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Iran is Not Responsible for US Deaths in Iraq

Who exactly is responsible for US casualties in Iraq during the Iraq War? The question has been raised thanks to President Trump's decision to assassinate Iranian General Gasem Soleimani.

On January 13, the New York Times published a front-page story about a lawsuit filed against Iran in federal court by US veterans and veteran families; it charges Iran with wounding or killing these men. The crux of the lawsuit is that the explosive devices that killed and maimed these soldiers were designed by Iran's Quds Force led by General Soleimani. Whether this is true or not, the allegation has been used to argue the general's assassination by a drone was justified. On the day he was killed Soleimani was reportedly to meet Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi to advance a fledgling peace dialogue with Saudi Arabia. Thus, Democrats and other Americans concerned about avoiding future wars should be arguing the Soleimani drone hit was a criminal act to thwart peace negotiations.

In 1980, Iraq initiated a war with its much larger neighbor Iran that like a runaway train stretched into an incredibly gruesome and bloody eight-year war in which the US allied with Iraq and supplied Saddam Hussein with chemical weapons and intelligence; over a million people died in that war. Next, there was the Gulf War in which the US turned on its ally Saddam Hussein. 9/11 happened and the United States invaded and occupied Afghanistan, the smaller, weaker neighbor to Iran's east. In 2003, the most powerful nation in the world, then, chose to send a huge army halfway around the world to bomb, invade and occupy Iraq, Iran's smaller neighbor to the west. The US wrecked the Arab

city of Baghdad. While many Americans are ignorant of the geography, Iranians knew that these US decisions left their country boxed in by its very powerful worst enemy.

In 1953, CIA and British intelligence operators overthrew the legitimately elected government of Iran and installed the Shah, who became a bloody tyrant who turned Iran into a US proxy in the Middle East; it already had Israel filling that role. The indisputable fact is the United States has militarily dominated the Iranian people since the 1953 coup. At the beginning, the issue was control of Iranian oil. By 1979, the Shah's brutality had pushed opposition to the level of critical mass and the so-called Islamic Revolution threw out the Shah. This led to the hostage crisis that destroyed Jimmy Carter's presidential career.

To expect the sovereign nation of Iran to passively accept United States military action on its eastern and western borders and not to look out for its own interests is willfully naïve and arrogantly hypocritical. Unfortunately, this is typical of US war-making behavior. The rule is simple: 1) Pretend that history began with the outrageous incident mounted against you. 2) Act righteous and indignant at the inhumanity of the act. And 3), most important, conveniently have amnesia about the abusive history the US is responsible for, abuses that, in this case, reach back to 1953. It's a familiar formula that focuses on Power and ignores Truth. Our pain is important and, since they're an "enemy" and inhuman, their pain doesn't matter. Trump administration belligerence vis-à-vis Iran is, thus, classic: Instead of non-existing WMDs, as in the disastrous invasion/occupation of Iraq, this time it's charges of "terrorist" crimes committed by Iran, while the many years of crimes done by the vastly more powerful United States are ignored.

Except for some pretty egregious examples of corrupt journalism (ie. Judith Miller, etc), The New York Times has covered the day-to-day details of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan pretty well. But in the context of the current war fever vis-a-vis Iran, the January 13th front-page story on the lawsuit against Iran for US casualties is a good example of the Times pandering to right-wing narratives following President Trump's assassination-by-drone of a beloved leader in a sovereign nation we're officially not at war with. In a purely human context, this would be called murder — and certainly an act of terror.

I'm not questioning widows or relatives who take vengeful satisfaction in the assassination of General Soleimani, who they feel was responsible for the IED death of their relative over ten years ago in Iraq. Nor am I suggesting General Soleimani was some

kind of boy scout. A father whose son was killed by an IED is quoted as taking delight in the news of General Soleimani's assassination: "I do take comfort that the last thing he [General Soleimani] heard was the sound of a United States missile coming down on his head."

The point is such feelings are understandable, but in this case they're mis-directed for political purposes. Had it not been for the disastrous decision by newly elected President George W. Bush to invade and occupy Iraq — following an attack on September 11, 2001 that had nothing to do with Iraq — none of these men would have been wounded or killed. Again, indisputable facts like this are regularly twisted.

Because of President Trump's willful belligerence toward Iran, the question who is responsible for the deaths and maiming of US soldiers sent to Iraq cries out to be addressed with courage in the 2020 presidential campaign.

On January 13th, the Times also did a front-page story discussing Joe Biden's 2002 senate vote to grant President George W. Bush the power to invade Iraq. Before he made that vote, he reportedly touted President Bush's "moderation." The fact of Biden's decision to support Bush's war returned as farce on Veterans Day 2018 when, as chair of the US Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Biden arranged for himself to hang a Medal of Freedom around the neck of a grinning George Bush, while outside the huge tent this took place in Iraq veterans and others hollered "Shame! Shame! Shame!" In his acceptance remarks, Bush spoke movingly of his personal relations with wounded Iraq veterans and the paintings he'd done of some of them. As with war-widows, I would not dispute the authenticity of President Bush's emotions in this area, since even presidents can suffer from survival guilt and other traumas of war. Especially presidents who know damn-well how guilty they are.

Candidate Biden's Iraq War vote reportedly has him under a microscope in Iowa. After assuring everyone that General Soleimani was a monster, Biden told a crowd that, in the context of tension with Iran, only he had the experience to be a Democratic "war president." This was Joe Biden at his worst, doing something he takes great pride in as a bipartisan compromiser-in-chief with Republicans. Go-with-the-flow-Joe. What candidate Joe should have said was, if elected the first thing I'll do is re-appoint John Kerry secretary of state and special representative to re-establish the diplomatic channel with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, with whom he worked out the Obama/Biden anti-nuke agreement with Iran.

But that's not how Biden rolls. The Great Compromiser wants our vote because he's the man with the chops to hit the ground running and manage the war fever Trump has stupidly set loose. American voters should be fed up with this Biden instinct and demand that the Democratic presidential candidate in 2020 be someone unambiguously opposed to Trump's belligerent Iran policy.

In war, everyone is guilty of violence; everybody crosses the line into illegal and immoral behavior, which releases a runaway train of violence and destruction. That's why we try to avoid war if we can. One hundred years ago, international dialogue came unglued and we had WWI. The conditions today are eerily similar, and humans should know enough history to avoid something called WWII. The way to do that is to balance the understandable urgencies calling for vengeance with mitigating and realistic efforts of forgiveness. This is not wimpy thinking. It's forgiveness as a negotiated means to facilitate a better future for everyone involved; that is, forgiveness as a way to move on. A way to get past the past.

The problem is, some people thrive on vengeance as a useful emotion to manipulate for other purposes. They disdain Martin Luther King's concern for pulling out of the ever-rising spiral of tit-for-tat violence. Between WWI and WWII, Sigmund Freud tried to understand the impulse toward violence in his analysis of a death-instinct and a life-instinct, Thanatos and Eros, respectively. He never quite made that analysis clear on the anti-intellectual level of war-making where war and violence are the playthings of politics and journalism and the first casualty of war is truth.

The mainstream journalism business lives by two rules:

- 1) If it bleeds it leads.
- 2) There's no story unless you have a pissing-contest of elites.

War with Iran certainly covers the first rule: Lots of bleeding potential to make it exciting to cover. As for the second rule, the question for Democrats should be critical: Now that President Trump has killed a workable peace deal, will his personal decision to strut around playing war brinksmanship with Iran be politically accommodated by moderate Democrats like Biden? That is, if Biden wins the nomination, will Trump's war fever be Bidenized in a Biden ideological meat grinder?

That is, in the main election, will Trump's Iran policy be clearly and morally opposed and turned into a proper campaign pissing contest?

Noam Chomsky has characterized the problem with the Democratic impeachment effort as a miserable failure to address Trump's real crimes in the areas of finance, environmental catastrophe and militarism.

"The worst crimes by far are those that literally threaten human survival, not in the distant future: [Trump's] policies on escalating global warming and the race to develop still more destructive weapons," Chomsky told Law & Crime. "But the Dems would never agree that these are 'high crimes.' "

In the corrupt, legalistic jujitsu world of lawyers and politicians, the problem is issues of human survival like runaway Global Warming and Militarism are not codified crimes. As Republicans like to whine ad-nauseum that to impeach Trump he must be guilty of a real crime "codified in the federal registry of crimes," the things Chomsky cites get overlooked by Democrats for much the same reason. This is summed up well by a bumper sticker:

Kill one person it's called murder; kill 100,000 and it's called foreign policy.

The question really comes down to this: In the presidential election campaign, do Democrats have the vision and the backbone to forge a re-energized, post-imperial America for the 21st Century that provides real future security but doesn't rely on the worship of militarism? The nation's needs are obvious: a massive job program in the area of alternative energy; an improved, much more fair education system that strengthens Americans from the bottom-up so we can compete in tomorrow's world; a health-care system that makes working families feel they're a respected part of the nation.

Torpedoing the art of diplomacy and workable peace treaties, relying on hi-tech lethal drones, hero-worshipping psychopathic Seal Team killers and ratcheting up war-fever against Iran are disastrous omens for the future of the United States as the 21st Century unfolds.

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