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"...at the very moment the number one nation has perfected the science of killing, it has become an impractical instrument of political domination." - Richard Barnet, Roots of War, 1972

France and Russia's military responses to mass murders in Paris and Egypt echo the United States' response to mass murders in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania in 2001. As Oxford University researcher [Lydia Wilson told Democracy Now](#) on November 17th, Islamic State (IS) is "seemingly delighted" by this warlike response to its latest atrocities.

In several interviews, Lydia Wilson has cited Abu Bakr Naji's [The Management of Savagery](#) as a "playbook" that IS appears to be following closely. Naji called for mass murders in foreign cities and tourist destinations as part of a strategy to draw foreign powers into unwinnable wars that would spread chaos, fuel jihadism and leave Muslim fundamentalist groups in control of more and more of the Muslim world.

This builds on [Al Qaeda's original strategy](#), which counted on an aggressive response to September 11th to expose the iron fist inside the velvet glove of U.S. "soft power" and the hollowness of the U.S. government's commitment to civil liberties, human rights and the rule of law. Al Qaeda astutely turned its enemy's military superiority into a liability by provoking the U.S. to unleash disastrous wars on Muslim countries. The US invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the concentration camp at Guantanamo became the most valuable assets in Al Qaeda's propaganda and recruiting campaigns, now complemented by the terror of drone strikes and bombing campaigns in Syria and Iraq.

As the UN Human Rights Commissioner, Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein of Jordan, [told the Council on Foreign Relations](#) on November 16th,

"...it seems that the defenses against chaos and bloodshed that states erected at the close of the Second World War, the laws they wrote and swore to abide by, the agreements and treaties they signed, are giving way to increasing action bound by no principle or any foresight... Much of the Middle East and North Africa is gripped in deadly conflict with constant, now almost routine, violations of the norms that should protect civilians, and even proxy warfare with greater powers engaged in combat rather than in making peace."

To briefly take stock of 14 years of war, which our leaders launched and continue to justify as a response to terrorism:

- The U.S. and its allies have conducted over [120,000 air strikes against seven countries](#),

exploding fundamentalist jihadism from its original base in Afghanistan to an active presence in all seven countries and beyond.

- We have invaded and occupied Afghanistan for 14 years, Iraq for over 8 years, and destroyed Libya, Syria and Yemen for good measure.

- By conservative estimates, [U.S.-led wars have killed about 1.6 million people](#), mostly civilians. That is 500 times the number of people killed by the original crimes in the U.S.

Disproportionate use

of

force and geographic expansion of the conflict by our side has ensured an endless proliferation of violence on all sides.

- War, occupation and human rights abuses have driven [59.5 million people from their homes](#), more than at any time since the Second World War.

- Since 2001, the U.S. has borrowed and spent \$3.3 trillion in additional military spending to pay for [the largest unilateral military build-up in history](#), but less than half the extra funding has been spent on current wars. (See Carl Conetta's 2010 paper,

["An Undisciplined Defense"](#)

, for more analysis of the Pentagon's "spending surge.")

When U.S. support for Muslim fundamentalist jihadis in Afghanistan led to the most catastrophic blowback in our history on September 11th 2001, our government declared a "global war on terror" against them. But less than a decade later, it once again began recruiting, training and arming Muslim fundamentalists

to fight in

[Libya](#)

and

[Syria](#)

. The U.S.

also

made

[the largest arms sale in history](#)

to Saudi Arabia, which is already ruled by a dynasty of Muslim fundamentalists

and

whose role in the crimes of September 11th remains

[a closely guarded secret](#)

. It was only when IS invaded Iraq in 2014 that the U.S. government was finally

forced to rethink its covert support for such groups in Syria

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t has yet to seriously reconsider its alliances with their state sponsors: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and other Arab monarchies.

Throughout the past 14 years, whenever the fear of terrorism has temporarily receded, our

government has quickly redirected its threats and uses of military force, covert operations and propaganda to a completely different purpose: destabilizing and overthrowing a laundry-list of internationally recognized governments, in Venezuela, Iraq, Honduras, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and around the world. In these operations, our government has never balked at allying with violent groups whom it would be quick to condemn as "terrorists" if they were on the other side. We are being treated to a new version of President Reagan's comical division of violent groups into "terrorists" and "freedom fighters" based on their relationship to U.S. policy, with patriotic Iraqis resisting the illegal invasion of their country as "terrorists" and [armed neo-Nazis in Ukraine](#) as "protesters" and now part of a new "National Guard."

Each new U.S. military operation is justified as a response to some new crisis, while the U.S. role in creating these crises in the first place is obscured (with increasing difficulty) behind [furnished house mirrors of secrecy and propaganda](#)

. This pattern of opportunistic uses of force was exactly the strategy outlined by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld within hours of the mass murders of September 11th 2001. CBS News obtained a copy of Undersecretary Stephen Cambone's [notes from a meeting](#) amid the ruins of the Pentagon at 2:40 p.m. that day. Cambone quoted Rumsfeld saying, "Judge whether good enough hit S.H. (Saddam Hussein) at same time - not only UBL (Usama Bin Laden)... Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not."

In a recent article about [the record U.S. military budget](#), I explained that President Obama's annual military budgets have (on average and after adjusting for inflation) been higher than George W. Bush's, 60% higher than President Clinton's and 2-1/2 times what bipartisan experts recommended to the Senate Budget Committee at the end of the Cold War. The U.S. military is now more generously funded than the rest of the ten largest militaries in the world combined.

Investing our nation's wealth in military forces and deadly weapons and deploying them all over the world is not just a tragic waste in terms of all the unmet human needs in our country and the world. It's dangerous. By building a global war machine designed to fight anybody anywhere, while rejecting all legal and political constraints on how it may be used, our leaders have set the stage for endless, unwinnable, global war.

. As Prince Zeid suggested, our government has turned its back on the legitimate infrastructure of collective security enshrined in the UN Charter and international law, and reverted to something more primitive: the law of the jungle or "might makes right." By fostering the dangerous illusion that illegal threats and uses of U.S. military force can replace the collective will of humanity and the rule of international law as the ultimate arbiter of international affairs, our leaders have set us on a collision course with history.

When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia and China remained on the sidelines. Their oil companies even bid for contracts on new oilfields in Iraq, and Russia allowed the U.S.

to ship war supplies through its territory to Afghanistan. In 2011, Russia and China both abstained from a UN Security Council resolution for a "no fly zone" to protect civilians in Libya when they could have simply vetoed it.

But when the U.S. and its allies abused that resolution to depose and butcher Muammar Gaddafi and plunge Libya into chaos, then transitioned quickly to launch an even bloodier proxy war in Syria, China and Russia finally accepted that the U.S. war machine was really out of control. The U.S. was treating their efforts at appeasement as a green light for aggression that would sooner or later threaten them directly.

In 2012, Russia [increased its military budget by 15%](#), the largest annual increase since Vladimir Putin was elected President in 2000. After the destruction of Libya, Russia concluded that it was essential to face down U.S. aggression and that the catastrophic failures of U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya provided an opening for Russian diplomacy to start pushing back

The U.S. responded to Russia's support for the Syrian government by [engineering a coup](#) against an even more strategic Russian ally in Ukraine. The Western-backed coup threatened to roll NATO expansion right up to Russia's border and sail NATO warships right into its most strategic naval base at Sevastopol. Russia responded by accepting Crimea's request to restore its

[230-year-old ties with Russia](#)
(94% of Crimeans had already
[voted for independence](#)

from Ukraine in 1991). Russia also supported the "Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics" in their resistance to the new Western-backed government in Kiev. U.S. allies in Europe initially supported the U.S. campaign to isolate and sanction Russia over the chaos in Ukraine, but now France and Germany are working with Russia and Ukraine to implement the Minsk agreements, which are gradually
[restoring peace to Ukraine](#)

Until recently, Russia played a deft diplomatic hand without being directly drawn into combat in Syria or Ukraine. But now Russia has joined the free-for-all bombing of Syria. IS has responded by blowing up a Russian airliner. Russia has in turn escalated its aerial bombardment. Turkey has shot down a Russian warplane. It seems that Russia is being drawn into the same escalating cycle of violence as the U.S. and its allies. Much depends on the results of the [diplomatic process in Vienna](#) and on the willingness of all the external powers involved in the war in Syria to allow the people of Syria to decide their own political future. That includes the U.S. and its allies just as much as Russia and Iran.

On a larger scale, it is vital for us to recognize that our country, by authorizing the use of military force in 2001, became a party to this open-ended conflict and shares the responsibility for escalating or resolving it. It is not responsible or legitimate to rely on

demonizing our enemies as a pretext for endlessly escalating an ill-defined war that has killed far more civilians than combatants.

But by declaring that we are at war with "terror," "Muslim extremism," "associated forces" or whoever our leaders decide we're at war with from one week to the next, our government has foreclosed many of the ways that wars are usually brought to an end. We cannot meet "terror" at the negotiating table. The international military competition to "destroy" IS, at whatever cost in

[civilian death and destruction](#)

, is an irresistible chance for the U.S., Russia, France and the U.K. to display and market their latest weapons technology. But it will not end the "war on terror." Even a superficially successful military campaign against IS in Syria and Iraq will instead hasten the next mutation of jihadism and drive even more Muslims from around the world into its ranks.

Even President Obama has acknowledged that there is no military way out of the trap that he and other U.S. officials have unwittingly collaborated with the "terrorists" to set for us.

Yet he still soldiers on blindly as if there are no non-military alternatives either.

But there are and always have been specific policy changes that our government could make if it was serious about ending this horrific cycle of violence:

- Repeal the 2001 and 2002 Congressional Authorizations for the Use of Military Force, which have become blank checks for endless war. Representatives Lee (D), Amash (R) and Massie (R) have introduced bills in Congress to do that: HR 1303 (to repeal the 2001 AUMF) and HR 1304 (to repeal the 2002 AUMF).
- Close the U.S. concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Every prisoner must either be released or be granted a free and fair trial in a real court.
- Stop threatening, bombing and attacking Muslim countries - and other ones too.
- Stop destabilizing and overthrowing internationally-recognized governments.
- End drone strikes and comply with long-standing [executive orders](#) prohibiting assassination as an instrument of U.S. policy.

- Shut down the [“rat-line” of U.S. weapons](#) to jihadi groups everywhere.
- Enforce [existing U.S. laws](#) that prohibit arms sales to governments that commit war crimes or human rights abuses, with no exceptions for U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia, Israel or Iraq.
- Stop using the US veto to [block majority decisions](#) of the UN Security Council on Israel and Palestine.
- Publicly recommit to full compliance with the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions and the rule of international law.
- Restore command accountability under U.S. law for war crimes ordered or sanctioned by senior U.S. military and civilian officials.

If these steps seem radical or “politically impossible,” that is only a measure of how far our country has strayed from the basic standards of international behavior that we and other countries are committed to. But if our government refuses to take such steps, then we must recognize that we share the responsibility for perpetuating the horrors of this conflict.

As the late historian and former US Air Force bombardier Howard Zinn wrote in [a letter to the New York Times](#) in 2007, “The terrorism of the suicide bomber and the terrorism of aerial bombardment are indeed morally equivalent. To say otherwise (as either side might) is to give one moral superiority over the other, and thus serve to perpetuate the horrors of our time.”

On the other hand, if we can restore some legitimacy to U.S. policy, we can begin to regain the moral and legal ground from which to respond effectively to terrorism. If or when there is another mass murder like the ones in the U.S. in 2001 or the recent ones in Egypt, Lebanon and France, we must respond to it as a heinous crime rather than as an act of war, as former Nuremberg prosecutor

[Benjamin Ferencz insisted in the aftermath of September 11th](#)

. Those responsible must be identified, pursued, arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, with only as much help from the military as is needed to bring them to justice. But as Ben Ferencz warned in 2001, their crimes must not be allowed to become a pretext for wreaking misdirected vengeance on other countries and innocent lives.

This is how we will defeat terrorism - theirs and ours. *Nicolas J S Davies is the author of Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq and of the chapter on "Obama At War" in*

Grading the 44th President: A Report Card on Barack Obama's First Term as a Progressive Leader.