

#1417 Afghanistan, The 20-year War

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left Podcast* in which we shall learn about the potential of the end of American involvement in the war in Afghanistan, as well as some of our recent actions related to Yemen and Syria, as well as our relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Clips today are from *Breaking the Sound Barrier* by Amy Goodman, *Worldly, Deconstructed, Democracy Now!*, the *Empire Has No Clothes*, *Citations Needed*, *Intercepted* with Jeremy Scahill, and a TED Talk from Samantha Nutt.

Will Biden End the U.S. "Forever War" in Afghanistan? - Breaking the Sound Barrier by Amy Goodman - Air Date 4-15-21

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:00:33] President Biden speaking from the treaty room, the same room in the White House where president George W. Bush announced the U S invasion of Afghanistan in October, 2001. In the two decades since, over a hundred thousand Afghan civilians have been killed along with 45,000 members of the Afghan army and police, and at least 3,500 US and coalition troops

Zahar Wahab knows well the impact of the invasion and occupation on his home country of Afghanistan. Wahab, a professor of education for decades, splits his time between the U S and Afghanistan. Since the 2001 invasion, he's been helping rebuild Afghanistan's shattered education system.

ZAHAR WAHAB: [00:01:17] This invasion and occupation and the bloodshed have destroyed the country: its economy, its institutions, its infrastructure, its education, its way of life, relationships among the different ethnic groups. This occupation has been nothing short of a catastrophe.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:01:35] Professor Wahab was speaking on the Democracy Now! News Hour.

ZAHAR WAHAB: [00:01:38] The United States and its allies should never have attacked and occupied Afghanistan. It was wrong. It was illegal. And I think it was immoral. The war may end for the United States, but the war will intensify for Afghanistan. Unless something needs, must be done, and that is that we need to constitute a UN peacekeeping force immediately.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:02:04] There are no plans yet for UN peacekeepers. In the central demand of the Taliban in the ongoing peace negotiations is a complete withdrawal of foreign forces by May 1st, the date set by President Trump. Biden's delayed troop withdrawal may start then, but will it be as complete as promised?

MATTHEW HOH: [00:02:22] This does not include the thousands of men and women who are part of US special operation and NATO special operation teams, CIA teams, as well as the

literally dozens of squadrons of attack aircraft and bombers, whether they be manned or drone, that are in the area.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:02:44] That's Matthew Hoh speaking on the Democracy Now! News Hour. He's a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy. He was a Marine in the occupation of Iraq, followed by a State Department position in Afghanistan. He resigned in 2009 in protest of president Obama's escalation of the war.

MATTHEW HOH: [00:03:03] The potential for the United States to remain involved militarily is quite high, even if all 3,500 acknowledged US troops are withdrawn as well as the NATO troops. The devastation on the Afghan people is hard to imagine. That two and a half million refugees are what's registered right now, but there's been, there have been millions and millions of refugees for the last 40 years. For most of these last 40 years, the Afghans have been the largest refugee population in the world, with the exception of a period of time when the Syrians were. As the Syrians go back as that war has wound down, the Afghans, I believe, are once again the largest refugee population in the world. It's something like 70% of Afghans subsist on a dollar a day. There is no industry in Afghanistan to speak of.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:03:55] The most recent estimate of the financial cost to the United States of the war in Afghanistan over the past 20 years, from Brown University's cost of war project, is \$2.3 trillion, which could have built a lot of infrastructure in both Afghanistan and in the United States.

Instead, the US bought weapons, built soon-to-be-abandoned bases, and endlessly cycled troops or repeated deployments. Care for injured veterans and dead on the money borrowed to wage war will continue to cost US taxpayers for decades to come. This doesn't count the billion spent arming the Afghan Mujahideen to fight the invading Soviet army during the 1980s, arms and training turned against the United States and its allies decades later. On September 14th, 2001, days after the Al Qaeda attacks in the US, California Congresswoman Barbara Lee spoke on the house floor opposing military action against Afghanistan.

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE: [00:05:00] Well, I have agonized over this vote. But I came to grips with it today, and I came to grips with opposing this resolution during the varying painful yet very beautiful Memorial service.

As a member of the clergy so eloquently said, "As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore."

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:05:29] Congressmember Lee gave that speech just before casting the lone vote against the authorization for use of military force or AUMF, which remains in effect to this day. This week, Lee applauded Biden's announced troop withdrawal, adding, "This is the result of decades of hard work by activists, advocates and members of Congress committed to ending our forever wars. We must utilize this momentum to reign in executive war powers and put that power back and the hands of Congress and the people," she said.

Lee is also leading a group of 50 house members who sent a letter to president Biden, urging him to slash the Pentagon budget. She said in a statement, "As we face a global pandemic and unprecedented economic crisis, the needs of American families far outweigh the need to

continue feeding our bloated military defense budget." California Congressman Ro Khanna, a co-signer of the letter, spoke on the Democracy Now! NewsHour.

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:06:31] If you're ending the forever war in Afghanistan, as the president pointed out, that should save about \$50 billion a year, then why are we increasing at the same time, the defense budget?

We need to look at where the numbers are being allocated, and have a strategic reduction and allocate that instead in the threats that the United States faces: potential pandemics, climate change, cybersecurity.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:06:58] Ending the war in Afghanistan should be a beginning, accompanied immediately by reparations to the Afghan people.

President Biden should also end US military interventions elsewhere, starting with Iraq, and cut the military budget. After decades of war, let's give peace a chance.

America is finally leaving Afghanistan - Worldly - Air

Date 4-15-21

ZACK BEAUCHAMP - HOST, WORLDLY: [00:07:18] This is the story of how the United States got into Afghanistan in the first place. The idea was that Afghanistan was the place where Osama bin Laden was hiding out and planned the 9/11 attacks, and the purpose of the invasion was to root out the Al Qaeda presence and their safe haven, so no more future attacks could be planned in the United States. 20 years later that's not really the issue anymore. The question now is the extent to which the Taliban, which is still to be clear an Islamist fundamentalist group, but one that doesn't seem to have designs on multi-national terrorism targeting in the United States. The degree to which that group takes over parts of Afghanistan that US and allied government forces have denied them for a long period of time.

Now, Alex, the rationale for the US staying is that it needs to indefinitely prevent the Taliban from taking over the country until there's some kind of negotiated settlement between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. So what are the chances that the US decides it goes back to that kind of thinking, as opposed to really firmly following through on the 9/11 withdrawal date?

ALEX WARD - HOST, WORLDLY: [00:08:24] I think it's really low. This administration could not have been clearer that this withdrawal is going to happen despite the conditions. I think it's important to take a quick step back here. So the US was in Afghanistan for what you alluded to for two general missions, as of now. The first is to train Afghan forces to defend themselves against Taliban advances. In fact, the US has not really been "fighting in the war" for a while. We've just mostly assisting and training Afghan forces, and that's roughly, as of now 3,500 troops, maybe a little bit less.

The other is a counter-terrorism mission against Al Qaeda, ISIS and other groups, roughly 20 terrorist groups, ruffling around in Afghanistan. And the thinking up till now, quite literally now, was that we needed to remain in Afghanistan, even with a small troop presence to bolster Afghan forces against any Taliban advances and or potential takeover of the capital,

Kabul, and other regions, and to continue fighting terrorist groups and effectively killing them with drones or night raids with the special operations forces and all that.

In February, 2020, the Trump administration made a deal with the Taliban, which basically said by May 1st of 2021, all US troops had to leave, all NATO troops had to leave, and the Taliban in effect had to keep a lid on Al Qaeda activities. So they wouldn't be using Afghanistan as a base to plan attacks against the United States. That deal, it should be said, set conditions. Even though it was the US saying we were going to get up by May 1st, there were tons of caveats in that deal. In effect, it was like, look, if Al-Qaeda's planning stuff; if we see the Taliban still very connected to them; if the Taliban attacks American troops and NATO troops during this time; if they escalate violence; then we can delay or this deal is somewhat abrogated.

It should be said, there are still Taliban Al Qaeda ties, how close we are not really sure. There were still attacks on Afghan civilians and Afghan troops. So violence didn't really deescalate. However, there weren't attacks on Americans and allies. So for many experts, the conditions weren't met, the deal has been broken and yet the Biden administration has gone further than the Trump administration in a sense. They said, we're out. We're not leaving by May 1st, we're going to start our withdrawal no later than May 1st, and we're going to leave by September 11th, but we're going to leave no matter what. No conditions whatsoever. And that's a pretty big deal because even if the Taliban were to escalate attacks on Afghan troops, on Afghan civilians, heck even Americans are allies, both NATO in the US have said, we will respond in kind with violence. Like we, if you try to kill us, we will try to kill you. But other than that, we are leading by September 11th and there will be no US troops in Afghanistan whatsoever.

Any counter-terrorism forces will move to nearby bases and they're currently having those deals. So I know that was a long explanation, but all this to say is, they're not really giving themselves any wiggle room. We are out. We are out by September 11th. There won't be any US forces, contractors, anything, it looks like, in Afghanistan within a few months.

ZACK BEAUCHAMP - HOST, WORLDLY: [00:11:16] When you think and talk about the consequences of this, what seems to be at this point an inevitable US withdrawal, seems to be as the key thing here, because again, we were supposed to be gone in May and that's not going to happen now, so it's possible there's another pushback, but as Alex said, it seems unlikely at this point.

If you look at a map of what's happening in Afghanistan right now, and where the Taliban controls territory, where the government controls territory and which, as is often the case in insurgency, which places are contested with both sides having a presence. There's a map by the Long War Journal that shows this stuff, and it is really striking to look at because huge chunks of the country, the vast majority of different areas are either controlled by the Taliban or more likely contested.

Now the population centers, including Kabul, tend to be more under government control, but a huge chunk of the country is still not firmly in the government of Afghanistan's hands. And that's the case, even when the United States is still here. So one of the lines that you hear from critics of the withdrawal plan is that this is the equivalent of the United States leaving Vietnam, the evacuation of Saigon, and the inevitable fall of the South Vietnamese regime, because absent US support it just can't sustain itself militarily against the Taliban. I

don't know if it's that obvious in this case, but there is a decent chance that the Taliban simply overruns Afghanistan and reinstalls itself as the new governing force as it was before 9/11.

JENNIFER WILLIAMS - HOST, WORLDLY: [00:12:48] Yeah if you look at those maps that you're talking about, over the past 20 years, but especially in the past several years, they have been very steadily grabbing more and more territory and getting closer and closer to Kabul and other population centers. They are on the outskirts of major cities. They are, right there. And again, like you said, that's with US troops there on the ground. When all of that is gone and you just have the Afghan security forces and the Afghan military there, the question is whether they will actually, in any way, have both the technical ability and the firepower to actually be able to hold off the Taliban.

So I think there is a very good chance that the Taliban could overrun the country and that would spell disaster for millions of people living in Afghanistan. If you look at what Taliban rule was like in the nineties, when they ruled the country, it was basically like a prison for women. Women were forced to stay in their homes. They couldn't leave without a male escort. They had to be fully covered except for their eyes. They weren't allowed to work. Girls weren't allowed to go to school. They were routine floggings and stonings of women for adultery, all sorts of horrific things. All sorts of other really awful things that I won't get into. But, basically, he was just a living nightmare for women, and for many other people, LGBTQ people don't fare particularly well under Taliban rule. Many minority groups, ethnic minorities are not particularly protected, but you don't really have to even go back to that era.

The Taliban, like we just said, controls a lot of territory, and in the places where they currently rule, it's actually a mixed bag. You have some areas where they're a little bit more lax, but you have some areas where it is very strict -- their fundamentalist version of Islamist must rule. And so the idea that after 20 years, and yes, they have been 20 really long war-torn years, but they have also been 20 years in which women have had the right to go to work, have had the right to leave their homes, been able to participate in government and in even the negotiations with the Taliban. There are really striking images of women speaking at these government Taliban negotiations and the Taliban just sitting there. I never thought I would even see something like that, that they would even be in the same room as women negotiating.

So for Afghan women in particular, facing that prospect is really terrifying that every gain that they've made in 20 years could essentially be wiped out, and that is incredibly terrifying. And there are a lot of really good pieces right now that are out there, with Afghan women saying hey, please, don't forget about us, we're still here. But on the other hand, that rationale of, we want to make sure that we protect women's rights is also part of why the US has been in the country for 20 years, which is also a difficult conversation to have. Whether, that is a reason for continued military, I don't know if you still want to call it occupation, but continued war for decades. Is that, or is that not worth fighting a war over?

**Let's End the War in Yemen - Deconstructed - Air Date
2-12-21**

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:15:50] And like you said, October, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi is butchered by Saudi Arabia.

UNKNOWN REPORTER: [00:15:55] Saudi Arabia has admitted for the first time, the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi was premeditated. Khashoggi, a fierce critic of the kingdom's leadership.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:16:05] Which had an effect on Congress's willingness to speak out on the Yemen war. Is that right?

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:16:10] Absolutely and Khashoggi and in many ways is a martyr for his own cause. He was a journalist who was assassinated because he's writing about Yemen.

That's why the Saudis take his life. And it's one of the unfortunate realities of mainstream coverage of Khashoggi's murder, that people didn't say the second sentence, the reason why he was assassinated. Right. But that opens up then a condemnation of the Saudis and changes the sentiment in Congress, at least about the US-Saudi relationship, if not about fully about the Yemen war.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:16:42] So then in the spring of 2019, so now the Democrats have taken over Congress. What was it that brought Democratic leadership around to the idea that this was worth doing?

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:16:52] I think it was a cumulative process. In those two years, we kept re-introducing those resolutions with more and more sponsors. They kept hearing from the groups. There were certain horrific events. I mean, bombings that were reported where women and children literally died, reports about starvation. And then the Khashoggi murder. That was the turning point. I think after that, the leadership said we have to do something. Even before Pelosi became speaker, she had called me and said, we're going to get this moving soon after I assumed the speakership.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:17:22] Then the reason we're talking about this of course, is that president Biden has come out and said that the US will no longer assist with offensive operations in the war on Yemen.

But then I want to read you what Biden says after that. He says, "At the same time, Saudi Arabia faces missile attacks, UAV strikes, and other threats from Iranian supplied forces in multiple countries. We're going to continue to support and help Saudi Arabia defend its sovereignty and its territorial integrity and its people."

What do you think of that carve out, given that basically since World War II, any country that attacks another country has said that it's doing so in its own defense.

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:17:59] Well the Saudis, of course have used the defense to prosecute the war in Yemen. I mean, they basically launched missiles into the residential sites in Yemen to target the Houthis, claiming that they were doing that in a defensive posture to prevent an attack on Saudi Arabia. So their explanation is not going to fly, and the Congress needs to make sure that it's actually a defensive and not offensive strikes into Yemen. And we have to be vigilant to make sure that the Saudis aren't able to exploit that definition.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:18:31] So do you think that means that another war powers resolution is necessary to put Congress on record, that the US shouldn't be involved in this war in any way?

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:18:40] So Senator Sanders and I, in fact, we had a phone call the day president Biden announced to discussing re-introducing the war powers resolution, and they knew that the administration was well aware that we were planning to reintroduce the war powers resolution. And then we got these very positive statements. The statement Dawn, the Houthis not being designated as terrorist organization. The reason that matters is you basically have no commercial activity into Yemen with that designation. And that was aggravating the famine. We had this statement that the US was not going to support in any way, including intelligence, any offensive strikes.

So what we said is, let's hold off. There has been a very positive movement. But let's be vigilant. I mean, if we start to see that the Saudis are continuing to take offensive actions in Yemen, and that we're in any way involved in them, then a war powers resolution becomes necessary. So we're going to be vigilant and see how things develop.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:19:34] What is the path to actually ending this war? Like not just US involvement in it, but the war itself.

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:19:41] Right. It's more pressure on the Saudis. I mean, [Martin] Griffiths is doing a phenomenal job as a UN Envoy, and he has not had a partner with the United States and putting pressure on the Saudis to stop the bombing, to come to an agreement, to make sure that they lift the blockade that allows food and medicine into Yemen.

So the critical thing is that Saudis really need to understand that it's not just the U S isn't going to be complicit in furthering the war, the United States actually is going to be on the side of putting pressure to end the war. And I think if the Saudis feel that pressure sufficiently Griffiths, who's, in my view, close to the finish line, can have the leverage to end the war.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:20:24] Biden rather remarkably during the debate, during a presidential debate, referred to Saudi Arabia as a pariah.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:20:30] I would make it very clear. We were not going to in fact sell more weapons to them. We were going to in fact make them pay the price and make them in fact, the pariah that they are. There's very little social redeeming value in the present government in Saudi Arabia.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: [00:20:48] Is this the number one thing that Biden wants of Saudi Arabia to, for them to end this war in order to repair the relationship that was so fractured over the last four years?

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA: [00:20:59] It seems to me, it is. I mean, I, from my conversations with the Biden administration and from the fact that this is the first foreign policy speech, really, of President Biden. And that's the first thing he says. I think it shows the level of priority that people put on it.

I think you also have individuals in the administration who were part of the Obama administration, who genuinely regret what has happened, and view it as part of their legacy and a matter of their conscience to fix the situation.

I think when they green-lighted, in some ways, the Saudi offensive, they didn't think it would lead to the absolute disaster that it has. So that leads me to believe that it is a very high priority. The appointment of a special envoy to Yemen suggests that. And I think Bob Malley in Iran suggests that the administration is going to prioritize ending the war.

A Crisis Made in America Yemen on Brink of Famine After U.S. Cuts Aid While Fueling War - Democracy Now! - Air Date 9-17-20

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:21:51] I want to go to a briefing that Mark Lowcock, the under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, gave on Tuesday to the U.N. Security Council. He called out the oil-rich Gulf states for turning away from the situation in Yemen

MARK LOWCOCK: [00:22:05] several donors, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, who have a particular responsibility, which they have discharged in recent years, have so far given nothing to this year's U.N. plan. It is particularly reprehensible to promise money, which gives people hope that help may be on the way, and then to dash those hopes by simply failing to fulfill the promise. More than 9 million people have been affected by deepening cuts to aid programs, including food, water and healthcare. continuing to hold back money from the humanitarian response.

Now. ~~will~~ be a death sentence for many families.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:22:54] That's the U.N. Under-Secretary-General, ~~to~~ Mark Lowcock. ~~So~~ Nima Elbagir, if you can talk about, it's even wrong to say the Gulf States have turned away from Yemen. They have not turned away from Yemen. They are constantly bombing Yemen. In fact, on Tuesday, president Trump stood with the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates.

~~and~~, of course, we know Saudi Arabia leads the bombing, bombs provided by the United States. And part of the deal didn't actually have to do with the Palestinians, that was signed off on at the White House. It had to do with the United States selling the UAE F-35 fighter-bombers. Can you talk about the significance of once again, these weapons deals to hunger and the devastation of Yemen.

NIMA ELBAGIR: [00:23:46] ~~Well~~, it sends a message. Doesn't it? it sends a message, not just in Yemen, but it sends a message around the world that you can do what you want to do as long as you ~~to~~ as long as you sign up for our key concerns. And a number of us diplomats have described to me conversations that they've had with the UAE and with Saudi Arabia ~~and~~, essentially the subtext of the conversation was ~~to~~, ~~well~~, we have signed.

The UAE has signed a peace deal ~~with~~, Israel. And we know that this is a key priority for the Trump administration. ~~So~~, what more do you want from us?"

What we know about Yemen is that Yemen was a national security risk to the United States. It was home to the most effective franchise of al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who at one point got very far in a plot to put a bomb on a plane and send it to the United States. That was always given as the excuse for the reason why the United States needs to continue to be engaged in Yemen. What has happened with allowing key U.S. allies like the UAE and Saudi Arabia to do what they have done in Yemen is that this hunger and this conflict has allowed not just al-Qaeda, but ISIS to become resurgent in Yemen again. Just this last week, there were a number of pretty effective ISIS and al-Qaeda attacks. The U.S. is measurably less safe because of what their allies have done in Yemen. But one of the things that is really interesting, that so many of us that are covering foreign affairs are looking at really closely is that the ICC, the international criminal court has now said that the chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda can begin to look into our war crimes in Afghanistan.

And that is precedent-setting, because given what the report, the unredacted version, shows about the U.S.'s disregard for civilian casualties perpetrated by their allies with their bombs, there is a real conversation that is beginning about whether the U.S. is opening itself up for further cases of war crime prosecution on Yemen. And it's a pretty incredible case that is being discussed.

And yet, any time that you bring this formally in on record to the state department or to Trump administration officials, they say. Well, this is about American manufacturers about American workers being able to make money out of American bombs, being dropped in Yemen.

And what we have seen with the engagement that we have found, not just for this piece, but also for the previous investigations that we've done is actually and, actually, I take heart from this — is that so many of our audience, whether it's in America or around the world, don't believe that. They don't believe that money should be made over the deaths of innocent civilians halfway around the world, in a country that was already a humanitarian disaster even before this ill-thought-through intervention.

Biden Bombs Syria - Empire Has No Clothes - Air Date 3-17-21

KELLEY VLAHOS - HOST, EMPIRE HAS NO CLOTHES: [00:26:51] What is discouraging is that ISIS wouldn't even be in existence if we hadn't invaded Iraq in the first place. And we were out of Iraq, mostly, when ISIS started taking territory, and we had to go back in using airstrikes and support for the Iraqi military, for which we had already poured billions of dollars in training over the years, they still couldn't handle their own security. They couldn't take back that territory that ISIS had been gobbling up all the way through 2014 and beyond. So we are still there contesting or protecting or securing parts of Iraq that their own military should be able to handle. So that's the answer to that question. Why are we still there? Because we feel that the Iraqi military that we had been training for the last almost 17 years can't handle their own security. But the problem is, the longer we stay there, the more we become targets for these attacks by Iranian-backed militias. Ironically, some of those same Iranian-backed militias had helped us get rid of ISIS during the sort of second wave that we were there in after 2014. So it's really what they call an S_ show. And I don't know how to answer that more clearly than to say, what's in it for us at this point? How is having, I don't

even know how many, several thousand troops in Iraq remaining, how is it protecting US interests? Why is it in our interest to remain there? Because to me, it seems like, you said, Dan, we're just sitting ducks. As for Congress, I think it's proven, it's been proven in the past that presidents can get away with these targeted bombings, whether it be in Syria or Iraq or assassinating Qasem Soleimani, and Congress will basically do nothing. They'll make a big show of putting out statements and demanding that the president come and brief them after the fact. But until they actually take action, as a body, and not just the House and not just the Senate, but as a body, and really push, presidents, whether they're Democrats or Republicans, are going to think they can get away with this.

MATT PURPLE - HOST, EMPIRE HAS NO CLOTHES: [00:29:21] Yeah, it's almost more of a tic than a war at this point. Right? I mean, why are we continuing to bomb these militias? Because that's what we've always done. We pass a budget and we have the state of the union address. And we also kill Shiites in Iraq and Syria.

And this supposed break from the Trump administration, right, that Joe Biden was going to implement, well at the beginning of his administration, Biden was shooting down Iranian drones in Syria. Biden was accidentally killing Syrian soldiers in Syria. Biden later in his administration, or I'm sorry, Trump later in his administration was targeting some of these same Shiite militias that we're now targeting. Trump assassinated Soleimani, which caused a lot of these flare ups with the Shiites in Iraq to start taking place.

I was saying Biden earlier, by the way, I meant Trump. Sorry about that.

But there really is no break. It's just the continuing of this kind of low grade, low burn war that we've been engaged in for so long. And, to your point, Kel, ultimately, if you're going to win something like this, and I don't even know what victory would look like at this point, but if you're going to win something like this, you need a patron on the ground, right? Unless you're prepared to invade and occupy Iraq and Syria again, and I would assume Iran too, you need somebody on the ground who you can work with. And the question is, who is powerful enough to do that right now? We know the armed forces in Iraq aren't going to be able to stand up. They haven't in the past, they got steamrolled by ISIS. They've been steamrolled by the Shiite militias. And the government, I appreciate the Iraqi government declaring Kata'ib Hezbollah, the group that bombed the Erbil airport and Biden later bombed, to be an enemy. And that's good, certainly. But other Shiite militias are deeply intertwined with the Iraqi state. In fact, they're a function of the Iraqis. They're integrated into the economy. They command entire sectors. They use their muscle to extract bribes and to perpetrate corruption. This is what Iraq looks like right now. This is what we've turned it into. And we've been fighting Kata'ib Hezbollah since the Iraq war itself, back when we were also fighting the Mahdi army, these groups just keep blending into one another.

And what is our plan for victory here? Instead of just lobbing a bomb here and there, which is what's become really the modus operandi, what do we plan to do to stop this? And if nothing else, if there's nothing that can be done, which there isn't, why don't we get out already. Like what interests do we still have in doing any of this? It just it's discouraging. I understand the impetus by the Biden administration to say, okay, we were attacked. Therefore we need to attack back. Our credibility is on the line. It's a tit for tat. There is a logic there. I don't deny it. But you have to look at it in the bigger picture. And the bigger picture shows that we are just, there's nothing that can be done. This is wholly futile.

DANIEL LARISON - HOST, EMPIRE HAS NO CLOTHES: [00:32:00] That's right. And I mean, if we're looking at the bigger picture, we need to remember that this is taking place against the backdrop of a very slow, and it seems to be ineffective, approach towards diplomacy with Iran.

One of the Biden's catchphrases now is to say, "Diplomacy is back," whenever he gives a foreign policy speech. And yet the actual diplomacy seems to be quite elusive. And of course it's possible that you can have military action and diplomacy working in tandem. They're not mutually exclusive necessarily. But it is troubling given the very slow pace that the US is taking on the nuclear deal that Biden chooses to strike at an Iranian-backed group, even if it may be justified, as a way of sending a message to Iran. And so after the airstrike they then also sent a message by way of Switzerland to say, okay, and now we want everything to calm down and stop. Well, if you want everything to calm down and stop, you don't go and blow up someone else's base. You exercise some restraint. And I think there's a warped assumption that a lot of people in foreign policy circles have that if you don't strike back against every provocation, that is weakness. When in fact we are the far more powerful state, we're the far more powerful force in the region. We don't have to respond to every provocation. We don't have to engage in these sort of overkill responses. And what we see from these responses is that they don't actually deter anything. They don't stop these attacks from happening in the future. If that had been the case, this most recent one would never have happened.

We've been quote unquote, restoring deterrence in Iraq now for several years. And we have to look at the real cause for these hostilities. And that's the part that you are the ongoing military presence in Iraq that isn't wanted and our sanctions policy towards Iran, which Biden has so far done nothing to lessen.

And as long as you have those two things, you're going to have a pushback from Iranian-backed groups in Iraq. And so if you really wanted to resolve the issue permanently, you would actually try to deal with the Iranians and meet them halfway on the question of re-entering the nuclear deal. And unfortunately, what we've seen over the last month is a Biden administration that doesn't want -- it's so desperate not to be perceived as weak that it refuses to follow through on its own promises.

And of course, that just makes them look ridiculous.

The Art of Fake-Ending Wars - Citations Needed - Air Date 4-14-21

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:34:41] In February of this year, newly minted president, Joe Biden, announced the end of the war in Yemen, which we'll talk to our guest about and get to a more detailed later, and when that announcement was made, there were two huge qualifiers in the announcements that were big red flags that we found fascinating that no one was really mentioning, which is that Tony Blinken when, he made the announcement, said they were still going to support "defensive operations" and that they were going to limit or curb arm sales or pause arm sales. And then, with the fine print, they said they were going to continue their arm sales anyway.

And what was interesting about it at the time is when we talked about this offline is just how much the media uniformly, BBC, New York Times, even Democracy Now!, and supposed progressive outlets, trumpeted the headline that "Biden Ends the War in Yemen" or "US involvement in the war in Yemen", and now that two months have gone by and the war has actually gotten worse in many ways, again, as we'll cover with our guests, there was no sense of follow up of how exactly did we limit our participation in the war in Yemen? What is the US doing to actually end the war, if anything, at all? And the predictable reality that these qualifiers that were thrown in by Secretary Blinken were there for a very specific reason, which was to not really end the war.

And this got us talking about how many times in our lives, there has been endings of wars announced that were later then actually JK or not really or the kind of hype didn't really live up to what was promised us and then we realized in our research and discussing this, that it was actually quite common.

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:36:10] Yeah, this actually happens all the time.

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:36:12] US presidents have a history of announcing the end of wars or pronouncing the intent to end the war without actually doing so at all. And then that raises a question of who exactly are these announcements for and whether or not, god-forbid, the media ought to be skeptical of announcements of intention or announcements of a vague process rather than the substantive evidence that said war has actually ended or troops have actually been withdrawn. ~~Right?~~

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:36:38] What are the actions that provide the proof that wars are over or military occupations have ceased? I think a perfect example to start with is going into how many times we heard about Obama ending the war in Afghanistan, pulling out of US occupation troops there, and how often the media lapped it up and then fed it back to all of us as yet another example of Obama sticking to his word.

Remember what we heard on the campaign trail, where he was going to bring the troops home and that there were dumb wars and he's not going to do stupid things. You know what, after more than a decade in Afghanistan, Obama's going to do it. He's going to end another war. So during his presidency, Obama promised multiple times to end the war in Afghanistan. In both 2012 and 2013, he claimed that war was it'd be over by the end of 2014. And lo and behold, in December of 2014, the United States and NATO formally ended the longest war in US history, the occupation of Afghanistan, with a flag lowering ceremony and Kabul, Afghanistan.

Now media outlets, of course, were quick to parrot this message, "the war has been ended." For example, CBS news had a headline that ran on December 8th, 2014, saying "US, NATO officially end Afghan combat mission." The article would go on to state, "the US and NATO have ceremonially ended their combat mission in Afghanistan, 13 years after the September 11 terror attacks sparked their invasion of the country to top all the Taliban led government. NATO's international security assistance force joint command, which was in charge of combat missions, lowered its flag Monday, formally ending its deployment."

However, even as these articles ran, there were signs that the war in Afghanistan was not in fact ending. Like, just the previous month, November of 2014, Obama had signed a secret

order green-lighting a more expansive military operation in that country, as the New York Times reported, saying this, "Mr. Obama's order allows American forces to carry out missions against the Taliban and other militant groups, threatening American troops or the Afghan government, a broader mission than the president described to the public earlier this year, according to several administration, military and congressional officials with knowledge of the decision. The new authorization also allows American jets, bombers, and drones to support Afghan troops on combat missions."

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:39:14] Meanwhile, Obama was already going back on the promised troop withdrawals. Right around the time of the flag lowering ceremony, then Defense Secretary, Chuck Hagel said that there would be a thousand more troops kept in Afghanistan in 2015 than had previously been promised by Obama. And then there was the US Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement signed in September, 2014, that secured another decade of US troop presence, meddling, training, arming, and funding of the Afghan military. And not only had Obama prolonged war in Afghanistan, which was already 13 years old in 2015, a year and a half after the end of the war, Obama stated that he would not withdraw troops in Afghanistan because quote, "Afghan forces are still not as strong as they need to be."

Obama then announced that the US would keep thousands of troops in Afghanistan through the end of his term in 2017. At the time of Obama administration officials insisted that he in fact, had not ended the war, that he had not broken his promise by the ironically named Josh Earnest, Obama's Press Secretary, "over the last seven years, we've made a lot of important progress." Homeland Security Advisor, Lisa Minako said that the open-ended mission would be to prevent a safe haven for terrorist groups and "endearing security partnerships with authorities and Kabul"

So Obama, on two separate occasions in 2012 and 2013, I think most notably during the 2012 election with Romney, had promised that within two years of the war would be over. It's now 2021 and US troop levels in Afghanistan are relatively stable, they're still there in Afghanistan, and there's no indication that they're going to not be there for some time.

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:40:37] But they lowered a flag, Adam. They had a ceremony and they took a flag down.

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:40:40] And so I felt like I was going crazy cause I was like, "didn't Obama end the war?" Another thing that Obama did is he promised to end the war in Iraq, which formally he did. American troops for the most part did leave Iraq in 2011, but it's important to note that it was reported partly at the time that Leon Panetta and Obama wanted to keep thousands of American troops in Iraq, but because of the WikiLeaks cables in the collateral murder video, which showed the mowing down of Iraqi citizens by American troops, had caused such an outrage that in many ways, Chelsea Manning was responsible for ending the Iraq war because the WikiLeaks collateral murder video is what caused so much outrage in Iraq that basically made it completely politically untenable for the Iraqi Congress to give the Americans the immunity clause they demanded to stay, which is to say, American troops can not be prosecuted by Iraqi courts.

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:41:26] Which is what the Obama administration wanted to maintain.

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:41:29] So again, they even tried to fake end the war in Iraq, but because of WikiLeaks cables that Chelsea Manning had blown the whistle on, it became politically impossible for them to do that. So that's an example of when US technically did pull out, for three years before they came back in August of 2014 to sensibly fight ISIS and other bad guys in West Iraq and East Syria, that they had actually wanted to stay. So that was an attempted fake ending.

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:41:52] But due to a Status of Forces agreement that demanded that all US troops withdraw from Iraqi territory no later than December 31st, 2011 that was not altered by the Iraqi government.

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:42:04] Otherwise, the Obama administration would of had to effectively re-invade Iraq. And so that was a failed, fake attempt. So that was a war we actually did briefly end for about two and a half years.

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:42:13] There were still plenty of military advisors and contractors in the country and the largest "foreign embassy", which is really just a military base on the planet. But hey, it was ended in a different way than say Afghanistan.

ADAM JOHNSON - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:42:27] Another place we see emerge the kind of faking ending the war is the supposed Biden withdrawal or desire to withdraw from the Afghanistan war, something that's the last two presidents had promised that never came to be over a span of three terms, over the span of 12 years. So what they do now with Biden, which you see also with the "border crisis", is that what was now a deliberate act by the most powerful person in the world, which is ethnic cleansing policy at the border by way of parallel, which is to say the Afghanistan war is something they can control, now mysterious forces are thrust upon Biden and he has no real agency over the process. We're now back to the "woe is me" quagmire, the situation is the problem, not necessarily the decisions made by the person at top.

And you see this framing now with matching Biden's campaign rhetoric, because he campaigned in the war in Afghanistan, quite explicitly, and now mysterious outside forces make the US having to stay in Afghanistan. Typically there's two excuses that are used: they need to fight for women's rights, everyone knows that NATO in the US are women's rights organizations with guns; or if they leave, they'll cede to the evil Russians and Chinese.

NIMA SHIRAZI - HOST, CITATIONS NEEDED: [00:43:29] So, you see this kind of dilemma framing of the Biden pending decision about what to do with Afghanistan. You see this in the New York Times on February 16th, 2021, an article headlined "Stay or Go? Biden, Long a Critic of Afghan Deployments, Faces a Deadline".

And the article says this, "Mr. Biden, one senior aid noted, started his long career in the Senate just before the United States evacuated its personnel from Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam; the image of helicopters, plucking Americans and a few Vietnamese from a roof was a searing symbol of a failed strategy. Mr. Biden is highly aware of the risks of something similar transpiring in Kabul, the Afghan capital, if all Western troops leave and he has privately described the possibility as haunting, aides said.

But the president also questions whether the small remaining contingent of Americans can accomplish anything after 20 years in which almost 800,000 US troops have deployed, or whether it will ever be possible to bring them home."

So again, you have this framing where it's not about all the people that US troops have killed or a country that was destroyed, or people living in a country having control over their own destiny, self-determination, none of that. It's all, "let's not repeat the Vietnam mistake where American might was defeated and we were humiliated and we fled."

Joe Biden's War Powers - Intercepted - Air Date 4-28-21

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:44:57] Joe Biden is an unprecedented president of the United States. There's the obvious things, ~~you know~~ at 78 years old, he is the oldest person ever sworn into office. And back in 1972, when he ran for the U.S. Senate, and wins, he ends up being sworn in at the age of 30, which made him one of the youngest people ever elected to the United States Senate

BOB CLARK: [00:45:28] they gave a surprise party yesterday for Joe Biden who will make history because of his age when he takes his seat in the new Senate. If he stays in the Senate 'til the end of this century, he'll be 57, the average age of senators now.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:45:42] What that means, especially in the internet age, is that we have this serpentine paper trail that follows Joe Biden into the White House: much of it is documented on the internet.

MURTAZA HUSSAIN: [00:45:55] And ~~you know~~, a lot of information just ~~kind of~~ disappears after a while, it's very ephemeral. So we had to do a lot of research beyond just what's immediately available online, digging into transcripts and archives. The utility of this project, at least, is that it allows people to chart the contradictions in the positions of somebody who's now the president. And this may give people a sense of how he may govern.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:46:21] As Maz and I started digging into Joe Biden's history and looking at his positions, what we realized is that by studying Joe Biden, you can ~~sort of~~ study the growth — the expansion, the abuses, the mistakes, the victories — of the project of building American empire. And what ~~you see~~ is that Joe Biden has been at the center of some of the most consequential decisions made by the U.S. government to go to war, to conduct espionage operations across the world. And what emerges is a picture of Biden as a true empire politician.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:47:02] I am not culturally one of those guys who likes to — I don't fit very well. I'm not a joiner. I don't go out. I'm not very, I was out of sync with — by the time the war movement was at its peak when I was at Syracuse, I was married. I was in law school. I wore sport coats. I was not part of that. I'm serious!

So I find y'all going back and saying, "~~Well~~, where were you Senator Biden at the time?" ~~You know~~, I think it's bizarre. I think it's bizarre. And then when the movement did catch up, I was a 23-year-old guy, married. And look, you're looking at a middle class guy. I am who I am. I'm not big on flak jackets, and tie dye shirts. And, ~~you know~~, that's not me.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:47:57] Joe Biden's view on the Vietnam War was not, "Wow, two million Vietnamese have been killed. 65,000 American service members have been killed." Biden's position on that war was that it was what he called "a tragic mistake based on a faulty premise." So Biden enters the U.S. Senate not having been an activist on any domestic issues, not having been an activist on any of the premier global issues of the day. But he comes into a Senate that is just starting to grapple with the incredible damage that was done, particularly by Richard Nixon and his administration, but also a CIA that was out of control that was engaged in domestic spying inside the United States, was conducting coups and assassinations abroad. And Biden ~~sort of~~ gravitates toward the crowd of people in the Senate that were taking on questions of accountability for the CIA and "What is the role of Congress?" And so Biden ends up being an original member of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee which was established so that there would be oversight of the CIA and oversight of the executive branch.

FRANK CHURCH: [00:49:05] ~~Well,~~ it's a bill that would set up a permanent Oversight Committee, bipartisan committee, with a rotating membership so that it would not be preempted by the agencies that it is to oversee, with sufficient authority both to keep the secrets that are legitimate, and to investigate — and expose — wrongdoing when it occurs. We want to be sure that this country stays free. And that means that any spy agency continues to be outward-looking to spy on foreigners, but not to be spying on Americans or not to be trampling upon the laws and constitutional rights of American citizens. That would be its purpose. And in the long run, it would contribute to public confidence in the CIA, and make for an efficient intelligence agency operating within the law.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:50:00] Biden is very good at hammering on past mistakes of U.S. militarism or expansionism — the excesses of its agencies. He's not so great at sort of addressing the potential for those things to happen as a result of U.S. policy. But he emerges early on in his career as a pretty passionate critic of not only the CIA, but the notion of the unitary executive. And it basically says: Hey, listen, Congress's only job is to finance the national security policies that the executive branch, the president, determines are necessary for our national security.

So what ~~you see you see~~ is Biden have, early on in his career, a front row seat to the great reckoning with the Nixon era, which then postures him in place to set policy going forward.

MARVIN KALB: [00:50:53] The War Powers Act was an act of congressional desperation. It grew out of the agony of the Vietnam War, and of a series of unchecked presidential commitments of troops and treasure to a cause that failed.

Finally, in 1973, after the Watergate scandal weakened the White House, Congress summoned up the courage to challenge a sitting president. Based on its constitutional authority, Congress passed a joint resolution, which obliged the president to get congressional approval if he was to commit American troops to combat or, as the law puts it, "into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances." The point was to stop the president from waging the twilight wars of modern time.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:51:38] One of the pieces of legislation that Biden signs on as a co-sponsor to in the first year of his Senate career is the 1973 War Powers Act.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:51:49] Does the Congress have greater flexibility to tell the president, for example: “Do not place any troops in Honduras, period; you are not authorized”? The President says it’s in our national interest to be in Honduras. The Congress says it is hereby declared by Congress that it is not in the national interest of the United States of America to place troops in Honduras or — let’s not pick Honduras, pick a country — in country X. And the president says, “I think it is in our national interest.” But we say ahead of time in the Congress, both houses of Congress; the President can veto it, obviously, the legislation, and it overrides the veto of the president, saying: “It is declared by Congress that no American troops should be placed in country X because it is not in our national interest.” Can the Congress do that?

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:52:46] And what ~~you see~~ is that every administration from 1973 to the present has violated that law.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: [00:52:53] Since 1798, there have been a few more than 200 military actions by the United States in foreign countries. Now, we have only been in five declared wars in our entire history. But the bulk of them, somewhere around 140 of them, were by American presidents that, on their own, put American forces in action because they believed it was necessary to our national security and our welfare.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:53:32] Biden becomes this really passionate, dedicated proponent of congressional authorities over the executive branch. When Reagan gets into power, the premier issues of the 80s were, on the one hand, Iran-Contra and, on the other hand, Reagan’s support for death squads and right-wing dictatorships in Central and Latin America,

UNKNOWN REPORTER: [00:53:54] Considering what you’ve just said about Nicaragua and your past statements about how it is a staging area there, doesn’t the United States want that government replaced? And is there anything that you feel that we should be doing within the law to have that government in Nicaragua replaced with a democratic one?

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: [00:54:13] Of course, as I said, anything that we’re doing is aimed at interdicting the supply lines and stopping this effort to overthrow the El Salvador government. But what I might personally wish, or what our government might wish, still would not justify us violating the law of the land

UNKNOWN REPORTER: [00:54:34] You’re not doing anything to overthrow the government there.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: [00:54:36] No, because that would be violating the law.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:54:46] Joe Biden, on a rhetorical level, generally speaking on a political level, was a very militant opponent of Reagan’s policies in Central and Latin America, with one caveat: Biden consistently tried to find ways to support Reagan by getting him to agree to certain adjustments of policy or to link certain aid to human rights questions. Biden was willing to support Reagan’s aid to the Contra death squads in Nicaragua if there would be certain conditions placed on how the Contras would use that funding.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:55:22] I believe we have so botched this policy, so botched the opportunities to move on the Sandinista government, in a way that puts genuine regional pressure on them, genuine world pressure on them, I think we've made their game for them by not being very bright and smart about how we have gone about it — I understand, I just want to make sure we understand, the basis upon which we disagree. And that I understand that the sine qua non to your whole policy requires that military peace, and that you're talking about that bringing about a result, hopefully, in the two-to-four-year timeframe, and I just think ~~that~~ that is not at all realistic, absent a significant — a significant — change in the amount of aid and what we're willing to back that aid up with. I see no evidence to indicate ~~that~~ that's not correct.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:56:20] Some politicians say: "No money to the Contras, they are a death squad under any circumstances." Not Joe Biden. He would say: ~~Well,~~ Reagan, ~~I guess,~~ has a right to try to finance this death squad. So let's see if we can't tinker with it and make it acceptable to me. That really is ~~sort of~~ the texture of Biden's opposition to war. He, generally speaking, is all in favor of war, but he wants to tinker with it a little bit so he can feel like he got something out of it is world news tonight with Peter Jennings.

ANNOUNCER: [00:56:50] This is world news tonight with Peter Jennings.

PETER JENNINGS: [00:56:52] Good evening. This has been another important day for the history books. In Washington today, the Senate and the House of Representatives began debating one of the most fundamental responsibilities of Congress: the right to declare war. There is nothing President Bush would like more than resounding support for going to war, if the Iraqis are not out of Kuwait by next week. No one doubts the President can start the war, but there are certainly doubts in Congress about the timing, at the very least.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:57:20] What's the hurry for war? What's the hurry?

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:57:28] Early on in his career, ~~you see~~ start to say: "Well, ~~Well,~~ you got to come to Congress, you have to respect the War Powers Act." And in fact, it leads Biden to one of the most consequential decisions of the first part of his political career, and that is to oppose the 1991 Gulf War.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: [00:57:45] Mr. President Bush, if you are listening, I implore you to understand that even if you win today 46-54, you still lose. The Senate and the nation are divided on this issue. Mr. ~~President,~~ President Bush, the debate to punish Saddam Hussein, the impatience you feel, the anger you feel, are all justified, but none of them add up to vital interest. And none of them — none of them — justify the death of our sons and daughters. First, commit this nation; then commit our troops. We will finish whatever you start, Mr. President. The sons of this generation are patriotic, as are the daughters. We will finish it. But for God's sake, don't start it unless you think it is a vital interest, which I feel strongly it is not.

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:58:42] ~~Well,~~ soon after that war is launched. And, in a way, it was a made-for-TV war, it was largely speaking an air war, it became a very popular propaganda moment in the history of the American Empire.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH: [00:58:53] President George H.W. Bush: Five short weeks ago, I came to this house to speak to you about the state of the union. We met then in time of war; tonight, we meet in a world blessed by the promise of peace. From the moment Operation Desert Storm commenced on January 16, until the time that guns fell silent at midnight one week ago, this nation has watched its sons and daughters with pride, and watched over them with prayer. As commander-in-chief, I can report to you our armed forces fought with honor and valor. And as President, I can report to the nation: Aggression is defeated, the war is over.

[Applause]

JEREMY SCHAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:59:49] And so Biden then realizes he's made a political mistake. He voted against a war that, in his perception, turned out to be a good war, a popular war. And at that moment, in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, you see the start of the transformation of Joe Biden into the very hawkish powerful senator that he would then be for the rest of his time in the United States Congress.

Samantha Nutt: The real harm of the global arms trade - TEDTalks - Air Date 6-23-16

SAMANTHA NUTT: [01:00:16] I ended up in Baidoa, Somalia. Journalists called it "the city of deaths" and they called it the city of deaths because 300,000 people had lost their lives there. 300,000 people, mostly as a result of war-related famine and disease.

I was part of a team that was tasked with trying to figure out how best to respond to this humanitarian catastrophe. And it was right on the heels of Rwandan genocide. And aid money to the region was drying up. And many aid organizations unfortunately had been forced to close their doors. And so the question that I was asked to specifically help answer, which is one that aid workers ask themselves in war zones the world over, is what the hell do we do now?

You know, the security environment in Somalia at that moment in time, and nothing has really changed too much, it can best be described as Mad Max by way of a Clockwork Orange. I remember very distinctly a couple of days after my arrival, I went up to a feeding clinic and there were dozens of women who were standing in line and they were clutching their infants very close.

And about 20 minutes into this conversation I was having with this one young woman, I leaned forward, and I tried to put my finger in the palm of her baby's hand. And when I did this, I discovered that her baby was already in rigor. She was stiff and her little lifeless hand was curled into itself. And she had died hours before of malnutrition and dehydration.

I later learned that as her baby was dying, this young woman had been held for two days by some teenage boys who were armed with Kalashnikov rifles. And they were trying to shake her down for more money, money she very clearly did not have.

And this is a scene that I have confronted in war zones the world over. Places where kids, some as young as eight, they are this big, and those kids, they have never been to school, but they have fought and they have killed with automatic rifles.

Is this just the way the world is? Some will tell you that war is unavoidably human. After all, it says old as existence itself. And we say "never again" and yet it happens again and again and again.

But I will tell you that I have seen the absolute worst of what we as human beings are capable of doing to one another. And yet I still believe a different outcome is possible. Do you want to know why? Because over 20 years of doing this work, going in and out of war zones around the world, I have come to understand that there are aspects of this problem that we, all of us, as people occupying this shared space, that we can change, not through force or coercion or invasion, but by simply looking at all of the options available to us and choosing the ones that favor peace at the expense of war, instead of war at the expense of peace.

How so? Well, I want you to consider this. There are at least 800 million small arms and light weapons in circulation in the world today. The vast majority of civilians like that young baby who are dying in war zones around the world, they are dying at the hands of various armed groups who rely on a near infinite supply of cheap, easy and efficient weapons, to rape, threaten, intimidate and brutalize those civilians at every turn. How cheap? Some parts of the world, you can buy an AK 47 for as little as \$10. In many places in which I have worked, it is easier to get access to an automatic rifle than it is to get access to clean drinking water.

And so now the important part. Can anything be done about this?

To answer that question, let's take a look at this map of the world. And now let's add in all of the countries that are currently at war and the number of people who have either died or been displaced as a result of that violence. It is a staggering number. More than 40 million people.

But you also do have something else about this map. You will notice that most of those countries are in the global South. Now, let's look at the countries that are the world's top 20 exporters of small arms in the world. And what do we notice? When you see them in green, you will notice that those are mostly countries in the global North, primarily Western countries.

So what does this tell us? This tells us that most of the people who are dying in war are living in poor countries. And yet most of the people who are profiting from war are living in rich countries. People like you and me. And then what if we go beyond small arms for a second? What if we look at all weapons in circulation in the world. Who does the biggest business?

Well, roughly 80% of those weapons come from none other than the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany. It's shocking, isn't it?

Now some of you might be saying this moment in time, oh yeah. But okay. Hang on a second there, nut. Grade school was spectacular for me, it was really wonderful experience.

But you might be saying to yourselves, you know, all of these weapons in war zones, they're not a cause, but an effect of the violence that plagues them each and every single day. Places like Iraq and Afghanistan, where they need these weapons to be able to maintain law and order, promote peace and security, to combat terror groups. And surely this is a good thing. So let's take a look at that assumption for just one moment, because you see, there has been

a boom in the small arms trade since the start of the war on terror. In fact, it is a business that has grown threefold over the past 15 years. And now let's compare that to the number of people who have directly died in armed conflict around the world in that same period. And what do you notice? Well, you notice that in fact, that also goes up roughly three to fourfold. They basically go up and end at the same point.

Now we can have a circular argument here about whether this increase in fatalities is a response to the increase of small arms or the other way around. But here's what we should really take away from this.

What we should take away from this is that this is a relationship that is worth scrutinizing. Especially when you consider that small arms that were shipped to Iraq for use by the Iraqi army or to Syria for so-called moderate opposition fighters, that those arms, many of them are now in the hands of ISIS. Or when you consider that arms that were shipped to Libya are now actively drifting across the Sahel and ending up with groups like Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda and other militant groups.

And therein lies the problem. Because you see, small arms anywhere are a menace everywhere. Because their first stop is rarely their last. Spending on war per person per year now amounts to about \$249. \$249 per person, which is roughly 12 times what we spend on foreign aid, money that is used to educate and vaccinate children and combat malnutrition in the global South.

But we can shift that balance. How do we do this? Well, it is essentially a problem of both supply and demand so we can tackle it from both sides.

On the supply side, on the supply side, we can push our governments to adopt international arms transparency mechanisms, like the arms trade treaty, which makes it so that rich countries have to be more accountable for where their arms are going and what their arms might be used for. Here in the United States, the largest arms exporting country in the world by far, president Obama has rightly signed to the arms trade treaty, but none of it takes effect, it isn't binding, until it is approved and ratified by the Senate. This is where we need to make our voices heard.

You know, the curbing of small arms, it's not going to solve the problem of war. Increased control mechanisms won't solve that problem. But it's an important step in the right direction. And it's up to all of us who live in those rich countries to make change here.

And then what about on the demand side? You know, there are generations around the world who are being lost to war. It is possible to disrupt that cycle of violence with investments in education, in strengthening the rule of law, and an economic development, especially for women. And I have personally seen just how incredibly powerful those kinds of efforts can be around the world.

But here's the thing: they take time. Which means for you as individuals, if you want to give, please by all means do it, but know that how you give is just as important as how much you give. Regular contributions, like monthly contributions, are [a] far more effective way of giving, because they allow humanitarian organizations to properly plan and to be invested over the long term and to be present in the lives of families who have been effected by war. Wars that many of us, frankly, all too quickly forget.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:10:56] We've just heard clips today, starting with Amy Goodman on *Breaking the Sound Barrier* examining the legacy of the occupation of Afghanistan. *Worldly* discussed the seemingly unconditional exit from Afghanistan now promised and the prospect of the Taliban taking over. *Deconstructed* looked at the war in Yemen and our relationship with Saudi Arabia. *Democracy Now!*, in a clip from last year, discussed the role that arms sales play in our foreign policy. *Empire Has No Clothes* discussed Biden's bombing of Syria. And *Citations Needed* looked at the history of fake endings of wars.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips, including another from *Intercepted* exploring how Joe Biden's legacy is intertwined with that of American imperialism, and a TED Talk from Samantha Nutt examined the role of arms sales in perpetuating war and violence around the world.

For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and our part of the transcript for today's episode, so you can still find them if you want to make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered to seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted. No questions asked.

And now, we'll hear from you.

Disney, racism and capitalism - Sasha

VOICEDMAILER: SASHA MILLER: [01:12:21] Hi Jay, this is Sasha.

It's strange to have a "serious" conversation about the racial makeup of "The Avenge-ers." What escape-ist fantasy, in a sea of escape-ist fantasies, by the leviathans of capitalism would be a *good* expenditure of our time and resources?

That said, I have wasted enormous amounts of my life's energies and can't help but chime in, perhaps doing so again, on my own moral repugnance of Marvel and Disney's storytelling, as well as to offer a few comments on the show.

I, too, was dismayed to see "Avenge-ers, End Game," not give equal standing and self-sacrificing virtue to characters of color. The choice to have the billionaire white man Tony Stark essentially be the pivotal hero was maddening, but after my initial emotional hostility to it, I realized how capitalism was fueling racism, not for the sake of racism, but simply profit.

If Disney is going to choose one person to be more heroic than the other heroes, wouldn't it want that hero to appeal to those in our society who control the most market share, who have the most disposable income? It isn't the dot com billionaires who Disney think's will run out and by their products, though it certainly helps sell their own vaulted glory and mythologized success, but all those people in the ranks of our technological revolution who have and can internalize the tech-genius as the hero. As well as those countless numbers

deluding themselves into thinking they might one day be a tech-billionaire of course those lauding their closeness or connections to the tech giants.

The broader point being that the sinisterness of racism doesn't always come from the Klan mentality. Given how little market capitol people of color have and control, it's pretty obvious who corporations are going to market stories and myths for.

It should also be obvious to you that choosing Tony Stark as the greatest protagonist in "Endgame" isn't just morally objectionable along color-lines, also the mythologized view of work and production it delivers. Stark doesn't need people to help him write hundreds of thousands of lines of code or engineers to work out the my-nute details of very complicated machinery, singular genius allows him to do it all himself. There is never any question about where his wealth comes from: it comes from him, not tens of thousands of employees working in his factories, not from resources extracted in impoverished communities and destroying the environment.

We do presently live in a nation where people of color are gaining market share and where their white allies are demanding their escape-ist fantasies be more woke. It's naïve then to think that Disney didn't capitalize on marketing "The Black Panther" as its woke film. And it's sad that the "left," can't praise racial inclusion, while also being critical of objectional parts of mythology of the film. How "advanced" is a society that chooses its leader in a cockfight? How is this acceptable, particularly in a film that is supposed to be speaking to African American's in particular? How mindless are a people who go along with their new leader, not because of his ideas, vision and moral character, but because he physically beat the hell out of the old leader? The rhetorical equal to this is Donald Trump.

Yes, Disney perpetuates racist stereotypes for profit, as does much of the American media. But it is important to remember that even if the US had perfect racial equality, capitalism would still dictate that billions of people of color live in abject poverty, just the portion of white people living in abject poverty would be equal to the portion of people of color living in abject poverty. It's in this vein that the "left" shouldn't just be critical of the systemic racism in Disney, but in the wealth and self-agency that has been stolen from the people, by corporations like Disney, and by everyone willing to perpetuate the idea that the work of one person can be infinitely more valuable than the work of another, whether that is a CEO or a movie star.

To counter the "right wing" sentiment that slipped into this episode I will state: "everyone is entitled to a decent life," regardless of employment status. It's the 21st Century, robots are doing more and more of the labor and the wealth of that should be public, not private, capitol.

Recommending "Somebody" podcast for example of DARVO - Pat from Chicago

VOICEMAILER: PAT FROM CHICAGO: [01:16:09] Hi, Jay, this is Pat from Chicago. I'm just calling in light of your recent episode to recommend a podcast to everyone that shows a textbook example of why, as usual, your analysis is spot on and Tucker Carlson cannot be more offensively or harmfully wrong. The podcast is called *Somebody*, it's about a young

man who was killed in Chicago and it's narrated by his mom as she attempts to investigate the murder, after the police's failure to do so, including looking at police actions themselves and how they may or may not have contributed to her son's death.

I have not finished the series, and I recommend it to everybody, but in episode three, there's a perfect example of the kind of racist institutionally, racist and harmful, deeply harmful behavior that you identify in your recent, rebroadcast, and it's even so much more powerful because rather than a White woman in a school board meeting being victimized, it's a Black mother who's lost her son, and it is directly at the hands of the police officers who should be investigating this. And it shows a textbook example of how they ignore context, historical and contemporary context, and turn around and blame her and accuse her of being racist, which in turn just blatantly disproves Turner Carlson's bad faith statement that being anti-racist is always lauded and appreciated in our country, which of course we know is not true.

So it's about the 20 to 25 minute mark of episode three of the *Somebody* podcast, I recommend that you check it out, Jay, and that any listeners to check it out as well, so that we can get smarter about this analysis and help to dismantle this fucked up system that we're dealing with.

So thanks for the work and let's keep it up.

Final comments on DARVO from the police in the Somebody podcast

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:17:56] Thanks to all of those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or a question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991. Or write me a message to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

In response to Pat, who we just heard from recommending the Somebody podcast, quick refresher, cause I'll take any opportunity to give a refresher on this, the phenomenon that Pat was referring to is called DARVO -- Deny, Attack and Reverse Victim and Offender. I explained it in great detail in the re-posted episode that Pat was referring to the one, just one click back in the feed, I think.

And I went and found the clip that Pat was referring to. It's super short. So let's just hear it and let's see if you can parse out the denial, the attack and the reversal of victim and offender.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:18:57] I believe that not enough has been done to solve Courtney's murder.

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:01] What would you like? What would you like done that I haven't done?

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:05] I, I, I personally would have went back and re-interviewed everybody to make sure that --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:09] Re-interviewed the police?

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:10] Oh, absolutely.

They assume police officers tell the truth. But I don't.

Sergeant Mitchell?

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:16] Yes. Ma'am.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:16] Based on the history that --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:19] No, no, no, no, no, no. Don't even, don't even start, why don't you talk to me?

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:23] What I'm saying to you is that this problem didn't just occur with Courtney Copeland's case, the breakdown from the community and the --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:37] I'm not here to talk politics with you. I am here to talk reality.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:42] I am talking reality.

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:44] No. I'm here to talk to Elliot about this case.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:45] Until you begin to you begin to, uh, uh, to build up --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:19:50] No. I'm done.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:19:52] These white men were having none of my experience as a black woman in Chicago.

Your department has -- not saying this particular, I'm just saying CPD in general -- has a history that has been tainted. And I know it's unfair --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:09] Absolutely, especially to these two gentlemen in this room. Absolutely it is.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:14] I know it's unfair. But that is just --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:17] Then why bring it up?

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:18] Because it's the reality of --

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:19] No it's not, not with these two guys. Cause I know him personally, and I've worked with him.. And I take offense to that.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:23] I'm not saying that they didn't even think to my son.

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:25] I take offense to that.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:26] Why?

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:26] I really do. Because you're painting with a broad brush, ma'am.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:30] It's not a broad brush when it's an everyday reality for Black and brown people in Chicago. Do you understand?

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:36] Okay. Fine. Whatever.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:37] Sergeant Mitchell.

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:38] I'm not, you know what, ma'am, I'm not going to be able --

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:40] You understand that that's the reality with Black and brown people in Chicago, or not?

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:43] No, and I'm telling you, not with us.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:20:45] I wanted them to understand that this wasn't only my perspective.

SERGEANT MITCHELL: [01:20:50] If I haven't been clear on this, I apologize. Our goal, our stated goal here is to find, arrest, charge, and convict the offenders who did this to your son.

That's our stated goal. Okay? No variance, no nothing, no politics, no bullshit. No nothing.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [01:21:12] And I'll tell you something else, regardless of what you may think of me because I'm white. [Talking back and forth] I really don't care because I've been a policeman long enough where there's some people that just, this is what they have a problem with, I want to let you know. Number one, I don't have a problem with it, if that's the way you feel and that's the way you feel about me, that's fine.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:21:35] I want everybody to focus on this case.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [01:21:38] I wouldn't let you know you, you, you could spit on the floor when you see me. It's still not going to affect me from, from, from working.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:21:45] You're doing your job.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [01:21:46] And if, whether we never talk again or we become good, a it doesn't matter one way or another to me. If something good comes that I'm able to pick up and run with, I'm going to run with it with, with your son's murder. And whether you thank me or tell me to get fucked at the end of all of this, it doesn't matter.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:22:05] I'm definitely going to thank you because that's my goal. I want to know why my 22-year-old son was murdered.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [01:22:10] So do I. So do I. But it, as far as this whole Black, brown, green shit, no, it doesn't matter to me.

HOST, SOMEBODY PODCAST: [01:22:18] I say you can't discount the history of what happened.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:22:22] My favorite part in there is, first of all, overall, how nice she's being to them, how much she's concerned about their feelings and assuring them about the unfairness of the situation.

But what's clear that's not getting through to them is what is unfair about it. They think it's unfair of her to bring it up. And she clearly means that it is unfair that the system works the way it does, and that because so many police officers have proven themselves to be untrustworthy, that it taints the rest of them.

That's unfair to everyone on every side of that equation. It's unfair for people to have to live in a community where they can't trust the police. And it's unfair for upstanding honest police officers to be untrusted because they have been tainted. That's what's unfair. And their only response, the only thing they can think to say is, well then why are you bringing it up? They just think it's unfair of her to bring it up. Unbelievable. And, uh, yes, absolutely a textbook case of trying to make her feel bad that she's attacking them actually, and them threatening to get up to leave in the middle of it because they can't handle it, is about the least surprising reaction I can think of.

So thanks to Pat for making that recommendation. I haven't heard much more of the show than what I just played for you, so you can act based on his recommendation or not.

As always, keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991, or by emailing me to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the monosyllabic transcriptionist trio, Ben, Dan and Ken for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic design, web mastering and occasional bonus show co-hosting, and thanks of course to those of you who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at BestoftheLeft.com/support as that is absolutely how the program survives.

For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all of that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from BestoftheLeft.com.