

*Propaganda, Fear, Distractions & Interests*

## **The Deadening Silence**

By JOAN ROELOFS

**T**here have been many theories as to why the US continues to batter various parts of the world—oil, hegemony, the great game, the military-industrial complex, military Keynesianism, Zionism, Presidential glory, genetic aggression tendency, terrorism, population control, protecting us against those who hate our freedoms, promoting democracy, etc. This discussion will not be my subject.

A different (but related) question is: why is there so much acceptance and so little protest against our government's illegal and immoral foreign policy? Furthermore, there has been scant concern that the UN Security Council, partner in the (yes) conspiracy, is apparently violating the UN Charter through its enabling resolutions. The Charter outlaws wars of nation against nation—not civil wars-- and provides for UN intervention only when there is a threat of international aggression. These principles of the Charter have been affirmed by the UN General Assembly, as in the 1981 Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Internal Affairs of States.

Some excerpts:

No State or group of States has the right to intervene or interfere in any form or for any reason whatsoever in the internal and external affairs of other States.

The duty of a State to refrain from the promotion, encouragement or support, direct or indirect, of rebellious or secessionist activities within other States, under any pretext whatsoever, or any action which seeks to disrupt the unity or to undermine or subvert the political order of other States;

The duty of a State to refrain from the exploitation and the distortion of human rights issues as a means of interference in the internal affairs of States, of pressure on other States or creating distrust and disorder within and among States or groups of States;

There is no justification for the UN Security Council itself violating these principles.

In addition, the General Assembly Declaration on Principles of International Law, Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations of 1970 provides that:

States shall accordingly seek early and just settlement of their international disputes by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their choice. In seeking such a settlement the parties shall agree upon such peaceful means as may be appropriate to the circumstances and nature of the dispute.

A similar process is to guide the Security Council: first, attempts at cooperative settlement, then non-violent sanctions, and only as a last resort, military force. According to the UN Charter, Chapter VII:

Article 41: The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.

Article 42: Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.

The experience of the Spanish Civil War and World War II inspired the principles that there should be no foreign intervention in civil wars, and that alleged "atrocities" do not provide an excuse for attacking foreign countries. It was, after all, Hitler's excuse that he was invading Czechoslovakia only to protect its oppressed Germans.

Nevertheless, most of the US public, press, and politicians appear unperturbed over US aggression and UN complicity. Even those from whom we would expect some protest: liberals, religious communities, universities, civil rights organizations, and environmental activists, are strangely silent.

Why? Among the reasons are propaganda, fear, distractions, and interests.

### **Propaganda**

People in this country have been taught from an early age that the United States is a beacon to the world and that its foreign policy is always intended for good. Very many want to believe this and do.

Recent immigrants, and those who benefit from the government provision, including social security and Medicare recipients, are grateful for their relative advantages, and do not want to scrutinize too closely the full scope of our government's activities. Citizens denied essential social services because of inadequate funds don't usually relate that to our trillion dollar arsenal.

Lately, we hear from the media and our government that only "sissies" pay attention to international law or the UN Charter; it used to be the "pointy-headed intellectuals" who were the spoilsports. Children are now exposed to a culture of violence, especially in their video games, and the increasing militarization of their schools. Violent policies have thus been normalized for them.

### **Fear**

Being an outspoken opponent of war or organizing of anti-war protests can incur penalties. These may range from social ostracism to loss of employment. If even tenured professors can be booted for opposition to US foreign policy, those with much less job protection have much to fear. Liberal religious groups mostly have declining memberships, and they may be concerned about putting off prospective followers by a dissenting stance. There also lurks the threat of government reprisal to individuals and organizations. Although cases have been few, an atmosphere of repression exists, e.g., "they let me on the plane, but how come I never received my tax refund"?

Democratic Party supporters may fear the further loss of Congressional seats, and the Presidency. They also do not want to criticize a biracial President, whose election is considered a sign of progress.

### **Distractions**

Many people must concentrate on working, keeping a job, feeding the children, preventing the house from falling down, caring for ill relatives, and all the other needs of daily existence. They have little energy left to consider the finer points of US foreign activities. The more obvious distractions: alcohol, drugs, sports, TV, celebrities, internet surfing, video games, pornography, horrible crimes, earthquakes, etc., often displace attention to foreign wars. Political serenity might possibly be an effect of anti-depression drugs. Perhaps nothing bothers the partakers—I know of no studies of the drugs' political implications.

Even noble distractions can blot out ugly realities. "Make love not war" is a fine



principle, but it creates a haze for some and leaves the field of war making to the many disgruntled and deprived.

Meditation and hobbies are good for clearing the mind—but do they clear too much? Should we heed the words of the great dissenter, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*:

Science, literature, and the arts spread flowery garlands over the iron chains of law, inducing consent without obvious coercion. Thus all memory of their natural birthright liberty is stifled; they come to love their enslavement and they are transformed into a law abiding populace. Need created the powers that be; the arts and sciences fortified them. Great nations, love talents and reward those who cultivate them!

Concern for protecting our health by growing our own food, seeking out local organic food and helping farmers to grow it, keeping our homes free of harmful chemicals, recycling waste, and walking to work, is certainly important. Still, these activities compete for time and attention with the ghastly environmental and human destruction resulting from wars; development, production, testing, and transportation of weapons; war games on land, sea, and air; the militarization of space; and the occupation of bases.

Volunteer work is at best a humanistic response to the misery around us, yet it may crowd out action to change institutions that cause many of those miseries. The great wave of "service learning" requirements for college students was instituted in response to the radical activism of the 1970s, following policy suggestions of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It was designed to be a diversion from attempts to change the system.

## **Interests**

These encourage some to cheer on war, and explain the silence of others. Many people now (or their close relatives) have military status: active, reserve, retired, veterans, civilian contractors, or base workers. Similarly, and accounting for muted dissent worldwide, many countries have robust military establishments, often with US tutelage. Through our alliances, military sales and aid, military training, joint operation forces, and bases, a network has been created that often overpowers the peace advocates. Even countries that are reputedly neutral, such as Sweden, are junior partners of NATO; in June 2009, Sweden hosted war games, *Loyal Arrow*, in its northern area.

There are brave dissidents in Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against War, and similar organizations, but not enough to turn the tide.

Those with no direct military connections may nevertheless benefit from military contractor philanthropy, which funds every kind of organization and institution. Especially notable is the attention to minority organizations, such as Lockheed Martin's support for the NAACP.

A highly effective silencer is the economic impact of the military-industrial complex. While it may contribute to a vastly unjust distribution of resources, it also helps to keep the sagging economy afloat. Employment could be far better provided in civilian endeavors; in fact, current government expenditure (state, local, and federal) for education, health care, highways, etc., far outweighs military expenditures.

At only 7% of the GDP, military funding nevertheless has great impact because: 1. it is a growing sector; 2. it is recession-proof; 3. it does not rely on consumer whims; 4. it is the only thing going in many areas of the country; 5. the "multiplier" effect: subcontracting, corporate purchasing, and employee spending perk up a large area; 6. it is ideally suited to Keynesian remedies, because of its ready destruction and obsolescence: what isn't consumed in warfare, rusted out, or donated to our friends still needs to be replaced by the slightly more lethal thing concocted in our research labs.

Military contracts provide large profits for corporations, and jobs for executives, engineers, scientists, mechanics, laborers, architects, and others. They reassure local governments that there will be some well-paying industries and sufficient multiplier effects to provide customers for the real estate agents, landscapers, restaurants, tap dancing schools, furniture shops, and yoga studios. The appropriators in Congress are well aware of these benefits to their districts.

The power of this realm is greatly enhanced by the multiplicity of businesses and occupations that receive Department of Defense contracts. Everyone (or his brother) is getting a piece of the action.

For example, in my state, New Hampshire, for FY 2010, the top 5 Prime Award Contractors were:

BAE SYSTEMS PLC \$555,589,168  
L-3 COMMUNICATIONS HOLDINGS, INC. \$77,478,718  
INSIGHT TECH \$64,115,852  
ELBIT SYSTEMS LTD. \$40,941,529  
FINMECCANICA SPA \$37,154,072

Of these, three are foreign corporations: British, Israeli, and Italian. You can search for your own state's contractors [here](#).

While BAE gets 57% of the DOD funds, there are 495 contractors. Some are smaller weapons producers; others are universities and colleges, medical institutes, and local governments. The range into the general economy is extensive. Among the 495 recipients:

Portsmouth Blind And Shade  
Geneva Point Center  
Pilates For Everybody  
Bob And Mikes Property Maintenance And Repair  
Mitchell Paddles  
Hedgehog Grounds Keeping  
Town And Country Motor Inn

For your state and county, city, or zip code, you can also [search here](#). Among the contractors in my county, Cheshire, are:

Atlas Advanced Pyrotechnics, Inc  
C&S Wholesale Grocers Inc  
Cheshire Sanitation Inc  
Historic Window And Door  
Sticky Wicket  
Timken Aerospace & Super Precision (this one is a weapons manufacturer)  
Tire Warehouse Central, Inc.  
One of my carpenters

One consequence of this wide distribution of benefits, also applicable to many US policies such as the farm bill, is the "Christmas tree" effect. There is something for almost everyone, which buys assent to the main thrust of the policy, however illegal, immoral, or irrational.

Our country needs vast new industries that would employ scientists, mechanics, et al, to improve the quality of life and clean up the mess, but the powers that be are not now permitting this to happen.

Propaganda, fear, distractions, and interests. These are the mountains that must be moved.

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