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Joe Biden and the American Shame of War

Sadly, my generation had to relearn the lessons of Vietnam in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in coming to terms with our defeat, we have a chance to ensure that we do not sacrifice future generations to such folly.

– Timothy Kudo, Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, from a [NYC op-ed](#)

I'm sure President-Elect Joe Biden had some choice words when he heard about the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhriadeh in an ambush on an Iranian highway. Killings like this are naturally furtive acts undertaken by experts in the art of wetwork. Yet, it's a no-brainer that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is behind it with a stubby thumbs-up from Lameduck US President Donald Trump. The question on everyone's mind is: Can this odious duo (with the help of Saudi butcher Mohammed bin Salmon) permanently destroy a serious peace effort and replace it with a new Middle East war fever?

The legacies of our two Middle East/SW Asia Wars have come in for some pretty bad analysis and conclusions lately. I expect even Joe Biden, who supported those wars enthusiastically, would admit they both turned out to be ill-advised and very costly adventures. The cost to US tax-payers for these debacles is estimated to be as high as \$6 trillion — that's with a "t." While we're at it, we might as well add the Drug War to that list of debacles. To the many militarists in our government, they all seemed like the right thing to do at the moment.

George W. Bush's Iraq War was going to bring democracy to Iraq; yet, what it actually did was turn the keys to Iraq over to the Shiite majority that had been brutally oppressed for years by Iraq's Sunni minority. Those Shiites, of course, were close allies with neighboring Shiites in Iran. During WWI, the Brits had helped set up the Sunni/Shiite arrangement that eventually led to the Sunni rule of Saddam Hussein, the despotic leader we were certain was amassing nuclear weapons. This led to brutal house-to-house assaults, torture and targeted

killings in Sunni Anbar Province in Iraq, which, in turn, led to the rise of a truly psychotic insurgency called ISIS. This motley band of vengeance-minded crazies lacked the highly sophisticated weapons of terror the United States likes to employ against benighted places like Iraq. But ISIS was nothing if not creative and made up for its shortcomings in weaponry by relying on sensational videos of heroic, young Sunni warriors slicing off the heads of their enemies, some of them Americans. The horror stunned Americans and made them more inclined to endorse massive bombings as the only workable policy.

In the end, Iraq — a nation that under Saddam Hussein had been approaching first-world levels of sophistication in some areas of culture and society — was driven to ground to become for the foreseeable future a basket case. In 2003 and 2004, I made two 12-hour trips via SUV from Amman, Jordan, to Baghdad through Anbar Province; at truck stops and other opportunities along the way, I met a number of talkative Iraqis who made it quite clear to me they viscerally hated my leader, George W. Bush. I'm convinced some of these men likely become part of ISIS.

One of the diplomatic efforts the Obama/Biden team did that much of the world applauded was the Iran Nuclear Deal; Secretary of State John Kerry worked hard on this with the Iranian foreign minister. As did Jake Sullivan, now designated by Biden as his national security adviser. But, then, Donald Trump — with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's encouragement — torpedoed the peace deal and lay new, crippling sanctions on Iran. Trump went on to assassinate Iran's rock star military leader, Qasem Soleimani. Now, Trump and Netanyahu are determined to do all they can to destroy any chance for re-vitalizing the Iran peace deal once Biden takes office.

So why doesn't Joe Biden say something? The suggestion is he's reluctant to heat up an already hot situation. Is he reluctant because it would entail criticism of Israel? You'd think he'd have no qualms about calling Donald Trump out for such a belligerent and illegal act. But to tangle over a Mossad murder with Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu? So far, we've heard from the head of the Obama/Biden Administration's CIA, John Brennan, who wrote on Twitter that, "This was a criminal act & highly reckless. It risks lethal retaliation & a new round of regional conflict." But nothing from Biden, himself.

All we hear is [stories about the dozens of WestExec corporate militarists](#) — like Anthony Blinken and Michele Flournoy — being appointed to lead Biden's foreign policy team. These talented people have lined their pockets with defense industry connections; if the Trump/Netanyahu gambits are able to foment a 21st century de-centered war with Iran, are these corporate warriors going to resist — or feel force to go along?

I know it's graceless to say, "We told you so!" But the responsible peace and anti-war movement advocated and protested against the debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan until we were blue in the face. From my vantage point as a Vietnam veteran peace activist, American corporate militarism always seems to trump (if the pun works, so be it) those advocating for

peaceful and diplomatic responses to international problems. These humble, constructive approaches are often relegated to the aftermath of our debacles, after the hatred has reached murderous levels, when peace-seeking becomes a pathetic, last-ditch, often futile, exercise.

Vis-a-vis Iran, it would be good if, for a change, we practiced preemptive peace-making — rather than operating as if peace can only be obtained through domination. That is, the approach expressed by my neighbor's bumper sticker:

PEACE THROUGH SUPERIOR FIREPOWER!

Recently, [an Iraq and Afghanistan Marine combat veteran named Timothy Kudo wrote a powerful op-ed in the New York Times](#). He opens his piece by noting that Trump's reduction of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to 2,500 soldiers in each warzone began as a high in Iraq of 170,000 soldiers and Afghanistan of 100,000.

"This drawdown makes explicit what those of us who served in the military have long realized: We lost. . . . For the roughly three million service members whose boots touched soil in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 19 years, our defeat is a uniquely personal loss."

Unlike President Trump, Captain Kudo is an honest, courageous and compassionate man unafraid to recognize Truth when it's in front of his face and courageous enough to articulate the unpleasant fact that the US "lost" those very costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both launched in an ignorance- and fear-driven haze following the attacks on September 11th. As FDR eloquently warned, *fear-itself* took hold of American leaders and made them do some really stupid things like invade Iraq when Iraq had nothing to do with the attack on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon.

For what its worth, Osama bin Laden and his ilk were "guests" in Afghanistan, according to Muslim law. Plus, the United States had supported and armed bin Laden's fighters as religious guerrillas to turn the Soviet invasion/occupation of Afghanistan into "the Soviet Vietnam." Osama bin Laden, then, turned his hostility against the United States and bit us. One of his goals, which he wrote about, was to do what Ronald Reagan bragged about vis-a-vis the Soviet Union: Make Americans nuts so they bankrupt themselves!

"I'm resigned that these wars will finally enter the history books not only as defeats but also as stains on our national honor," Kudo says.

He quotes Michael Walzer from his book *Just and Unjust Wars*: "It still seems important to say of those who die in war that *they did not die in vain*. And when we can't say that, or think we can't, we mix our mourning with anger."

Kudo again: "I would add that we also mix it with shame. [But] shame is not a very American trait."

Indeed. If shame were an encouraged American trait, can one imagine Manifest Destiny, the winning of the west and the rise of American imperial expansion in the world? No. Reflection in these enterprises was virtually outlawed. Shameless killers were instrumental to pulling it all off. Making killers into cultural heroes is a preeminent American trait.

We can only hope Joe Biden is able to look into the future and envision a different path, a path that prepares the nation for a post-pandemic, post-depression reality that avoids shameless wars, especially one with Iran. There's a tragic failure of logic at work in the minds of men like Trump, Netanyahu and the Pompeo. They think if they use whatever underhanded methods they have in their quiver — assassinations, bombings, cyber attacks and crippling sanctions — to damage Iran's economy and cause suffering in the lives of individual Iranians, somehow that kind of belligerence is going to make us safe here in The Land of Plenty. That somehow such cold-blooded hostility is going to stop Iran from eventually obtaining a nuclear weapon. And the most illogical delusion, that somehow conventional weapons can't hurt us or won't be used against us.

This love-affair with Power that men like Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohammed bin Salmon share is the key ingredient in the classic formula for tragedy that Aristotle famously wrote about and Shakespeare made into compelling theater. Power and arrogance too often lead human beings to make stupid decisions that lead inexorably to their death.

The trouble is, Trump & Company are playing tragedy with *our* lives.

I made a one-sided contract with Joe Biden: I agreed to hold my nose and vote for him — and to encourage progressives to vote for him — in order to get rid of the disease known as Donald Trump. The other part of my one-sided contract was that, once elected, the gloves were off. Some liberal friends have asked me, why pick on Biden so soon? Because smart progressives and supporters of diplomacy over war know who Joe Biden is and how susceptible he is to following the patriotic, gravitational pull of bi-partisan Power into things like the Drug War and the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We need to hear from President-Elect Biden. What will he do? What won't he do? Let's hope he agrees with former CIA chief Brennan that the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was a "reckless" and "criminal" act that Iran is justified to be outraged about. Let's hope our president-elect doesn't come to see the latest Trump/Netanyahu murder as entrapping him and his administration in a crazy, corporate-militarist bind that, as Captain Kudo put so well, further "stains our national honor."

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JOHN GRANT is a member of [ThisCantBeHappening!](#), the new independent, uncompromised, five-time Project Censored Award-winning online alternative newspaper.