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Permanent War, Permanent Failure

By David Rosen
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The current tiff between two of the world's most pugnacious petty tyrants, Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, could, sadly, end in a military showdown – and, worst case, a nuclear engagement. While a nuclear confrontation seems highly unlikely, the political-military shadow puppet show captures endless headlines. Most troubling, Americans are getting increasingly worried, expecting the worst. A recent Gallup poll finds 38 percent of American adults say the threat of terrorism makes them less willing to attend events where there are thousands of people, up from 27 percent in July 2011.

The Trump administration's current tussle with North Korea is a long-time in coming. Six decades ago, in July 1953, an armistice was signed that ended formal hostilities, but not the Korean War. On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces invaded the South, leading to a growing conflict between the U.S. and China. In this UN-sanctioned conflict, 54,000 Americans were killed. Six decades later, a permanent peace treaty has yet to be agreed upon and the U.S. is upping the ante by installing its latest THAAD anti-ballistic missile system.

Asia was WW-II's second front. Japan claimed Korea as its territory in 1876 and formally ruled it between 1910 and 1945. Following Japan's surrender in September '45, the peninsula was divided into U.S. and Soviet Union (SU) occupation zones. In 1948, two states were formally established; the American-backed Republic of Korea (South), a right-wing dictatorship (including many collaborators with the Japanese occupation), and the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North), a Moscow-puppet dictatorship.

Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, formally ending a quarter-century long civil war. Dragging on from 1927-1949, the U.S. backed the loser, the dictatorial Kuomintang regime. Mao's declaration changed Asia's political landscape and, in time, the global order. To maintain its hegemony, the U.S. maintains an occupying force in Japan of 28,500 troops and commands South Korea's 640,000 military.

Pres. Trump rants about North Korea are the clearest example of the U.S. political-military's failed policy of permanent war. Since the end of WW-II, the U.S. has promoted numerous military confrontations, covert counterrevolutions, political coups and assassinations of designated "enemies" or "security threats." To facilitate this aggressive policy, the U.S. maintains about 800 military bases worldwide, including 174 "base sites" in Germany, 113 in Japan and 83 in South Korea – all former WW-II enemy states.

The permanent war is a direct extension of Pres. Dwight Eisenhower's legendary 1961 Farewell Address warning of the military-industrial complex. In 1970, Seymour Melman relabeled it "pentagon capitalism" and, most recently, the libertarian economists Thomas Duncan and Christopher Coyne dubbed it the "permanent war economy." Duncan and Coyne identify "three key interest groups" — unions, industry, military — that drive permanent war. It arose from the dual crises of the Great Depression and World War II" and become an essential – and permanent — feature of corporate capitalism.

Edward Hunt, writing earlier in *CounterPunch*, identifies key aspects of the post-WW-II state of permanent war. He focuses on the "war on terrorism" and its economic and social consequences. He identifies two proponents of permanent war. Richard Haass, the State Dept.'s Director of Policy Planning under Gen. Colin Powell's tenure, proclaimed, "There can be no exit strategy in the war against terrorism." And Secretary of Defense Robert Gates insisted, "We're not leaving Afghanistan prematurely. ... In fact, we're not ever leaving at all."

The Afghan War started shortly following the horrendous terrorist attacks of September 11th and officially lasted from Oct. 7, 2001 to Dec. 28, 2014. As of 2017, there were 9,000 U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan with 4,000 more pledged. However, from 1979 to 1989 the U.S.

backed Islamic *mujahideen* groups in the Soviet–Afghan War. Is the long and on-going U.S. military presence in Afghanistan a first-step in a permanent war in the Middle East?

In follow-up to the Afghan offensive, the U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003; the war formally dragged on until December 2011. Military confusion and political duplicity compounded a doomed socio-military effort. Now, a decade-and-a-half later, the U.S. maintains 12 military bases in Iraq and deploys an estimated 6,000 military personnel. Iraq, along with Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen, are part of a second front in its global permanent war to contain resistance and preserve geo-political hegemony.

While permanent U.S. wars were established in Korea, in force in Germany and put in place in the Middle East, they took different forms in South East Asia and in Latin/South America. The Vietnam War ended in a U.S. military defeat, a failed over-flexing of post-WW-II arrogance. Framed as a geo-moral battle between good and evil, capitalism and communism, ruling class vs ruling party, the failed Vietnam War signaled a further stagnation (after Korea) of the U.S. military.

In terms of permanent war, the Cold War was America's great pyric victory. Begun in the shared WW-II victory, the U.S.-SU combatants waged limitedly military engagements until the SU dissolved in 1991. Victory left the U.S. the sole global superpower. The Cold War was over; the enemy defeated; the military-industrial complex's rationale for existence over. Yet, permanent war required ever-lasting, every-global vigilance.

While the Cold War was playing out in Asia and Europe (e.g., Greek 1947 civil war), a nationalist insurgence took root in Latin America and was perceived as a direct threat to the U.S. domination of the Americas. In 1823, Pres. James Monroe proclaimed what became known as the "Monroe Doctrine," warning European nations that any effort to colonize territory in the Americas would be seen as a direct act of aggression against the U.S. These territories, especially in Central and South America, were off-limit to all but the U.S. for colonization and plunder.

The U.S. permanent war in Latin America occurred against a background of the CIA failed efforts to topple the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro marched into Havana on January 7, 1959, a week after U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista fled to the Dominican Republic. The U.S. officially broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961 and, in April '61, the CIA orchestrated an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs; 1,000 CIA foot soldiers, Cuban exiles, were taken prisoner. A year later, in October '62, the world held its breath over the Cuban Missile Crisis, a showdown between the U.S. and SU. Now, a half-century later, under Pres. Obama those relations are being reestablished; under Pres. Trump, U.S. relations to Cuba are in the air. Trump rumbles about a possible U.S. military intervention into Venezuela.

Between the early-50s and the collapse of the SU in 1991, Latin America was littered with the corpses of victims of U.S. military and CIA clandestine interventions. They included: CIA's overthrowing of Guatemala's elected government (1954); the U.S.-backed dictatorships of Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier in Haiti (1957-1986); U.S. orchestrated military coup in Brazil (1964); U.S. military occupation of Dominican Republic (1965-1966); U.S. orchestrated military

coup of socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile (1973); U.S. backed Contra army in Nicaragua to suppress the Sandinistas (1974-1979); and U.S. backed military, including death squads, in El Salvador civil war (1979–1992). And then there were the two great U.S. military victories in the permanent war, in Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989-1990).

To maintain the failed state of permanent war, the U.S. spends close to \$1 trillion annually to fund the military and intelligence apparatus. The military budget is \$825 billion and is divided into four sectors: (i) base spending; (ii) Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) to fight the Islamic State group; (iii) related agencies (e.g., Department of Veterans Affairs, State Dept., Justice Dept., etc.); and OCO funds for the State Department and Homeland Security. In 2016, the National Intelligence Program (e.g., CIA, NSA) budget totaled to \$70.7 billion.

One of the unspoken consequences of the U.S. permanent war policy is the untold number of casualties – and their families and communities/tribes – who suffer. Ordinary people, non-combats pay a heavy price to maintain the U.S.’s permanent war. Nevertheless, memory lives on for a very long time while vengeance can endure forever. It’s hard to know how long the misnamed “war on terror” will drag on. Sadly, the failed permanent war will likely persist so long as corporate and financial capitalism determine U.S. government and military policy.