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Human Costs of War & Violence

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For the second year (2010) in a row, more US soldiers killed themselves (468) than died in combat, reports Cord Jefferson January 27, 2011 on www.good.ir. Excluding accidents and illness, 462 soldiers died in combat, while 468 committed suicide. Veterans who, after serving, suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are also at high risk. The study showed that 47 percent of veterans with PTSD had thoughts of suicide before they found help. The internal anguish a soldier experiences after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan can be far more severe than that experienced during live external combat.

More than 2 million troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. Those who do return often suffer from physical, psychological, and cognitive trauma. More than 40 per 100,000 men from the ages of 20 to 24 take their lives each year. Some deaths, which are not part of these statistics, are due to driving while under the influence of alcohol consumed due to depression. In 2008, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were 75 percent more likely to die in a car accident and 148 percent more likely to die in a motorcycle accident. By making the calculations of 40 per 100,000 per year the numbers of veteran suicides reaches into the tens of thousands nationwide since the beginning of the 9/11 wars.

In 2009, there were 381 military personnel suicides, a number that also exceeded the number of combat deaths. While the military has acknowledged an increase in suicides for some years, the corporate media tends to downplay the seriousness of these deaths by pointing to improvements and blaming the victims themselves. USA Today reporter Gregg Zoroya writes on 7/20/10, (1) “After nine years of war, the Army attracts recruits ready for combat but inclined toward risky personal behavior. It’s a volatile mix that led to more deaths from suicide, drug overdoses and drinking and driving than from warfare, an Army review concludes.”

“The Marine Corps reported a decline in suicides from 52 in 2009 to 37 confirmed or suspected cases in 2010. Among active-duty Army soldiers, there were 156 potential suicides in 2010, down slightly from 162 in 2009,” writes Zoroya in an earlier article January 20, 2011.

Chris Hedges quotes former mortuary unit marine Jess Goddell, “War is disgusting and horrific,” she said. “It never leaves the people who were involved in it. The damage is far greater than the lists of casualties or cost in dollars. It permeates lifestyles. It infects cultures and people and worldviews. The war is never over for us. The fighting stops. The troops get called back. But the war goes on for those damaged by war.”

Goddell goes on to describe how the Marines exploit young people, “Every single Marine I know goes to Iraq to help,” she said. “While I was there that is what I thought. That is why I volunteered. I thought I was going to help the Iraqis. I know better now. We did the dirty work. We were used by the government. The military knows that young, single men are dangerous. We breed it in Marines. We push the testosterone. We don’t want them to be educated....We cannot question anyone. We do what we are told.”

Absent from corporate media coverage of suicide rates among the troops, is a comprehensive analysis of the nature of the war and occupations itself. Corporate media acknowledges that “The Army and the Marine Corps, which have borne the heaviest burden in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been hit the hardest, reporting a record number of suicides in 2008. This year (2009), the toll is on pace to climb even higher. When combined, the figures paint a stark portrait of loss. More than 2,100 members of the armed forces have taken their own lives since 2001, nearly triple the number of troops who have died in Afghanistan and almost half of all U.S. fatalities in Iraq.”(2)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is also widely covered in the corporate media with the focus on the soldiers themselves and not the US government’s position in these wars and occupations. Corporate media’s framing of impacts on soldiers never questions the US policy of maintaining a military empire of occupations and wars worldwide.

Instead a bipartisan group of senators is asking President Barack Obama to change the current “insensitive” policy of not sending condolence letters to families of service members who commit suicide. A letter signed by 11 senators — 10 Democrats and one Republican — and sent May 25 urged the president to “take immediate steps to reverse the long-standing policy of withholding presidential letters of condolence” to families of troops who killed themselves. (3)

In the January 2011 issue of *American Psychologist*, the American Psychology Association (APA) dedicated 13 articles to detailing and celebrating a \$117 million collaboration with the US Army, called *Comprehensive Soldier Fitness* (CSF). It’s being marketed as a resilience training to reduce if not prevent adverse psychological consequences to soldiers who endure combat. Because of the CSF emphasis on “positive psychology,” advocates call it a holistic approach to warrior training.

Criticism arose shortly after the initiative was announced – including ethical questions about whether soldiers *should* be trained to be desensitized to traumatic events. Psychologist Bruce Levine loudly warned politicians, military brass, and the nation that if soldiers and veterans discover that they have been deceived about the meaningfulness and necessity of their mission, it is only human for them to become more prone to emotional turmoil, which can lead to destructive behaviors for themselves and others.

“This is the largest study – 1.1 million soldiers – psychology has ever been involved in” (a “study” is a common synonym for “research project”). But when asked during an [NPR interview](#) whether CSF would be

“the largest-ever experiment,” Brigadier General Cornum, who oversees the program, responded, “Well, we’re not describing it as an experiment. We’re describing it as training.”

“It is highly unusual for the effectiveness of such a huge and consequential intervention program not to be convincingly demonstrated first in carefully conducted, randomized, controlled trials— before being rolled out under less controlled conditions,” writes Roy Eidelson, Marc Pilisuk and Stephen Soldz in Truthout.org.

The Obama administration has quietly put into practice an escalation of policy (practicing an ‘incomplete idea’ is an awkward concept, can this be reworded or should this be an attributed quote? left over from the Bush II presidency: creating a de facto ‘presidential international assassination program.’ Court documents, evidence offered by Human Rights Watch and a special United Nations report allege that US citizens suspected of encouraging “terror” had been put on “death lists.” Reports of these ‘death lists’ show that Obama’s Director of National Intelligence told a Congressional hearing that the program was within the rights of the Executive Branch of the government and did not need to be revealed. At least two people are known to have been murdered by Central Intelligence Agency operatives under this program. When the program was challenged in a New York City court, the judge refused to rule, saying, “there are circumstances in which the executive’s decision to kill U.S. citizens overseas is constitutionally committed to the political branches and judicially unreviewable.”

A moral, ethical, and legal analysis of assassinations seems to be significantly lacking inside corporate media. The unquestioned announcement that the Obama administration has authorized assassinations of supposed terrorists, including US citizens, was on the front page of the *Washington Post*, January 27, 2010, by Dana Priest (4)

“After the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush gave the CIA, and later the military, authority to kill U.S. citizens abroad if strong evidence existed that an American was involved in organizing or carrying out terrorist actions against the United States or U.S. interests,” military and intelligence officials said. The evidence has to meet a certain, defined threshold. The person, for instance, has to pose “a continuing and imminent threat to U.S. persons and interests,” said one former intelligence official. The Obama administration has adopted the same stance. If a U.S. citizen joins al-Qaeda, “it doesn’t really change anything from the standpoint of whether we can target them,” a senior administration official said. “They are then part of the enemy.” Both the CIA and the JSOC maintain lists of individuals, called “High Value Targets” and “High Value Individuals,” whom they seek to kill or capture. The JSOC list includes three Americans, including Aulaqi, whose name was added late last year. As of several months ago, the CIA list included three U.S. citizens, and an intelligence official said that Aulaqi’s name has now been added. (Priest 2010)

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and the ACLU currently are challenging this notion in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. This lawsuit stems from the killing of Nasser Al-Aulaqi’s son (a U.S. citizen) who was targeted and killed by the United States Government. It is interesting to note that according to CCR Staff Attorney Pardiss Kabriaei, “The Supreme Court has repeatedly rejected the government’s claim to an unchecked system of global detention, and the district court should similarly reject the administration’s claim here to an unchecked system of global targeted killing.” The ACLU and CCR

hopes the court will rule that the U.S. Government can only kill a U.S. citizen if there is a proof of an imminent threat to life.

Focusing on American targets in a February 4 press release, Ben Wizner, a staff attorney for the ACLU National Security Project, emphasizes: “It is alarming to hear that the Obama administration is asserting that the president can authorize the assassination of Americans abroad, even if they are far from any battlefield and may have never taken up arms against the U.S., but have only been deemed to constitute an unspecified ‘threat.’” (5)

Francis A. Boyle at the *University of Illinois College of Law* writes that, “This extrajudicial execution of human beings constitutes a grave violation of international human rights law and, under certain circumstances, can also constitute a war crime under the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949. In addition, the extrajudicial execution of U.S. citizens by the United States government also violates the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution mandating that no person “be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.”

There is no corporate media-drawn correlation between the US policy of presidential assassinations and the on-ground troop engagement in outrageous human rights violations, which was made public when the German magazine *Der Spiegel* released images of smiling US soldiers kneeling next to naked children they had just massacred. The soldiers not only took the village children’s lives but also ripped out their teeth and fingertips to keep as keepsakes along with pictures of themselves holding the dead bodies up by their hair. Jeremy Morlock one of the soldiers in that group who participated in these incidents has agreed to negotiate his declaration against his colleagues and superiors, to reduce his sentence for the murders. This group of soldiers referred to themselves as “Team Death.”

Luke Mogelson from the *New York Times* covered the trial of Jeremy Morlock May 1, 2011: (6)

In a military courtroom at Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma, Wash., 22-year-old Jeremy Morlock confessed to participating in the premeditated murder of Mullah Allah Dad, as well as the murders of two other Afghan civilians. In exchange for his agreement to testify against four other soldiers charged in the crimes, including the supposed ringleader, Staff Sgt. Calvin Gibbs, the government reduced Morlock’s mandatory life sentence to 24 years, with the possibility of parole after approximately 8. The rest of the accused, who are still awaiting trial, contest the allegations against them.

The story that has been told so far — by Morlock in his confession and by various publications that relied heavily on the more sensational accusations from interviews hastily conducted by Army special agents in Afghanistan — is a fairly straightforward one: a sociopath joined the platoon and persuaded a handful of impressionable subordinates to join him in sport killing as opportunities arose. There may indeed be truth to this, though several soldiers in the platoon give a more complicated account. Certainly it’s a useful narrative, strategically and psychologically, for various parties trying to make sense of the murders — parents at a loss to explain their sons’ involvement and lawyers advocating their clients’ innocence and a military invested in a version of events that contains and cauterizes the problem. (Mogelson 2011)

While the tragic events of “Team Death” received widespread coverage in world news, [Drug-crazed killers Rogue US army unit ‘hunted humans in Afghanistan’](#), The Daily Telegraph (Australia), March 23, 2011, most US coverage focused on the individuals as rogue deviants combined with official apologies from the US military.

Additionally, Afghan Civilian deaths are usually reported in the US corporate media as isolated incidents, and/or mistakes. A comprehensive evaluation of the human and environmental costs of the war in Afghanistan is mostly ignored by the corporate media.

Afghani civilians are facing the deadliest period since the U.S. led invasion began more than nine years ago. According to the Afghanistan Rights Monitor at least 2,421 civilians were killed in Afghanistan last year, and

more than 3,270 civilians were injured in conflict-related security incidents. This means that every day 6-7 noncombatants were killed and 8-9 were wounded in the war.

In addition to the casualties, hundreds of thousands of people were affected in various ways by the intensified armed violence in 2010. Tens of thousands were forced from their homes, or deprived of healthcare and education services and livelihood opportunities due to war.

Armed opposition groups were blamed for 63 percent of the total reported civilian deaths, US/NATO forces for 21 percent, pro-government Afghan forces 12 percent, and about 4 percent could not be attributed to an identifiable armed group and were labeled “unknown” in the report. Improvised Explosive Devices were the most lethal tools, which killed over 690 civilians and wounded more than 1,800. At least 217 noncombatants died in air strikes and 192 killed in direct/indirect shooting by US/NATO forces in 2010.

The American military presence in Afghanistan consists of fleets of aircraft, helicopters, armored vehicles, weapons, equipment, troops and facilities. Since 2001, they have generated millions of kilograms of hazardous, toxic and radioactive wastes. The Kabul Press asks the simple question: “What have the Americans done with all that waste?” The answer is chilling in that virtually all of it appears to have been buried, burned or secretly disposed of into the air, soil, groundwater and surface waters of Afghanistan. While the Americans may begin to withdraw next year, the toxic chemicals they leave behind will continue to pollute for centuries. Any abandoned radioactive waste may stain the Afghan countryside for thousands of years. Afghanistan has been described in the past as the graveyard of foreign armies. Today, Afghanistan has a different title: “Afghanistan is the toxic dumping ground for foreign armies.”

Hundreds of tons of Depleted Uranium (DU) were used during the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. The US forces forbid any kind of DU related exploration programs or research. They have also covered up and denied DU’s damaging health effects, and refused to release information on the amounts, types and locations of these weapons. As a consequence, thousands of Iraqi and Afghan children and their families are suffering from various low level radiation (LLR) related diseases such as malignancies, congenital heart diseases, chromosomal aberration and multiple congenital malformations. Women in the contaminated areas suffered high rates of miscarriages and sterility.

DU weapons are manufactured from radioactive waste generated during the enrichment process of natural uranium as part of the nuclear fuel cycle. American and British armed forces fired DU bullets and projectiles for the first time against a human population and environment in Iraq during the Gulf War, 1991. When DU munitions hit their target, they ignite prophetically and generate heat that reaches a temperature of 3000-6000 degrees F? or C?. This heat causes the DU and other metals to form a gas or aerosol of nanoparticles. These nanoparticles cross the lung blood barrier, gain entrance to the cells and create free radicals. Some effects that the people are facing are immune and hormonal systems damage, disruption of thyroid function, and teratogenic toxicity as soluble DU oxides cross the placenta to the fetus, resulting in damages that range from behavioral problems to mental retardation and congenital malformations.

President Obama’s undeclared and Congressionally unauthorized war against Libya may be compounded by the crime of spreading toxic uranium oxide in populated areas of that country.

Concern is being voiced by groups such as the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons, which monitor the military use of DU anti-tank and bunker-penetrating shells.

As of late March, 2011, the US has not introduced its A-10 Thunderbolts, known also as Warthogs, into the Libyan campaign, probably because these sub-sonic, straight-wing craft, while heavily armored, are vulnerable to shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles which Libyan forces are known to possess in large numbers. Once the air-control situation is improved by continued bombardment, however, these specialized ground-attack aircraft will probably be added to the attacking forces. The A-10 has a particularly large automatic cannon, which fires an unusually large 30 mm shell. These shells are often fitted with solid uranium projectiles.