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## Trump: Yet Another War President?

By William J. Astore  
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Is Donald Trump going to be yet another American war president? Come to think of it, is there any other kind?

This is no accident. Tom Engelhardt has an insightful article at TomDispatch today about how Trump the blowhard is a product of blowback from America's failed wars, notably Iraq. There's much truth in this insight, since it's hard to imagine demagogue Trump's rise to power in a pacific climate. Trump arose in a climate of fear: fear of the Other, especially of the terrorist variety, but also of any group that can be marginalized and vilified. Think of Mexicans and the infamous Wall, for example.

In a separate post, Engelhardt noted the recent death of Marilyn Young, an historian who found herself specializing in America's wars, notably Vietnam. He cited a *New York Times* obituary on Young that highlighted her attentiveness to America's wars and their continuity.

Since her childhood, Young noted, America had been at war: "the wars were not really limited and were never cold and in many places have not ended – in Latin America, in Africa, in East, South and Southeast Asia."

She confessed that:

“I find that I have spent most of my life as a teacher and scholar thinking and writing about war. I moved from war to war, from the War of 1898 and U.S. participation in the Boxer Expedition and the Chinese civil war, to the Vietnam War, back to the Korean War, then further back to World War II and forward to the wars of the 20th and early 21st centuries.”

“Initially, I wrote about all these as if war and peace were discrete: prewar, war, peace or postwar,” she said. “Over time, this progression of wars has looked to me less like a progression than a continuation: as if between one war and the next, the country was on hold.”

As George Orwell wrote in *1984*, all that matters is for a state of war to exist (whether declared or, nowadays in the USA, undeclared). A war mentality is the driver for autocratic excesses of all sorts. It serves to focus the attention of people to various perceived enemies, whether from without or from within. It promotes simplified thinking and generates fear, and fear is the mind-killer. “Us and Them,” as Pink Floyd sang.

Aggravating simplistic and hateful “us and them” thinking in the USA is the lack of a major political party dedicated to peace. In the USA, we have two war parties. Trump knew this and readily exploited (and continues to exploit) it. He knows the modern Democratic Party won’t seriously challenge the war rhetoric that drove and drives America’s new militarized reality.

Why? Because the Democrats nurtured it. Recall that in 2004 John Kerry “reported for duty” by saluting the Democratic National Convention. Barack Obama in 2008 quickly morphed from a “hope and change” liberal to a drone-wielding assassin-in-chief while pursuing his “good” war in Afghanistan. Hillary Clinton in 2016 proudly embraced Henry Kissinger and projected a harsh exterior as a hardheaded hawk. “We came, we saw, he died,” she famously chuckled about Libya and the death of Qaddafi. Even Bernie Sanders, with all his dreams, said little about cutting the Pentagon’s budget.

You can go back further and tag other recent Democratic presidents, such as LBJ during the Vietnam War or JFK during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Candidate Kennedy wantonly exaggerated the “missile gap” in nuclear capability between the US and USSR (JFK had it backwards; it was the US that had clear superiority). Jimmy Carter took a different approach, but he too soon learned his lesson, ordering a huge military buildup (overseen by the Reagan Administration) and declaring the “Carter Doctrine” to safeguard Persian Gulf oil supplies as a vital US interest. That policy contributed in its own way to America’s recent disasters in the Greater Middle East.

Did Jimmy Carter, then, lead to Donald Trump? Indirectly, yes. America’s insatiable hunger for global resources (especially oil) and its desire for global power bred the conditions under which blowback came to America’s shores. Blowback helped to generate the fear and confused desires for revenge that Trump tapped with great success in his campaign.

Today, America’s state of incessant warfare is consuming its democracy, yet President Trump’s answer is to call for more military spending, more violent attacks overseas, and more walls at home, all in a vain quest to “win” again. Small wonder then that he’s ramping up military spending while ordering more attacks.

Trump knows what got him to the Oval Office, and it wasn't his keen intelligence or gentlemanly charm or skill at diplomacy. Recall that his favorite generals, George Patton and Douglas MacArthur, were all about "winning" even as they both wanted to wage the wrong wars (Patton was ready to take on the Soviets in 1945; MacArthur wanted to cross the Yalu River and invade China during the Korean War).

Will Trump, like his favorite World War II generals, seek to wage the wrong wars? Will he recognize that fighting the wrong war is a loss even when you "win"? Does he want to be a "war president," and, if so, who will stop him?