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The Great John Pilger

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New Year Donation Drive: Global Research Is Committed to the "Unspoken Truth"

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*The world suffered a great loss when the Australian journalist and documentary filmmaker **John Pilger** died December 30 at the age of 84. One fact stands out foremost in his decades-long career as a writer and intellectual: He opposed war and fascism. He thought that the United States and Britain all too often supported war and fascism, and he often had occasion to criticize other intellectuals as lackeys of the state, in a way that will remind readers of LRC of Murray Rothbard's similar attacks on "court historians."*

To be against fascism, we have to be able to identify the fascists properly. Pilger argues that in the war between Russia and the Ukraine, those who condemn Putin as a "fascist" have matters backwards. It is the Ukrainian leadership who are the real fascists:

> "The rise of fascism in Europe is uncontroversial. Or 'neo-Nazism' or 'extreme nationalism', as you prefer. Ukraine as modern Europe's fascist beehive has seen the re-emergence of the cult of Stepan Bandera, the passionate anti-Semite and mass murderer who lauded Hitler's 'Jewish policy', which left 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews slaughtered. 'We will lay your heads at Hitler's feet,' a Banderist pamphlet proclaimed to Ukrainian Jews.

Today, Bandera is hero-worshipped in western Ukraine and scores of statues of him and his fellow-fascists have been paid for by the EU and the US, replacing those of Russian cultural giants and others who liberated Ukraine from the original Nazis.

In 2014, neo-Nazis played a key role in an American bankrolled coup against the elected president, **Viktor Yanukovych**, who was accused of being 'pro-Moscow'. The coup regime included prominent 'extreme nationalists' — Nazis in all but name.

At first, this was reported at length by the BBC and the European and American media. In 2019, Time magazine featured the 'white supremacist militias' active in Ukraine. NBC News

reported, 'Ukraine's Nazi problem is real.' The immolation of trade unionists in Odessa was filmed and documented.

Spearheaded by the Azov regiment, whose insignia, the 'Wolfsangel', was made infamous by the German SS, Ukraine's military invaded the eastern, Russian-speaking Donbas region. According to the United Nations, 14,000 in the east were killed. Seven years later, with the Minsk peace conferences sabotaged by the West, as **Angela Merkel** confessed, the Red Army invaded.

This version of events was not reported in the West. To even utter it is to bring down abuse about being a 'Putin apologist', regardless whether the writer (such as myself) has condemned the Russian invasion. Understanding the extreme provocation that a NATO-armed borderland, Ukraine, the same borderland through which Hitler invaded, presented to Moscow, is anathema.

Journalists who travelled to the Donbas were silenced or even hounded in their own country. German journalist Patrik Baab lost his job and a young German freelance reporter, Alina Lipp, had her bank account sequestered." See here.

We need to ask ourselves a question about war. Why is it bad? The answer is obvious. It causes an enormous amount of death, injury, and suffering. We see this happening in the war between Israel and Hamas. Millions of Palestinians have been displaced while Gaza has been bombed to smithereens, and the death toll continues to mount. John Pilger strongly supported Palestinian rights, which earned him the obloquy of pro-Israel lobby:

> "In 1977, the award-winning journalist and film-maker, John Pilger, made a documentary called Palestine Is Still The Issue (1977). He told how almost a million Palestinians had been forced off their land in 1948, and again in 1967. In this in-depth documentary, he has returned to the West Bank of the Jordan and Gaza, and to Israel, to ask why the Palestinians, whose right of return was affirmed by the United Nations more than half a century ago, are still caught in a terrible limbo — refugees in their own land, controlled by Israel in the longest military occupation in modern times.
>
> "The fate and struggle of the Palestinians," says Pilger, "are not just critical to the overdue recognition of their basic human rights, but are also central to whether the region, and the wider world, are plunged into war. Israel is now one of the biggest military powers in the world. While nothing changes, the dangers become greater. This is a film about a nation of people, traumatized, humiliated and yet resilient. In trying to liberate less than a quarter of historic Palestine, they have had no army, no air force, and no powerful friends — and have fought back with slingshots and now with the terrorism of the suicide bombers."

One of the best features of Pilger's work was that he was able to set current events within a larger picture that made sense of them. In an article written in 2016, he warned that the US was building up a nuclear arsenal that threatened the total disaster of war with both Russia and China.

"How many people are aware that a world war has begun? At present, it is a war of propaganda, of lies and distraction, but this can change instantaneously with the first mistaken order, the first missile.

In 2009, President Obama stood before an adoring crowd in the centre of Prague, in the heart of Europe. He pledged himself to make "the world free from nuclear weapons". People cheered and some cried. A torrent of platitudes flowed from the media. Obama was subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

It was all fake. He was lying.

The Obama administration has built more nuclear weapons, more nuclear warheads, more nuclear delivery systems, more nuclear factories. Nuclear warhead spending alone rose higher under Obama than under any American president. The cost over thirty years is more than $1 trillion.

A mini nuclear bomb is planned. It is known as the B61 Model 12. There has never been anything like it. General James Cartwright, a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said, "Going smaller [makes using this nuclear] weapon more thinkable."

In the last eighteen months, the greatest build-up of military forces since World War Two — led by the United States — is taking place along Russia's western frontier. Not since Hitler invaded the Soviet Union have foreign troops presented such a demonstrable threat to Russia.

Ukraine – once part of the Soviet Union – has become a CIA theme park. Having orchestrated a coup in Kiev, Washington effectively controls a regime that is next door and hostile to Russia: a regime rotten with Nazis, literally. Prominent parliamentary figures in Ukraine are the political descendants of the notorious OUN and UPA fascists. They openly praise Hitler and call for the persecution and expulsion of the Russian-speaking minority.

This is seldom news in the West, or it is inverted to suppress the truth.

In Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia — next door to Russia – the US military is deploying combat troops, tanks, heavy weapons. This extreme provocation of the world's second nuclear power is met with silence in the West.

What makes the prospect of nuclear war even more dangerous is a parallel campaign against China.

Seldom a day passes when China is not elevated to the status of a "threat". According to Admiral Harry Harris, the US Pacific commander, China is "building a great wall of sand in the South China Sea".

What he is referring to is China building airstrips in the Spratly Islands, which are the subject of a dispute with the Philippines – a dispute without priority until Washington pressured and bribed the government in Manila and the Pentagon launched a propaganda campaign called "freedom of navigation".

What does this really mean? It means freedom for American warships to patrol and dominate the coastal waters of China. Try to imagine the American reaction if Chinese warships did the same off the coast of California.

I made a film called The War You Don't See, in which I interviewed distinguished journalists in America and Britain: reporters such as Dan Rather of CBS, Rageh Omar of the BBC, David

Rose of the Observer.

All of them said that had journalists and broadcasters done their job and questioned the propaganda that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction; had the lies of George W. Bush and Tony Blair not been amplified and echoed by journalists, the 2003 invasion of Iraq might not have happened, and hundreds of thousands of men, women and children would be alive today.

The propaganda laying the ground for a war against Russia and/or China is no different in principle. To my knowledge, no journalist in the Western "mainstream" — a Dan Rather equivalent, say –asks why China is building airstrips in the South China Sea.

The answer ought to be glaringly obvious. The United States is encircling China with a network of bases, with ballistic missiles, battle groups, nuclear -armed bombers.

This lethal arc extends from Australia to the islands of the Pacific, the Marianas and the Marshalls and Guam, to the Philippines, Thailand, Okinawa, Korea and across Eurasia to Afghanistan and India. America has hung a noose around the neck of China. This is not news. Silence by media; war by media.

In 2015, in high secrecy, the US and Australia staged the biggest single air-sea military exercise in recent history, known as Talisman Sabre. Its aim was to rehearse an Air-Sea Battle Plan, blocking sea lanes, such as the Straits of Malacca and the Lombok Straits, that cutoff China's access to oil, gas and other vital raw materials from the Middle East and Africa." See this.

Why does the US follow an aggressive foreign policy that threatens nuclear war with Russia and China? Pilger finds the answer in a 1992 plan to dominate the globe:

> "Events today are the direct result of plans laid in the 1992 Defence Planning Guidance, a document that laid out how the US would maintain its empire and see off any challenges, real and imagined. The aim was US dominance at any cost, literally. Written by Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney, who would play key roles in the administration of George W. Bush and the invasion of Iraq, it might have been written by Lord Curzon in the 19th century. They formed The Project for a New American Century. America, it boasted, 'would oversee a new frontier'. The role of other states would be as vassals or supplicants, or they would be crushed. It planned he conquest of Europe, and Russia, with all the zeal and thoroughness of Hitler's imperialists. The roots of Nato's current war on Russia and the provocations of China are here."

For Pilger, history is not a matter of impersonal forces but rather of concrete decisions by particular people. In his account of history, there are heroes and villains. One of his main contemporary heroes was Julian Assange, who courageously leaked documents that proved the warmongering plans of the Washington elite. The US government seeks to extradite Assange, who is now in jail in London on trumped-up charges, and imprison him in a hellhole for the rest of his life. Pilger waged a long campaign to prevent this. Here is what he said in an article written in 2018:

> "When I first met Julian Assange more than ten years ago, I asked him why he had started WikiLeaks. He replied: "Transparency and accountability are moral issues that must be the essence of public life and journalism."

Image: Julian Assange court sketch, October 21, 2019, supplied by Julia Quenzler.

I had never heard a publisher or an editor invoke morality in this way. Assange believes that journalists are the agents of people, not power: that we, the people, have a right to know about the darkest secrets of those who claim to act in our name.

If the powerful lie to us, we have the right to know. If they say one thing in private and the opposite in public, we have the right to know. If they conspire against us, as Bush and Blair did over Iraq, then pretend to be democrats, we have the right to know.

It is this morality of purpose that so threatens the collusion of powers that want to plunge much of the world into war and wants to bury Julian alive in fascist America.

In 2008, a top secret US State Department report described in detail how the United States would combat this new moral threat. A secretly-directed personal smear campaign against Julian Assange would lead to “exposure [and] criminal prosecution”.

The aim was to silence and criminalise WikiLeaks and its founder. Page after page revealed a coming war on a single human being and on the very principle of freedom of speech and freedom of thought, and democracy.

The imperial shock troops would be those who called themselves journalists: the big hitters of the so-called mainstream, especially the “liberals” who mark and patrol the perimeters of dissent.

And that is what happened. I have been a reporter for more than 50 years and I have never known a smear campaign like it: the fabricated character assassination of a man who refused to join the club: who believed journalism was a service to the public, never to those above.

Assange shamed his persecutors. He produced scoop after scoop. He exposed the fraudulence of wars promoted by the media and the homicidal nature of America’s wars, the corruption of dictators, the evils of Guantanamo.

He forced us in the West to look in the mirror. He exposed the official truth-tellers in the media as collaborators: those I would call Vichy journalists. None of these imposters believed Assange when he warned that his life was in danger: that the “sex scandal” in Sweden was a set up and an American hellhole was the ultimate destination. And he was right, and repeatedly right.

The extradition hearing in London this week is the final act of an Anglo-American campaign to bury Julian Assange. It is not due process. It is due revenge. The American indictment is clearly rigged, a demonstrable sham. So far, the hearings have been reminiscent of their Stalinist equivalents during the Cold War.

Today, the land that gave us Magna Carta, Great Britain, is distinguished by the abandonment of its own sovereignty in allowing a malign foreign power to manipulate justice and by the vicious psychological torture of Julian – a form of torture, as Nils Melzer, the UN expert has pointed out, that was refined by the Nazis because it was most effective in breaking its victims.

Every time I have visited Assange in Belmarsh prison, I have seen the effects of this torture. When I last saw him, he had lost more than 10 kilos in weight; his arms had no muscle. Incredibly, his wicked sense of humour was intact.

As for Assange's homeland, Australia has displayed only a cringeing cowardice as its government has secretly conspired against its own citizen who ought to be celebrated as a national hero. Not for nothing did George W. Bush anoint the Australian prime minister his "deputy sheriff".

It is said that whatever happens to Julian Assange in the next three weeks will diminish if not destroy freedom of the press in the West. But which press? The Guardian? The BBC, The New York Times, the Jeff Bezos Washington Post?

No, the journalists in these organisations can breathe freely. The Judases on the Guardian who flirted with Julian, exploited his landmark work, made their pile then betrayed him, have nothing to fear. They are safe because they are needed.

Freedom of the press now rests with the honourable few: the exceptions, the dissidents on the internet who belong to no club, who are neither rich nor laden with Pulitzers, but produce fine, disobedient, moral journalism – those like Julian Assange.

Meanwhile, it is our responsibility to stand by a true journalist whose sheer courage ought to be inspiration to all of us who still believe that freedom is possible. I salute him."

Let's do everything we can to carry on John Pilger's fight against war and fascism and defeat braindead Biden and his gang of neocon controllers. This is my aim at LRC, and this is why we featured so many articles by John Pilger over the past twenty years.

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Featured image: John Pilger, photographed in 2006, whose decades in journalism included Reuters and 23 years at the Mirror, then ITV's World In Action (Wikicommons)

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