

Permanent War Against Humans and the Planet

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Featured image: U.S. Marines raise their flag atop Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Feb. 23, 1945 (Source: latinamericanstudies.org)

War is evil; permanent war is permanent evil. It is evil to humans but also to other species and the planet; the weapons used destroy us but also contaminate and destroy nature.

*Despite a general knowledge of the evils of war and acceptance of peace and the rule of law, war has become a permanent feature of the 21st century -destructive, cruel, dehumanizing and vindictive. Its message: those who can kill and destroy the most have the upper hand. **Major General Smedley Butler** said it in a speech in 1933: "war is a racket." Butler, who had joined the Marine Corps in 1898, predicted WWII and ongoing wars thereafter; he served his country for 34 years but understood how war worked and our limits in putting an end to it (1).*

At the helm of 21st century paranoia with war we find NATO and the U.S. The U.S. has an aggressive history that includes its own Civil War, about a century after its war of independence in 1776, costing at a minimum the lives of some 620 000 to 820 000 soldiers.

"Based on 1860 census 8 percent of all white males between the ages of 13 and 43 died in the war, including 6 percent in the North and 18 percent in the South...the war destroyed much of the wealth that had existed in the South -confederate bonds forfeited, banks and railroads bankrupt, income dropped to less than 40 percent of that of the North, something that lasted into the 20 century." (2)

Since the 1991 offensive of **George H.W. Bush** administration against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and a number of strikes by the Clinton administration (in 1993, 1996 and 1998 - Desert Fox), the world has been at war since 2003 when the George W. Bush administration, and the "coalition of the willing," invaded Iraq. There was a plan:

"He (G.W. Bush) reiterated his commitment to preemption in his West Point speech in June.

"If we wait for threats to fully materialize we will have waited too long," he said. "We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge."

Although it was less noted, Bush in that same speech also reintroduced the Plan's central theme. He declared that the United States would prevent the emergence of a rival power by maintaining "military strengths beyond challenge." With that, the President effectively adopted a strategy his father's administration had developed ten years earlier to ensure that the United

States would remain the world's preeminent power. While the headlines screamed "preemption," no one noticed the declaration of the dominance strategy."(3)

The Bush administration obtained Congress' approval for this attack knowing well that the UN would not authorize a resolution favoring a UN attack. **Kofi Annan**, then UN Secretary General, called the United States' attack "an illegal act of war" but this did not end it. The American Congress authorization for the attack would turn into the facto approval for permanent war; the costs of war unexamined or optimistically under-estimated. The public everywhere remains ignorant of the actual costs of war that include not only our dead and wounded, but our enemies,' civilians dead or wounded, the death of other species, and the economic and environmental destruction caused by war. Furthermore, the constant danger of war escalating into a global conflict is disregarded or dismissed. The hope in making all this more visible is increasing awareness about risks, so that rational, moral perspectives prevail and life holocaust is prevented.

War: from racket to permanent destruction

Smedley Butler identified war as a racket, making fortunes for some while costing much to the majority and the lives of many:

"It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious (racket). It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. A racket is...something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small "inside" group knows what it is about...conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes. In the World War [I] a mere handful garnered the profits of the conflict. At least 21,000 new millionaires and billionaires were made in the United States during the World War. How many of these war millionaires shouldered a rifle? How many of them dug a trench? How many of them knew what it meant to go hungry in a rat-infested dug-out? How many of them spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine gun bullets?.....

The general public shoulders the bill." (1)

On December 2015, **Barack Obama** (then president of the U.S.) while making comments at the Air Force base of Tampa (Florida) explained that permanent war had never been authorized:

"As you know all too well, your mission — and the course of history — was changed after the 9/11 attacks. By the time I took office, the United States had been at war for seven years. For eight years that I've been in office, there has not been a day when a terrorist organization or some radicalized individual was not plotting to kill Americans. And on January 20th, I will become the first President of the United States to serve two full terms during a time of war... Right now, we are waging war under authorities provided by Congress over 15 years ago — 15 years ago. I had no gray hair 15 years ago. Two years ago, I asked Congress, let's update the authorization, provide us a new authorization for the war against ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), reflecting the changing nature of the threats, reflecting the lessons that we've learned from the last decade. So far, Congress has refused to take a vote. Democracies should not operate in a state of permanently authorized war. That's not good for our Military. It's not good for our democracy." (4)

The Trump administration, however, does not seem worried about the issue and continues to wage war with the authorization Congress extended to Bush in 2001. **Ashton Carter**, Trump's Secretary of Defense, stated clearly that he is not concerned, in fact, he believes the coalition must be kept militarily active even after the inevitable expelling of ISIL from Mosul and Raqqa. In Washington, officials seem to agree in essence that the war against terror must continue. **Edward Hunt** raises concerns about how promises about ending the war and in favor of peace are regularly made while the state of permanent war continues. Ending it, Hunt says, requires political commitment because the U.S. has been changed profoundly so to return to how it was before requires effort. **President Trump** remains unconcerned about permanent war. Trump increased the U.S. military budget for 2017 by 5 percent commenting at the time that "the fighting is wonderful". (5)

Militarism and Environmental Contamination, at home and everywhere

Many try to ignore how militarism contaminates the environment turning the issue into the "white elephant" sitting in the living room. The ecological print of the Military in the U.S. is undeniable and huge; and it is an issue even within the 4127 military installations sitting on 19 million acres of land. **Maureen Sullivan**, head of the Department of Ecological Programs of the Pentagon, recognized this in 2014 explaining that she was dealing with 39 000 contaminated sites with an estimated cost of 27 000 million American dollars. **John D. Dingell**, Congressman from Michigan, who served during WWII, argued that practically all U.S. military sites are seriously contaminated.



King Island Tasmania 2009 stranding. Scientists believe that naval sonar from both Australian and US Navy may have been responsible. — Island, Tasmania 2009 (Source: [Champions for Cetaceans](#))

In addition, American Military are the world's greatest consumers of oil and the third major polluters of the U.S. waterways. They use extremely contaminating nuclear power -which they need to fabricate bombs. Also, the U.S. government has concealed nuclear accidents for the past 50 years by compensating 33 000 armament workers (dead today) for health damages. The Pentagon is one of the main emitters of greenhouse gases in the world while the Department of Defense burns contaminants in open pits seriously contaminating the air. We know that military sonar(s) kill whales and dolphins; that chemical weapons and depleted uranium used by the Military destroy human health and ecosystems; and that U.S. Military bases are the most toxic places in the U.S. as their per-chlorate and

trichloroethylene have filtered down into aquifers, soil and drinking water. Nuclear arms tested in the South East of the U.S. (and the South Pacific islands) have contaminated millions of hectares of land and water with radiation; uranium has contaminated Navajo Reserve lands, and *"rusting barrels of chemicals and solvents and millions of rounds of ammunition are criminally abandoned by the Pentagon in bases around the world."* (6)

In Canada the Distant Early Warning Line (DEW Line), designed by MIT scientists to give advance warning of Soviet bombers heading over the North Pole, is a clear example of military contamination. It took a lot of materials, money and effort to build it -460 000 tons of materials, 45 000 commercial flights completed delivering them, 75 million gallons of petroleum products consumed, 22 000 tons of food in 1 million containers shipped to the Line, and 20 000 people working there to complete it by 1958. But, half of the Line was obsolete by 1963 because of intercontinental ballistic missiles and other emerging technology and by 1993 all the stations were closed. Thankfully, in 1996 Canada's Department of National Defense launched one of North America biggest environmental clean ups and cleaned the area; it cost C\$575 million (of which C\$ 92 million came from the U.S.). There were about 40 million kilograms of soil contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and lead incinerated, 283 000 cubic meters of less contaminated soil buried on site in new engineered landfills, and more than 200 000 cubic meters of soil contaminated with diesel fuel placed in land farms till the hydrocarbon evaporated to acceptable levels. There were also thousands of cubic meters of garbage in 83 non-hazardous waste landfills covered with gravel. (7)

Barry Sanders, Fulbright senior chief researcher, twice nominated to the Pulitzer, argues that the war on terror is really a war against our planet:

"If...the United States invaded Iraq to ensure oil...in trying to reach that goal the United States have consumed, destroyed and burnt a huge amount (of oil)."

In fleeing Kuwait, the Army of Iraq burnt more than 600 oil wells, 5 to 6 million barrels of oil turned into smoke together with 70 to 100 million cubic meters of natural gas. The clouds were huge covering 10 thousand square miles, blocking the Sun and killing about a thousand people from inhalation of acrid smoke. To this we have to add about 60 million barrels of oil that filtered into the soil poisoning about 40 percent of the underground water; and, about 6 million barrels of oil that filtered into the sea forming a huge documented oil spill destroying fish, birds and local mammals and ending with the fishing of shrimp. He estimates the armed forces consume a million barrels of oil a day (20 million gallons). According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency each gallon of gasoline produces 19 pounds of CO₂; the armed forces send 400 million pounds (200 000 tons) of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere a day. For Sanders the most serious assault on the environment comes from the U.S. armed forces and needs to end. (8)

The U.S. Department of Defense, by itself, produces more waste than the 5 largest chemical corporations of the U.S., including depleted uranium, oil, pesticides, defoliants, lead and radiation due to the making, testing and use of arms. Thousand kilos of radioactive micro-particles, highly toxic, for instance, are contaminating the Middle East, Central Asia and the Balkans. The mines and cluster bombs are spread in vast areas even after the war has ended. After 34 years of the end of the Vietnam War, dioxin contamination is still 300 to 400

times larger than normal levels, resulting in severe birth defects and cancer in the third generation of affected. Because of the war, Iraq -an exporter of food, imports now 80 percent of its food, the war and military policies since the war caused desertification. (8)

Damages to the environment can be temporal but most are not. According to the World Watch Institute a 35 percent of the hard wood of the forest in South Vietnam were spread with agent-orange at least once during the war. In places close to rivers and roads like the Ho Chi Minh road they were spread up to half a dozen times. The areas spread have lost trees from a 10 to 80 percent, depending on how many times they were spread. In total a 14 percent of the forests of Vietnam were destroyed. Yet, not all trees react the same way, some, like mangroves with aquatic roots filtering salt from water, are more susceptible to agent-orange as it interferes with their filtration mechanism causing all of them to die and not to recover years after they were spread. In the 1980s a study completed in the Vietnam forests, documented existing 24 species of birds and 5 of mammals in the forests spread, compared to 140 to 170 species of birds and 30 to 55 of mammals in the ones that were intact, showing the effect agent-orange had over the fauna. (6)

The Many Costs of War

War has been tolerated as “necessary evil;” it is evil but unnecessary. The Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs (Brown University) in the U.S. offers detailed estimates of the human costs of the war on terror showing the crime taking place. The estimates are inclusive of American soldiers, who die directly under enemy fire, subcontractors and allies, opponents and the directly and indirectly killed civilian population. In the case of the “war on terror,” studies including Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, estimate that 6 900 American soldiers died during hostilities (half of them under enemy fire and the rest due to electrocution, explosive devices and sunstroke). Among subcontractors there are about 7 000 dead, a number that is probably larger because subcontractors tend to under-report deaths. Among allies (Pakistani, Afghani and Iraqi personnel) and including the police, numbers add to about 6 for every American soldier dead, that is estimated 50 000 dead. We add the opponents (that is the enemy militants) estimated in 110 000. We then add the civil population in the war zones that generally die in large numbers as they die in the markets, in their homes and in the streets and are estimated to be 217 000, all of them direct deaths. We finally add indirect deaths of civil population; deaths by hunger, sickness or injury, because of the destroyed infrastructure (lack of food, water, hospitals) estimated in about 4 for every one of the civilians who died directly or an estimated total of 870 000. The calculations of war victims by 2016 were 1.261.000 people of who the great majority are civilians while 14 000 are soldiers and contractors. (9)

The financial costs of war include more than human costs. They include the medical treatments of soldiers returning to the U.S. from the front with physical, emotional and psychological injuries requiring short or prolonged assistance. These costs of war are less easy to calculate; we know how many soldiers we have lost but we do not know the levels of sickness, trauma and loss capacities until the returning soldiers complete applications. Thus, for example, by March 31, 2014 there were 970 000 applications for loss of capacity registered. (9)

Millions of people were indefinitely displaced and live in very precarious conditions; the number of Afghani, Iraqi and Pakistani refugees is calculated in more than 7.6 millions. The civil freedoms and rights have also been very negatively affected and violated due to war. The moneys sent for reconstruction have been used not to reconstruct these countries but

to arm the military and police of the countries affected by war, especially in Iraq y Afghanistan. Large part of the monies destined to humanitarian relief and reconstruction of the civil society have been lost, stolen, abused or used fraudulently in unsustainable projects. (9)



Iraq before and after “democracy” 10 years since the American invasion of Iraq. (Source: [Another Me / Pinterest](#))

In Afghanistan wild life and ecosystems disappeared too. The past 30 years have left the place without trees –more than a third of the forest disappeared between 1990 and 2007, the soil suffers desertification and other species have also been lost, even 85 percent of the migratory birds have disappeared in the area. The infrastructure of Iraq has been devastated, including health and education systems. In Afghanistan American politicians used to promise that the invasion would bring democracy to the region but today the warlords control power and the society continues to be segregated in terms of gender and ethnicity while ISIS is free to take territories and lives. (9)

Economic Destruction

The myth that war is good for the economy is false. **Paul Krugman** (Nobel in Economy) argues that war never pays:

“If you’re a modern, wealthy nation...even easy, victorious war doesn’t pay. And this has been true for a long time.”

According to the British journalist **Norman Angell**,

“in an interdependent world (like ours), war would necessarily inflict severe economic harm even on the victor. Furthermore, it’s very hard to extract golden eggs from sophisticated economies without killing the goose in the process.”

Modern war, adds Krugman, is also very expensive; for example, the Iraq war could cost over \$ 1 trillion dollars (more on this ahead). (10)

Nobel-prize winning economist **Joseph Stiglitz** also agrees that war is bad for the economy. He explains that although WWII was often seen as moving the world out of depression, we now know this is nonsense. The 1990s boom showed, he explains, that peace is economically far better than war. Economist **Dean Baker** explains that most economic

models show that military spending diverts resources from productive uses (like consumption and investment) and ultimately slows economic growth and reduces employment. **Joshua Goldstein** points that recurring war drains wealth, disrupts markets and depresses economic growth; war impedes economic development and undermines prosperity. (10)

Mike Lofgren argues that if at one time (when weapons were compatible with converted civilian production lines) military spending was a job creator those days are gone. Today, a dollar used for highway construction, health care, or education will create more jobs than a dollar for the Pentagon buying weapons. War causes austerity, limits investments and spending on people and their needs, and generates inflation -war finances itself with inflation, creating it and expanding it. War causes inequality, damages the economy and creates huge levels of debt. **James Galbraith** wrote in 2004 that during a war prices and profits rise, wages and their purchasing power fall:

“Thugs, profiteers and the well connected get rich. Working people and the poor make out as they can. Savings erode, through the unseen mechanism of the inflation tax -meaning: the government runs a big deficit in nominal terms, but a smaller one when inflation is factored in.” (10)

In Canada, military spending has increased too; the current build-up in spending began in 1999, well before the 9/11 attack on the U.S.; but, Canadian participation in the “Global War on Terrorism” following 9/11 has been the primary driving force behind the increases. In 2010-2011 Canada reached the largest military budget since WWII. Canada is the 13th largest military spender in the world; in 2016-2017 Canada’s military budget was of C\$ 18.9 billion. As a member of NATO Canada has committed itself to a level of military spending of 2 percent of its GDP; thus, although it is currently spending about 1.2 percent of its GDP the expectation is to increase it. Pressure has increased recently; the Trudeau government agreed to increase spending to C\$ 32 billion by 2026-27, which is about 1.4 percent of Canada’s GDP. (12, 13)

Economic historian, **Julian Adorney** points that

“Hitler’s rearmament program was military Keynesianism on a vast scale.”

Hitler’s economic administrator, **Herman Goering**, poured every available resource into making planes, tanks and guns, their hope was to create a multiplier effect that would jump-start the flagging German economy. It did not happen. Military spending grew from 750 million Reichsmarks in 1933 to 17 billion Reichsmarks in 1938 -a 21 percent of GDP was taken by military spending. Total government spending was 35 percent of Germany’s GDP -the military consumed 60 percent of the budget. Military rearmament produced military wealth but private citizens in Germany starved. (11)

Still, Hitler’s war machine would not have been possible without secret funneling of British and American funds through the Bank for International Settlements (BIS). The BIS original purpose was to facilitate reparation payments imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles after WWII, the bank went beyond this. Established in Basil, Switzerland, in 1930 through intergovernmental agreements by a dozen countries, the BIS is today the central bank of central banks and essentially, a sovereign state paying no taxes, with sovereign

grounds and offices, annual secret meetings and personnel holding diplomatic immunity. The Governor of the Bank of Canada (BOC), **Gerald Bouey**, bowed to the BIS dictates in 1974, since then the BOC lost its independence (16).

In the U.S. military budget is high. Obama's budget for 2017 dedicated 63 percent to military spending, the 37 percent left covered all other expenditures but half of this discretionary part of the budget was also used for military costs as well. Trump's budget for 2018 dedicated 68 percent to military spending, the 32 percent left is to cover all other expenditures. A huge percentage of the U.S. budget is spent in the military and in war. (14)

When War costs Trillions...

Professor Neta Crawford makes a conservative estimate of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, she explains that they have and will cost more than \$4.79 trillion of U.S. dollars. In her estimate she includes future veterans' care and the President's request for FY2017 Overseas Contingency Operations, but not all future interest on debt associated with the wars as, she says,

"This will likely be many trillions of dollars."

Her paper estimate does not include all the costs of the war for which it is difficult to come to a reasonable estimate or which are smaller and scattered in various federal and state budgets. She says:

"For example...I have not included the various costs of veterans' care that have fallen to state and local governments or other costs externalized to military families and Americans more generally. Nor have I estimated the macro-economic consequences of the wars."

Professor Crawford estimate of current and future costs of war greatly exceeds pre-war and early estimates, most being optimistic she says. In her view,

"the most comprehensive estimate of the long-term budgetary costs of both wars -including direct and indirect spending and other economic effects — is The Three Trillion Dollar War by Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes."

She argues still that costs of war have exceeded even their cautious estimates. Crawford estimate make the post-9/11 wars very expensive, at more than \$4.79 trillion current U.S. dollars (see table below). In addition, she includes cumulative interests on past appropriations by 2053 of 7.9 Trillion U.S. dollars to a total cost of 12.69 Trillion U.S. dollars.

**Summary Costs of War in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria,
and Homeland Security FY2001-2016**

Federal appropriations and expenditures	\$Billions¹
Total Dep't of Defense spending on wars ²	1,630
Total State Department and US/AID spending on wars	112
War-related additions to Pentagon base budget ³	733
War-related veterans care and disability ⁴	213
War-related additions to Homeland Security ⁵	548
Interest on Pentagon war appropriations	453
Subtotal FY2001-FY2016 costs⁶	3,689
Estimate of future obligations Incurred for veterans care, FY2016-2053 ⁷	1,000
Dep't of Defense, request for FY2017	60
State Department/USAID, request for FY2017	6
Homeland Security, request for FY2017	37
Total costs to date⁸	4,792
Plus additional cumulative interest on past appropriations (FY2001-2013) by 2053⁹	>7,900

In summary, the actual costs of war are difficult to put in numbers and even the numbers calculated by experts are so huge that are still difficult for most of us to grasp, we are talking about trillions of dollars in the case of the U.S. where actual costs have been well documented and where a large portion of war expenditures is taking place. There is much that has not been documented including the expenses paid by U.S. allies but also expenditures that are challenging to document, such as the costs of economic and infrastructure destruction, the costs of loss of life, incapacitation and human suffering of others involved and victimized, the costs of human rights violations and the costs of ecological destruction. Furthermore, with perpetual war there is a risk of precipitating our planet into an international conflict involving use of nuclear power that would cause ultimate destruction of our species and home. A focus on war seems pessimistic; most importantly it leaves out the only sane alternative: peace. We need to refocus on peace, to see peace for what it is: our only option. We already know that peace is good for the economy, for people, for other species and for our planet; we know war continues to cause ruin, pain and destruction to the financial benefit of few. Butler saw the challenge in 1933 and more than 80 years later we are still unable to make war a thing of the past. We are allowing war to escalate risking world proportion holocaust. We are the only ones who can stop the craziness.

Notes

1. **“War is A Racket”** (Major General Smedley Butler, 1933)

<https://ratical.org/ratville/CAH/warisaracket.pdf>

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7. "DEW Line: Canada is cleaning up pollution caused by Cold War radar stations in the Arctic." (Sandro Contenta, The Star, August 4, 2012).

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9. "The Human Toll of the Post 9/11 Wars." (Catherine Lutz & Yidan Zeng, video (2016) Watson Institute International Public Affairs, Brown University). <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar>

10. "Economists destroy the myth that war is good for the Economy." (Washington's Blog (June 11, 2016). <http://www.washingtonsblog.com/2016/06/top-experts-war-bad-economy.html>

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12. "**Canadian Military Spending 2010-2011.**" (Bill Robinson, Foreign Policies Series, Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives).

13. "Canada Increase Military Spending NATO" (The Guardian, June 7, 2017).

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14. "Costs of War, Last Obama budget (2017) vs Proposed Trump budget (2018)" (Watson Institute International Public Affairs, Brown University).

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<http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/Costs%20of%20War%20through%202016%20FINAL%20final%20v2.pdf>

16. "**Beyond Banksters. Resisting the New Feudalism.**" (Joyce Nelson, Watershed Sentinel Books (2016).

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