

The 'US Way of War' from Columbus to Kunduz

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The confluence of Columbus Day Weekend and the Kunduz hospital bombing has us thinking about the deep levels of cultural violence in the United States and what can be done to change it. How does the US move from a country dominated by war culture to one dominated by a humanitarian culture? And, how do we do it in time to avoid war with China and Russia, which both advanced closer this week.

What does Celebrating Columbus say About the Character of the United States?

Popular Resistance has reported on the [the legacy of Columbus](#). [Howard Zinn](#) describes the true history of Columbus and the Indigenous people of North America. There is a great need for the Columbus myth to be [revised with realities](#). When the truth is understood, it is evident the US [is celebrating a brutal war criminal](#) and that it is [time to abolish Columbus Day](#).

After-all, Columbus lost at sea, “discovered” a continent, or an island near it, where up to a hundred million people already lived. He enslaved the indigenous peoples, treating them as workhorse animals and sex slaves; he fed live natives to his dogs and cut off the hands of those who did not work hard enough; he slaughtered tens of thousands, beginning a process of ethnic cleansing across the continent, and his son was one of the originators of the African slave trade.

Many [Indigenous peoples of North America do not celebrate Columbus Day](#) because the reality of his human rights violations make it a celebration of [a brutal war criminal](#). Cities are renaming Columbus Day as Indigenous People’s Day, or after local Indigenous Peoples. The most recent are [Albuquerque](#) and [multiple cities in Oklahoma](#). Others include [Seattle](#), [Bellingham](#), [Minneapolis](#), St. Paul, Berkeley, Portland, Lawrence, and Santa Cruz. Alaska, Hawaii, Washington and Oregon, do not recognize Columbus Day, which did not become a US federal holiday until 1937.

This is an international movement. [In 1977](#), the International Indian Treaty Council, the international arm of the American Indian Movement, called for the global end of the celebration of Columbus Day and declared instead the International Day of Solidarity and Mourning with Indigenous Peoples. Throughout the years we have seen aggressive protests in Latin American countries over Columbus Day. In 2013 [15,000 protesters, organized by Indigenous Peoples in Chile](#), called for an end to Columbus Day and the police turned water cannons on them. Thousands more marched in 2014 in [Chile and the police attacked Columbus Day protesters](#) with tear gas and water cannons. The Columbus protests are tied up with disputes between the largest Indigenous community over rights to the ancestral lands. This July, in Argentina after years of protest, a [statute of Columbus was taken down](#)

[and replaced by a female freedom fighter](#) central to their fight for independence. Progress has come with conflict:

“[In 1982](#), Spain and the Vatican proposed a 500-year commemoration of Columbus’s voyage at the UN General Assembly. The entire African delegation, in solidarity with Indigenous peoples of the Americas, walked out of the meeting in protest of celebrating colonialism—the very system the UN was supposed to end. The commemoration was crushed, and the UN declared a celebration of the World’s Indigenous Peoples Day and the Decade for the World’s Indigenous Peoples, which began in 1994. The second Decade was declared in 2005, and the UN adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.”

The Vatican continues to show ongoing blindness on Indigenous issues. The Pope failed to denounce [“The Right Of Conquest”](#) which provided legal justification for colonization and stealing of land and resources from Indigenous Peoples. Pope Francis, in his visit to the United States, canonized a California missionary, Junipero Serra, some now call the Saint of Genocide. He refused to meet with 50 Indigenous Nations to discuss the issue. [People protested the canonization](#) by replacing Serra’s name on street signs with the name Toyapurina, an Indigenous woman who led a revolt against Serra for his treating Indigenous as slaves, destroying cultural rights and actions which led to the deaths of thousands.

It is not just about renaming the day, it is about ending discrimination against Indigenous peoples. Albuquerque’s Indigenous People’s Day proclamation declares the day “shall be used to reflect upon the ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples on this land.” The reality is that Indigenous men aged 20 to 24 are the [group most likely to experience police violence](#). There is a massive, inadequately addressed reality [of missing and murdered woman](#), especially in Canada. Indigenous people continue to [fight for the survival of their culture](#) and to stop the [sale of sacred artifacts](#). And, they continue to fight to [keep their land and rivers](#) and [against extraction of energy](#), minerals and resources from their land. At the root of many problems with the ongoing ethnic cleansing is the failure to recognize treaty rights.

The US Way of War

The United States has conducted war in brutal ways since before the country was founded. In the [“Indigenous People’s History of the United States,”](#) Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, writes about the origins of the ‘US Way of War:’ “This way of war, forged in the first century of colonization – destroying Indigenous villages and fields, killing civilians, ranging and scalp hunting – became the basis for the wars against the Indigenous across the continent into the late nineteenth century.”

This week the US military received intensive worldwide criticism for bombing a Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF or Doctors Without Borders) hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. The [DoD has changed its story multiple times](#), after [MSF refuted each version](#), evolving from a mistake, to that the Afghans requested it, to that it was ordered in the US chain of command in violation of US rules of engagement. When Margaret Flowers, MD was sitting in the audience before the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing and General John Campbell walked in to testify, she wanted to make sure he heard the anger of people over the Kunduz bombing and she said “Bombing hospitals is a war crime. Stop the bombing now.” Sen. John [McCain ordered her arrested](#) for making this statement.

The DoD will be investigating itself, so we know how that will turn out before it even begins. An independent investigation is needed. The DoD's latest is to [deny a congressional request for the audio and video cockpit tapes of the bombing](#). A request for the tapes was made in closed door congressional hearings this week. DoD acknowledged they had reviewed the tapes which provided important evidence but refused access to Congress because of the ongoing investigation. Edward Snowden first suggested these tapes would provide valuable evidence and [Wikileaks has offered a \\$50,000](#) reward to find out. [DoD should release the audio and video tapes of the bombing run](#). Sign our petition to President Obama demanding release of the tapes so the truth about the bombing can be known to all.

The Kunduz bombing and recent US wars are all consistent with the "US Way of War" which includes terrorizing communities, killing civilians of all ages, denying them healthcare and even food. We see the latter two in tactics like economic sanctions that increase poverty or make prescription drugs unavailable. These tactics go back to the founders.

George Washington ordered the Six Nations of the Indigenous Peoples in New York attacked with orders to kill or capture civilians of all ages:

The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements, and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible. It will be essential to ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent their planting more. I would recommend, that some post in the center of the Indian Country, should be occupied with all expedition, with a sufficient quantity of provisions whence parties should be detached to lay waste all the settlements around, with instructions to do it in the most effectual manner, that the country may not be merely overrun, but destroyed. But you will not by any means listen to any overture of peace before the total ruinment of their settlements is effected.

In Vietnam does anyone think that the widespread use of napalm did not result in mass killings of civilians? From 1965 to 1973, eight million tons of napalm bombs were dropped over Vietnam. And, Agent Orange, the chemical poison that not only kills people, causing serious health problems for generations, but poisons the land was also used. Between 1962 and 1971, the United States military sprayed nearly 20,000,000 gallons of Agent Orange over Vietnam. By 1971, 12 percent of the total area of South Vietnam had been sprayed with defoliating chemicals, at an average concentration of 13 times the recommended level of use. Five million acres, 20 percent of forests and 24 million acres of agricultural land were destroyed.

And, Tom Hayden asks in [Democracy Journal](#) whether people remember "the US bombing of Hanoi's Bach Mai hospital on December 22, 1972, when 28 doctors and nurses lay dead among the civilian casualties? That sparked American and global outrage, caused the Pentagon to go into a defensive crouch, and spurred the mass movement for medical aid to Indochina [MAI]."

During the Iraq War, when the US attacked Fallujah, days after George Bush won re-election, [health services were the initial targets of attack](#).

By Saturday, November 6, the assault on Falluja began. U.S. rockets took out their first target: the Hai Nazal Hospital, a new facility that was just about ready to open its doors. A spokesman for the First Marines Expeditionary Force

said, 'A hospital was not on the target list.' But there it is, reduced to a pile of rubble. Then on Sunday night the Special Forces stormed the Falluja General Hospital. They rounded up all the doctors, pushed them face down on the floor and handcuffed them with plastic straps behind their backs. With the hospital occupied, those wounded by the U.S. aerial bombings headed to the Falluja Central Health Clinic. And so at 5:30 a.m. on Tuesday, November 9, U.S. warplanes bombed that clinic as well, killing 35 patients, 15 medics, 4 nurses, 5 support staff and 4 doctors, according to a doctor who survived (The Nation, 13 December). U.S. fire also targeted an ambulance, killing five patients and the driver.

[Jon Schwarz of the Intercept](#) provides a series of examples of the bombing of civilian facilities since 1991 including: Infant Formula Production Plant, Abu Ghraib, Iraq (January 21, 1991), Air Raid Shelter, Amiriyah, Iraq (February 13, 1991), Al Shifa pharmaceutical factory, Khartoum, Sudan (August 20, 1998), Train bombing, Gdzelica, Serbia (April 12, 1999), Radio Television Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia (April 23, 1999), Chinese Embassy, Belgrade, Serbia (May 7, 1999), Red Cross complex, Kabul, Afghanistan (October 16 and October 26, 2001), Al Jazeera office, Kabul, Afghanistan (November 13, 2001), Al Jazeera office, Baghdad, Iraq (April 8, 2003), and the Palestine Hotel, Baghdad, Iraq (April 8, 2003).

Throughout the Obama presidency and during the end of the Bush presidency, the US has been using [drones](#) to bomb multiple countries. There have consistent [reports](#) of drones [killing civilians](#) including [Obama killing at least 8 Americans](#). This week the Obama administration took these killings a step further, trying to deny legal access to the victims' families by [seeking dismissal of their case](#). The US is seeing [protests even in allied Germany](#) against their use of drones. Efforts to bring transparency to the use of drones have resulted in [blacked-out responses to FOIA](#) requests.

This week the US moved toward direct confrontation with Russia and China. In Syria, the US is engaged in an unauthorized war supposedly against the Islamic State in Syria, but also to achieve its [long term goal of putting in place a US friendly government in Syria](#). There is a lot of [misinformation](#) and confusion about this war, which has now been joined by Russian aerial attacks. Unlike the US, Russia was asked by the Syrian government to help prevent terrorist attacks in Syria. The US has been covertly using the CIA for ground operations with supposed moderate Syrian terrorists while also conducting an aerial campaign. There are widespread deaths of civilians and a [massive exodus of refugees](#). Rhetoric is escalating, former National Security Advisor [Zbigniew Brzezinski](#) is calling for retaliation against Russia while [Senator John McCain](#) says the US is in a proxy war with Russia. Talks in Geneva, without any preconditions as to the status of President Assad, are urgently needed.

Regarding China, last week [the US announced](#) that within the next two weeks it was going to send US war ships inside the 12-nautical-mile zones that China claims as territory around islands it has built in the Spratly Chain. The next day [China responded](#) that it would not tolerate violations of its territorial waters and told the US not to take any provocative actions. This sets up a potential conflict that the US has been stoking in the region, using allies like the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam as proxies for conflicts with China over the Islands.

War Is Not the Answer, Time to End US War Culture

[Ralph Nader](#) points to the recent war losses in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria and says there are lessons for the United States. The US has been unrestrained by international law and

used “military power anywhere and everywhere, regardless of national boundaries and the resulting immense civilian casualties.” The US has created “wonton destruction and violent chaos” and destroyed functioning governments.

Nader describes the blowback caused by “reckless slaughter of civilians – wedding parties, schools, clinics, peasant boys collecting fire-wood on a hillside – from supposedly pinpoint, accurate airplanes, helicopter gunships, drones, or missiles. Hatred of the Americans spreads as people lose their loved ones.” As a result, the US is perceived as “invaders on a rampage” resulting in countries producing an endless supply of “motivated fighters” and “suicide bombers.” US wars’ “‘blowback’ policies are fueling the expansion of al-Qaeda offshoots and new violent groups in over 20 countries.”

Nader points out that “all this could have been avoided” as there were scores of retired military officials who warned all-out war was a mistaken course. Further, al-Qaeda, the Taliban and their off shoots are not winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people with their brutal policies but their promise of law and order is better than the chaos of US militarism.

These war policies seeking to achieve full spectrum dominance have also had negative effects at home. Nader points to “the harm to and drain on our soldiers, our domestic economy, the costly, boomeranging, endless wars overseas and what empire building has done to spread anxieties and lower the expectation level of the American people for their public budgets and public services.”

How do we get out of these depraved quagmires of our own self-creation? Nader gives an answer – a change in approach to the world, an end to war culture and a move toward a humanitarian culture. As Nader says it:

Not repeatedly doing what has failed is the first step toward correction. How much better and cheaper it would be if years ago we became a humanitarian power – well received by the deprived billions in these anguished lands.

Let’s stop repeating the mistakes that have been with us since Columbus. Let’s end the American culture of war.

Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers co-direct [Popular Resistance](#). This article first appeared as the [weekly newsletter](#) of the organization.

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