Cutting Food Stamps to Buy Drones

Cuts for the least of these. More money for bombs and guns. That's no way to balance the budget.
Help Sojourners protect the poor today and get a free End Poverty 2012 bumper sticker!

Dear Dick,

Another week in Washington brought another week of attacks on the poor. The immoral budget proposed by Rep. Paul Ryan called for billions of dollars in cuts to poverty programs like Medicaid, food stamps, and other programs that feed hungry Americans and help those in need.
But here’s the kicker: Ryan’s destructive plan would increase the already bloated military budget by 20%.
Cuts for the least of these. More money for bombs and guns. Sounds like a horrible plan, right? We think so. But the sad reality is that this budget actually passed in the House and was only narrowly defeated in the Senate.
It was a close call. Too close.

And the threat lingers. Just this weekend, Rep. Ryan went on Meet the Press and audaciously claimed these budget priorities were the medicine needed to restore America's economic health. These policy debates will continue from now until election day.
Washington needs to act responsibly with taxpayer money, but balancing the budget on the backs of the poor is anything but responsible. Paul Ryan and many other decision-makers believe the only solution to the budget deficit is cutting poverty programs. You and I know that’s just not true.
This is not responsible politics. These politicians are playing chicken with the budget, but the people who will lose the most are the poor.
Sojourners is committed to fighting for the poor until Election Day, but we need your support to do it.
Last year when poverty programs were on the chopping block, Sojourners mobilized tens of thousands of Christians to pray, fast, and take action with our “What Would Jesus Cut?” campaign. We held off cuts last year, but the fight clearly isn’t over. The budget debate is back and worse than ever. With your help, we can mobilize again to protect the least of these.
Chip in $25 today to help us get started on this work.
Steadfastly,
Sojourners

RAPE IN MILITARY

Court-Martialing the Military | By Molly M. Ginty

The Human Rights Watch Film Festival is concluding its annual round, as usual, with a visit to the Film Society of Lincoln Center (June 14–28), where the makers of The Invisible War, director Kirby Dick and producer Amy Ziering, are being honored with the 2012 Néstor Almendros Award. They've earned the distinction. Dick and Ziering have committed impressive resources of research, skill and moral gravity to The Invisible War. In doing so, they also happen to have touched on many of the themes of the 2012 festival: women's rights, personal testimony, LGBT rights and reporting in crises.

If this range of issues seems large, so is the scale of the problem the film documents. To judge from statistics presented in the film, some 20 percent of the women who go into the US military will be sexually assaulted by the people they most trust: the servicemen with whom they live and work. The real percentage must of course be much higher, given the daunting pressure on victims to remain silent. As the filmmakers point out in The Invisible War, this is not just a problem for women. Men on active duty are raped too, at a lower rate but in higher absolute numbers than women. Nor is this exclusively a problem for the military. Many uniformed perpetrators retire into the civilian community unpunished, unidentified and amply experienced in sexual predation.

Spurred into action on this subject by a 2007 report by Helen Benedict, “The Private War of Women Soldiers,” which was published in Salon, Dick and Ziering gained interviews with approximately seventy survivors of military rape. Out of this body of material, which must not have been easy to come by, the filmmakers then selected the testimonies of some two dozen
women and men to be the soul of the film.

The witnesses are stunning in their pain and courage—none more so than Kori Cioca, a former Coast Guard seaman who became (with her husband and daughter) a particular focus of the film, and Myla Haider, a sergeant in the Army Criminal Investigation Command and herself a survivor of rape, who is perhaps the most sharp-tongued of the film's commentators. But as much as the testimonies are overwhelming, so is the way the film deploys them. Dick will patiently lay out a topic by presenting extended conversations and contextual scenes with a handful of survivors, then follow them with a succession of rapid comments from another five, ten, fifteen. You get an appalling sense of outrage piled upon outrage, even as the film moves along calmly and logically. Here is how a culture of rape flourishes in the military. Here are the physical and emotional effects on the victims, for years afterward. Here is a twenty-year history of repeated sexual assault scandals, complete with repeated declarations that the military has “zero tolerance” and will investigate fully. And here is why nothing changes: because the people charged with addressing the problem are the very commanders who allowed the rapes to happen in the first place, and who in some cases are rapists themselves.

**The Invisible War** opens in theaters across the country on June 22.

1. [The Invisible War](https://www.invisiblewar.org) 
   [invisiblewar.movie.com](https://www.invisiblewar.org/movie.com)Cached
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   From Oscar®- and Emmy®-nominated filmmaker Kirby Dick (This Film Is Not Yet Rated; Twist of Faith) comes **The Invisible War**, a groundbreaking investigative ...

2. News for **The Invisible War**
   1. 'The Invisible War' review: military rape examined

_San Francisco Chronicle_ - 7 hours ago
What they never volunteered for: sexual assault, institutional apathy, failures of justice,
callousness in the chain of command and repeated ...

2. 'The Invisible War,' Directed by Kirby Dick

New York Times - 1 day ago

3. 'The Invisible War' a heartbreaking look at military rape

MiamiHerald.com - 1 day ago

3. The Invisible War (2012) - IMDb

www.imdb.com/title/tt2120152/Cached
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Rating: 6.6/10 - 168 votes
An investigative documentary about the epidemic of rape of soldiers within the US military.
Directed by Kirby Dick. Starring Helen Benedict, Anu Bhagwati.

4. Documentary film 'The Invisible War' takes on military sexual assault ...

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5. The Invisible War - Rotten Tomatoes

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Directed by Kirby Dick. Starring Amy Ziering, Kirby Dick, Kori Cioca.

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www.latimes.com/.../la-et-invisible-war-20120622,0,7404471.storyCached
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1 day ago – The Invisible War documentary directed by Kirby Dick and produced by Amy Ziering includes affecting interviews with victims.

8. Videos for The Invisible War


9.
Rachel Maddow Talks About Drift, & What She'd Love To Ask Dick Cheney

Rachel Maddow with Poppy

For most television personalities, the release of a book is akin to tossing a giant, bleeding hunk of red meat to their most fervent admirers. Substantive content be damned, Daddy needs a new yacht! But Rachel Maddow's Drift addresses questions that people of every political persuasion should be asking as we approach our twelfth year embroiled in wars both acknowledged and covert. How did American society become so disengaged with its military? When did the executive branch effectively swallow Congress' warmaking powers and how do we shift the balance back? We spoke with Maddow about the real legacy of Ronald Reagan, cornering Dick Cheney, and pitching Drift to the FOX News faithful.

Much of your book addresses the problems presented by the sprawling reach of the military
industrial complex, and it's become standard to invoke Eisenhower's farewell address, in which he warns the country of its influence. I don't think it's in your book once. Was that a conscious decision? Well, I think that if you read that address and if you read his papers, Eisenhower was referring to these militarily industrial companies becoming political in a sense, because doing what they were doing in a permanent way would create a lobby. And that lobby would encourage the United States to wage wars that weren't in the country's interest, but were in their interest. He didn't spell it out that conspiratorially, but that was essentially what he was saying.

But the book isn't about that idea very much. The book is about the politics of making war and whether or not we have been keeping with our Constitutional inheritance whether we have war. It's in the same spirit except that it's about how the structures of our country affect our decision-making about war, but he's actually speaking about something different.

For my generation, the Bush administration has become the gold standard of a fear-mongering, evidence-fabricating presidency. But in Drift, you make the case that Ronald Reagan was actually the president who perfected these tactics. Why don't more people remember him for this legacy? [Laughs] I'm happy to hear that's what you took from the book! One reason why I wanted to write the book is because I felt like there was so much consternation, particularly on the left, but by a lot of different types of people, over the way our nation approached politics in the post-9/11 era. And what I wanted to write about was the fact that, that came from something. That political place that we were in where we felt like we didn't actually make much of a choice about whether or not we were going to war. And that didn't just happen, that was part of a long process. We all slid into that place gradually.

And so the book kind of ends before George W. Bush. There's very little about Barack Obama, very little about the post-9/11 wars in a major sense, because I wanted to inform the frustration people have with what we've done post-9/11 with the things that allowed it to happen.

The presidency of Ronald Reagan not only undercut those reforms made after Vietnam to wrest the power over war back from Congress to the Executive Branch, but swung them way back in the other direction. And the office inherited the growth of executive power from the Reagan administration into the George H.W. Bush administration into Clinton and beyond—I think that's important context for understanding how we got to this point.

And you know, Dick Cheney is really really important to the story not just because he was the Vice President after 9/11 but because he was a former congressman and the White House chief-of-staff, and then Defense Secretary.

You dedicate the book to Dick Cheney. If you could ask him one question that he had to answer truthfully, what would it be? You know it's a little bit wonky but I really think about this all the time. When the Iran Contra scandal happened, it was like nothing that had ever happened before. I mean, senior officials were being indicted, charged with this completely illegal action ordered by president Ronald Reagan. And if you asked the president if that happened he said he "didn't remember"? It was a disaster, it was a political disaster and a huge crisis.

And so part of the reason that I focus so much on Reagan, is that the Republican Party permanently reinvented Reagan as a saint, because the Republican Party needed a modern saint. That being said, we tell ourselves stories about Ronald Reagan that really don't make sense when you look back at presidency. There were a lot of good things to remember about his presidency but boy, were there a lot of bad things too, and we should remember that as well.

But in terms of Cheney, when the Reagan administration got caught in Iran-Contra, in the huge scandal, the way they tried to save Reagan's butt, is that they came up with this super radical and ridiculous theory that the president can do anything he wanted on national security by definition of the fact that he
was just presenting it. Just totally ridiculous. It completely violates the letter and the spirit of the law that Congress made.

And in the midst of the Iran-Contra scandal Congress investigated they found that Reagan had done a lot of things wrong. And Cheney actually said, you know what? I buy that argument. That crazy idea that a president can do anything involving national security, with no constraints for other law or any other branch of government? I think that, I believe that.

What I want to ask him is, when he did that, when he said I believe what Reagan did was legal and anything the president does with national security is by definition legal because he is the president: was he just trying to get Reagan's butt out of trouble? [Laughs] Or did he actually believe it? Because if he did; what a radical thing to actually believe in!

President Reagan meets with his advisors about Iran-Contra
Dick Cheney is presumably a very intelligent person. Why do you think conservatives like Cheney (or Supreme Court Justice Scalia, who recently compared broccoli to the health care mandate) make these brilliantly ridiculous arguments? Do you think they see it as a sort of intellectual exercise? Right, the question becomes: are you arguing this to achieve some short-term goal or are you really ideologically that radical? And do you understand the implications of how radical you're being here? Dick Cheney went on to live that in his political life. I want to believe that [it's for a short-term goal.] And I find it hard to believe we put someone that ideologically radical in charge of that much.
But I don't know how he sees himself. I do have a feeling that he would own up to that.

At the end of Drift you have a series of prescriptions for the country to undo some of the damage that has been incurred over time, and the last one refers to the "Gordian Knot of executive power." Is that "knot" responsible for our current administration going from a pledge to shut down Guantanamo to, just a few weeks ago, redefining what "due process" means in order to give the president more leeway in ordering the death of American citizens? How much of that change is due to the president being swayed by enormous executive power and how much is just, this is the candidate we got? That's a very good question. I think presidents can't be relied on to give away executive power. There are some instances, like after the Watergate scandal, where the scope of executive power was reined in by the Carter administration. There are a few examples after huge, cathartic, national scandals in which the presidency has been able to relinquish unwarranted power.
But most people don't give up power once they have it. Presidents want as much power as possible to have. And I understand that. I don't think the Obama presidency is immune from that. But we shouldn't be counting on the executive to hold the power that it has. We should be counting on Congress to stand up and assert the power that it's supposed to have.

So people don't give up power willingly, you have to take it, and the Obama presidency is no different. They're not giving anything up. And the executive branch has as much power now as it did under president George W. Bush and we have to count on Congress to assert itself to fix that problem.

Another central theme in the book is that Congress should have a rigorous, open, honest debate before the country takes any sort of military action. This is what the founders wanted. But do you think that our current Congress is capable of having such an open, honest debate? Is there some truth to the executive branch's argument that Congress is too mired in politics to act quickly enough in some instances? Yeah, I mean, our low expectations of Congress will continue to prove us right. There's a big chapter in the book on George H.W. Bush and the lead up to the Gulf War, and that was to show an example of Congress doing the right thing, even though they were kind of lame. [Laughs]
George H.W. Bush didn't think that Congress should have been part of the decision to go to war, he thought that it was. And Congress was just straddling this line in the middle—they wanted to take credit if it was successful, and not have to take responsibility if it wasn't. They were sort of a hot mess. And they did debate the measure and it went through but not because it was a Congress full of heroes. It was a Congress much like the Congress we've got right now.

But when pushed to assert their Constitutional right, they didn't blow it, and they fought like hell, whether or not to wage the Gulf War. They had a really positive debate that engaged the entire country in the question of whether or not we were going to wage that war. They voted on it, and both times the votes weren't very partisan. And the entire country was riveted and engaged what ended up being a very short war. It functioned not because of any one person—it works. When you do it right, it works. And it's not an example that we look back to frequently.

You excerpt George H.W. Bush's diary and it is fascinating to see how pained he was about the decision to go to war. So what happened with his son? Where was the agony in 2003? Well, I'm going to dodge the question a little bit because I don't write very much about George W. Bush in the book and you know, I'm not quite as well read on the subject compared to H.W. But I have read his book, Decision Points, and I think if you asked him about his anguish over deciding to start the wars, he would say that he was anguished.

I think one of the reasons that it is worth reading the diary entries of H.W.'s is how he says, "It's my decision, it's my decision, me alone." And as for Congress, "it's not their decision, because they don't have all this additional information that I have to deal with. It's me, it's me, it's me, it's me." It's not you. It's not supposed to be.

But one of the happy byproducts of reading a president's anguish, is that you learn that they think there's supposed to be one person making that decision. The founders never wanted the president to have that responsibility. I think they knew it would be too much for one person. So the byproduct of that is that it shouldn't ever be that much agony for one person.

My grandmother keeps FOX News on all day—she actually told me that she "didn't approve" of me interviewing you. Pitch your book to someone like her, who sees Drift as a piece of liberal propaganda rather than the incisive, nonpartisan analysis that I read it to be. [Laughs] Well, Roger Ailes actually gave me a blurb for the book, and he said some nice things about it. So maybe that will help! You know, I think if you sit there with her just—start in the nuclear weapons chapter about this challenge with the huge reserve of them we have—I think that is the most entertaining, if not illustrative in a way that has absolutely no ideology about it. I think that about the rest of the issues in the book as well but in particular the nuke stuff—like, there's nothing liberal about it! [Laughs]

There's no room to put your ideological bent in that issue. The fact is that we have so many of them, sometimes we're actively moving [nuclear weapons] around the country without knowing where they are. I'm not writing about that because I want to disguise my liberal ideology and bring it to bear on the matter, I don't think there's an ideological angle to it.

There are a lot more issues in our politics that are real problems for the country that are dominated by this left/right, ideological model—national security, or taking care of our veterans, or education policy: the left/right whole Judge Judy show model just doesn't apply. There's a lot of truth to both sides.

I have been very humbled by the fact that I have had so much support from conservative-leaning readers, and even conservative-leaning reviewers. And even the people who hate the book, they're just as likely to be on the left as they are on the right.

Last question: have you spoken to Keith Olbermann recently, and if so, how's he doing? No, I
A bipartisan amendment introduced by Rep. Mac Thornberry and Rep. Adam Smith would allow the Department of Defense to utilize propaganda. (image: Telegraph UK)

The Creeping Fascism of American Politics

By Juan Cole, Informed Comment, RSN, 20 May 12

Two congressmen are attempting to insert a provision in the National Defense Authorization act that would allow the Department of Defense to subject the US domestic public to propaganda. The bipartisan amendment was introduced by Rep. Mac Thornberry from Texas and Rep. Adam Smith from Washington State.

Nothing speaks more urgently to the creeping fascism of American politics than the assertion by our representatives, who apparently have never read a book on Germany in the 1930s-1940s or on the Soviet Union in the Stalin period, that forbidding DoD and the State Department from subjecting us to government propaganda "ties the hands of America's diplomatic officials, military, and others by inhibiting our ability to effectively communicate in a credible way." And mind you, they want to use our own money to wash our brains!

As Will Rogers observed, "This country has come to feel the same when Congress is in session as when the baby gets hold of a hammer."

I love our guys and gals in uniform, but they can be extremely obnoxious in any discussion about US government policy that 'gets off point' or 'doesn't serve the mission.' At Washington think tank events, I've seen them repeatedly close down discussions among e.g. State Department foreign service officers. You don't want most of the DoD types providing information to us, because it won't be in any way balanced.

Of course, having a Pentagon propaganda unit at all is highly anti-democratic. The best defense of the truth is a free press. It should also be remembered that nowadays everything in Washington is outsourced, so government propaganda is often being turned over to Booz Allen or the American Enterprise Institute, which have a rightwing bias.

Doing propaganda abroad has the difficulty that it doesn't stay abroad. False articles placed in the
Arabic press in Iraq were translated into English by wire services, who got stung.

Then, another problem is that the Defense Intelligence Agency analysts *also* read the false articles placed in the Arabic press by *another* Pentagon office, which they did not know about. So the analysts were passing up to the White House false information provided by their own colleagues!

I was told by an insider that one reason Washington analysts often read my blog in the Bush years was that I had a reputation for having an accurate bull crap meter, and thus my judgments on what was likely to be true helped them fight the tendency to believe our own propaganda!

Not only should this amendment be gotten rid of quick, but their constituents should please vote out of office Reps. Thornberry and Smith next November.

END JUAN COLE ON PENTAGON PROPAGANDA AND FASCISM

07 June 2012
Jack A. Smith : Reversing the Vietnam War Verdict

Demonstrators at the October 21, 1967 march on the Pentagon carry a banner that says, "Support our GIs, Bring Them Home Now."

Reversing the Vietnam War verdict
Most of the allegations about insults directed at soldiers or vets from war opponents have been fabrications to discredit the antiwar forces.

By Jack A. Smith / The Rag Blog / June 7, 2012

The Pentagon has just launched a multi-year national public relations campaign to justify, glorify, and honor Washington’s catastrophic, aggressive, and losing war against Vietnam -- America’s most controversial and unpopular military conflict.

President Barack Obama opened the militarist event, which was overwhelmingly approved by Congress four years ago, during a speech at the Vietnam Wall on Memorial Day, May 28. The entire campaign, which will consist of tens of thousands of events over the next 13 years, is ostensibly intended to “finally honor” the U.S. troops who fought in Vietnam. The last troops were evacuated nearly 40 years ago.
In reality, the unprecedented project -- titled the Vietnam War Commemoration -- will utilize the "pro-veteran" extravaganza to accomplish two additional and more long lasting goals:

- The first is to legitimate and intensify a renewed warrior spirit within America as the Pentagon emerges from two counterproductive, ruinously expensive, and stalemated unjust wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and prepares for further military adventures in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Within days of Obama's speech, for instance, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta announced a big increase of U.S. Navy forces in the Pacific, a move obviously targeting China. At the same time the Obama Administration's drone wars are accelerating as the Oval Office's kill list expands, and the president engages in cyber sabotage against Iran.

- The second is to dilute the memory of historic public opposition to the Vietnam war by putting forward the Pentagon's censored account of the conflict in public meetings, parades, and educational sessions set to take place across the nation through 2025. These flag-waving, hyper-patriotic occasions will feature veterans, active duty military members, government officials, local politicians, teachers, and business leaders who will combine forces to praise those who fought in Vietnam and those on the home front who supported the war. There won’t be much -- if any -- attention focused on the majority of Americans who opposed this imperialist adventure, except as a footnote describing how tolerant U.S. democracy is toward dissent.

The principal theme of the president’s address was that American troops have not received sufficient laurels for their efforts to violently prevent the reunification of North and South Vietnam. He did not point out that there would have been no war had the United States permitted nationwide free elections to take place in Vietnam in 1956 as specified by the 1954 Geneva Agreement ending the French colonialism in Indochina. Washington recently decided that the war "officially" began in 1962 (although U.S. involvement dates back to the 1950s), allowing the commemoration to begin during the "50th anniversary" year.


President Obama told the large, cheering crowd of veterans and their families at the Vietnam Wall exactly what they — and all those who still resented the era’s large antiwar movement — wanted to hear:

*One of the most painful chapters in our history was Vietnam -- most particularly, how we*
treated our troops who served there....

You were often blamed for a war you didn't start, when you should have been commended for serving your country with valor. (Applause.) You were sometimes blamed for misdeeds of a few, when the honorable service of the many should have been praised. You came home and sometimes were denigrated, when you should have been celebrated. It was a national shame, a disgrace that should have never happened. And that's why here today we resolve that it will not happen again. (Applause.)....

[Y]ou wrote one of the most extraordinary stories of bravery and integrity in the annals of military history. (Applause.).... [E]ven though some Americans turned their back on you -- you never turned your back on America... And let's remember all those Vietnam veterans who came back and served again -- in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. You did not stop serving. (Applause.)

So here today, it must be said -- you have earned your place among the greatest generations. At this time, I would ask all our Vietnam veterans, those of you who can stand, to please stand, all those already standing, raise your hands -- as we say those simple words which always greet our troops when they come home from here on out: Welcome home. (Applause.) Welcome home. Welcome home. Welcome home. Thank you. We appreciate you. Welcome home. (Applause.)....

May God bless you. May God bless your families. May God bless our men and women in uniform. And may God bless these United States of America.

There was virtually no criticism in the corporate mass media about the president's gross exaggerations concerning the "mistreatment" of Vietnam era veterans. True, there were no victory parades, but that was because the U.S. Armed Forces were defeated by a much smaller and enormously outnumbered adversary -- the guerrilla forces of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) and regular forces from North Vietnam.

*Members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) hold a peaceful demonstration outside the 1972 Democratic National Convention in Miami. Photo by JP Laffont / Sygma / Corbis.*

By the time many vets returned home the American people had turned against the war and wanted it over, as did a significant portion of active duty troops, including the many who identified with the peace movement or who mutinied or deserted. Undoubtedly some veterans were disrespected -- but to a far lesser extent than Obama and pro-war forces have suggested over the years.
Whenever the U.S. conducts unpopular invasions, as in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, Washington and the mass media invariably insist that it is the duty of patriotic citizens to “support the troops” even if they oppose the war. But to manifest the kind of support the government seeks inevitably implies support for the war. This is why the peace groups came up with the slogan “Support the Troops -- Bring 'em home NOW!”

According to the Pentagon, which is in charge of staging the Vietnam War Commemoration, the main purpose is:

To thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War... for their service and sacrifice on behalf of the United States and to thank and honor the families of these veterans. To highlight the service of the Armed Forces during the Vietnam War and the contributions of Federal agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations that served with, or in support of, the Armed Forces. To pay tribute to the contributions made on the home front by the people of the United States during the Vietnam War...

Thousands of community, veteran, and various nongovernmental organizations throughout the U.S. are expected to join the Commemorative Partner Program to assist federal, state and local authorities to assist a grateful nation in thanking and honoring our Vietnam Veterans and their families. Commemorative Partners are encouraged to participate... by planning and conducting events and activities that will recognize the Vietnam Veterans and their families’ service, valor, and sacrifice.

In addition the government and its "partners" will be distributing educational materials about the war, according to the Pentagon, but it is unlikely that the Vietnamese side of the story or that of the multitude of war resisters in the U.S., civilian and military, will receive favorable attention. Many facts, including the origins of the war will undoubtedly be changed to conform to the commemoration's main goal of minimizing Washington's defeat and maximizing the heroism and loyalty of the troops.


The Geneva Conference of 1954, facilitating impending French withdrawal, established that
Vietnam would be divided temporarily into two halves until free elections were held in 1956 to determine whether the liberation forces, led by Ho Chi Minh, or Emperor Bao Dai, who had collaborated with both French and Japanese occupation forces and was a puppet of the U.S., would rule the unified state.

*American soldiers carry a wounded comrade through a Vietnam Swamp. Photo by Paul Halverson, 1969. Image from The Veterans Hour.*

It is doubtful that the commemoration is going to emphasize the fact that the U.S., led by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, used its power to prevent nationwide elections from taking place when it became clear that Ho Chi Minh would win 80% of the vote. Eisenhower acknowledged this in his memoirs. Instead, Washington allied itself to right wing forces in the southern sector to declare "South Vietnam" to be a separate state for the first time in history and set about financing, training and controlling a large southern military force to prevent reunification. The U.S. dominated the Saigon government throughout the following war.

When Paris withdrew remaining French troops in April 1956, according to John Prados in *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975* (2009), "their departure made America South Vietnam’s big brother," i.e., overlord and military protector against popular liberation forces in the southern half of the country.

By June 1962, 9,700 U.S. "military advisers" plus a large number of CIA agents were training and fighting to support the corrupt U.S.-backed regime in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), at which time President Kennedy's Defense Secretary, Robert McNamara, announced that "every quantitative measure shows that we're wining the war."

By 1968, when the number of U.S. troops attained their apogee of 535,040, Washington was obviously losing to its tenacious opponent. This is when Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson decided not to seek reelection rather than face the humiliation of defeat. Republican President Richard M. Nixon succeeded to the presidency and vastly increased the bombings while also calling for negotiations to end the war.

Facing an impending defeat and political catastrophe, American troops pulled out in 1973. The CIA and some U.S. military personnel and political advisers remained in diminished South Vietnam assisting the right wing government in Saigon until April 1975 when the entire country was liberated.

The U.S. lost 58,151 troops in the war. Between four and five million Vietnamese civilians and
soldiers were killed on both sides in a catastrophe that could have been entirely avoided had Washington allowed the free elections to take place. Over a million civilians in neighboring Laos and Cambodia also were killed or wounded by U.S. firepower.

Vietnam, north and south, was pulverized by U.S. bombs and shells. The Pentagon detonated 15,500,000 tons of ground and air munitions on the three countries of Indochina, 12,000,000 tons on South Vietnam alone in a failed effort to smash the National Liberation Front backed by the North Vietnamese army. By comparison, the U.S. detonated only 6,000,000 tons of ground and air munitions throughout World War II in Europe and the Far East. All told, by the end of the war, 26,000,000 bomb craters pockmarked Indochina, overwhelmingly from U.S. weapons and bombers.

The Pentagon also dumped 18,000,000 gallons of herbicides to defoliate several million acres of farmland and forests. Millions of Vietnamese suffered illness, birth defects, and deaths from these poisonous chemicals. The AP recently reported from Hanoi, Vietnam's capital, that "More than 100,000 Vietnamese have been killed or injured by land mines or other abandoned explosives since the Vietnam War ended nearly 40 years ago, and clearing all of the country will take decades more."

It should also be mentioned -- since it will be suppressed during the commemoration -- that U.S. forces, including the CIA and the Pentagon-controlled South Vietnamese military, tortured many thousands of "suspected" supporters of the liberation struggle, frequently with portable electrical current. An estimated 40,000 "Vietcong" (suspected members or supporters of the NLF) were murdered during the long-running "Operation Phoenix" assassination campaign conducted by the CIA, Special Forces, and killer units of the Saigon forces.

![Iconic photo of crying Vietnamese children after an aerial napalm attack near near Trang Bang, Vietnam, June 8, 1972, Photo by Nick Ut / AP.](image)

There were three main fronts in the Vietnam war, in this order: First, the battlefields of Indochina. Second, the massive antiwar movement within the United States and international support for Vietnam. Third, the Paris Peace Talks. Well over 60% of the American people opposed the war by the late 1960s-early '70s. The first peace protest took place in 1962; the first very large protest took place in Washington in 1965. Subsequently there were thousands of antiwar demonstrations large and small in cities, towns, and campuses all over America.

[Disclosure; This writer was a war opponent and a conscientious objector during this period. His information about the war derives from when he functioned as the news editor, managing
editor and then chief editor of the largest independent leftist paper in the U.S. at the time, the weekly Guardian. This publication thoroughly covered the war, peace movement, antiwar veterans (Vietnam Veterans Against the War [VVAW] was founded in 1967 and is still active today), the extraordinary resistance of active duty troops in Vietnam and at U.S. bases and COs in prison or in Canada and Europe throughout the period of conflict.]

Most of the allegations about insults directed at soldiers or vets from war opponents have been fabrications to discredit the antiwar forces -- falsehoods Obama chose to repeat as part of the Pentagon's campaign to reverse history's negative verdict on the war in Vietnam. The peace movement's targets were the warmakers in Washington and their allies abroad, not members of a largely conscript army. Perhaps the most notorious of the false accusations were frequent reports about antiwar individuals "spitting" at GIs and vets. The rumors were so wild that sociologist Jerry Lembcke wrote a book exposing the lies -- The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam, New York University Press, 1998.

It's extremely doubtful that the war commemoration will dare touch honestly upon the movement of active duty troops against the war and the hundreds of cases killing their own officers.

Historian Howard Zinn included this paragraph on the opposition to the Vietnam War by American soldiers in his People's History of the United States:

The capacity for independent judgment among ordinary Americans is probably best shown by the swift development of antiwar feeling among American GIs -- volunteers and draftees who came mostly from lower-income groups. There had been, earlier in American history, instances of soldiers' disaffection from the war: isolated mutinies in the Revolutionary War, refusal of reenlistment in the midst of hostilities in the Mexican war, desertion and conscientious objection in World War I and World War II. But Vietnam produced opposition by soldiers and veterans on a scale, and with a fervor, never seen before.

According to the Washington Peace Center:

During the Vietnam War, the military ranks carried out mass resistance on bases and ships in Southeast Asia, the Pacific, U.S., and Europe. Military resistance was instrumental in ending the war by making the ranks politically unreliable. This history is well documented in Soldiers in Revolt by David Cortright and the recent film Sir! No Sir!

One of the key reports on GI resistance was written by Col. Robert D. Heinl Jr. and published in the Armed Forces Journal of June 7, 1971. He began:

The morale, discipline and battle worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at anytime in this century and possibly in the history of the
By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous. Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious.

Intolerably clobbered and buffeted from without and within by social turbulence, pandemic drug addiction, race war, sedition, civilian scapegoatise, draftee recalcitrance and malevolence, barracks theft and common crime, unsupported in their travail by the general government, in Congress as well as the executive branch, distrusted, disliked, and often reviled by the public, the uniformed services today are places of agony for the loyal, silent professions who doggedly hang on and try to keep the ship afloat.


Another former Army colonel in Vietnam, Andrew J. Bacevich Sr. (now a professor of international relations at Boston University and a strong opponent of U.S. foreign/military policy) wrote a book about how the U.S. military labored for a dozen years after the defeat to revamp its war strategy and tactics. (*The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*, Oxford University Press, 2005.)

One major conclusion was that a conscript army may become unreliable if the war is considered unjust in nature and unpopular at home. This is why conscription was ended for good and the Pentagon now relies on better paid professional standing military supplemented by a large number of contractors and mercenaries, who perform many duties that were once handled by regular soldiers.

*Vietnam Veterans Against the War at 2009 Atlanta Veterans Day Parade. Photo by David Howell.*

Veterans' movements from the professional military of contemporary wars, such as Iraq Veterans Against the War and March Forward, as well as from the Vietnam era, are still out in the streets opposing imperialist wars, and public opinion polls reveal that over 60% of the American people oppose the Afghan adventure.

Despite the colossal damage the U.S. inflicted on Vietnam and its people during the war years,
the country has emerged from the ashes and is taking steps toward becoming a relatively prosperous society led by the Communist Party. The Hanoi government has received no help from Washington. During the Paris Peace Talks of 1973, Nixon promised Prime Minister Pham Van Dong in writing that the U.S. would pay Vietnam $3.5 billion in reparations. This promise turned out to be worthless.

What strikes visitors to Vietnam in recent years, including this writer, is that the country appears to have come to terms with what it calls the American War far better than America has come to terms with the Vietnam War. Despite the hardships inflicted upon Vietnam, the government and people appear to hold no grudges against the United States.

Hanoi has several times extended the welcome mat to former antagonists, urging Americans and residents of southern Vietnam who now live abroad to "close the past and look to the future." Wherever touring U.S. citizens -- including former GIs -- travel in Vietnam, they are met with the same respect as visitors from other countries.

In the U.S., the Vietnam war still evokes fighting words in some quarters. Some Americans still argue that the U.S. "could have won if it didn’t have one hand tied behind its back" (i.e., used nuclear weapons), and some continue to hate the antiwar protesters of yesteryear, just as they do demonstrators against today’s wars. And some others -- in Congress, the White House and the Pentagon -- still seem to continue fighting the war by organizing a massive propaganda effort to distort the history of Washington’s aggression and unspeakable brutality in Vietnam.

[Jack A. Smith was editor of the Guardian -- for decades the nation’s preeminent leftist newsweekly -- that closed shop in 1992. Smith now edits the Hudson Valley Activist Newsletter. Read more articles by Jack A. Smith on The Rag Blog.

The Rag Blog

Posted by thorne dreyer at 7:35 AM

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