



Life Matters Journal

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Last month marked the twentieth anniversary of two of some of the most historically significant events of our lifetimes. The first being the attacks on the World Trade Center that took place on September 11, 2001, in which about three thousand Americans lost their lives in a horrific act of violence. Consequently, that means this also marks twenty years of the U.S. War on Terror that has resulted in the deaths of nearly one million human beings and the displacement of countless others.



In this issue of *Life Matters Journal*, our writers reflect on the violence that has been a constant in our world for the past 20 years. Katherine Noble writes about her experiences growing up in a post-9/11 world, having been too young at the time to remember the attacks. In, "A Mistake from the Beginning: Looking Back on the Afghanistan War," John Whitehead reflects on the longest war in American history. In this issue, Whitehead also explores the U.S. targeted killing program that began under George W. Bush's administration and has continued under Obama, Trump, and now Biden. Rana Irby writes on the importance of welcoming refugees, particularly from nations in which imperialist wars have been waged in the recent past. Finally, in this issue Judith Evans, details what we know about the horrific use of torture during the war on terror and the effect this has had on the United States' perception and credibility among the international community.

When thinking about these disheartening topics it can certainly be easy to despair; however, we hope that as you read this magazine your resolve grows and you are inspired to join us in our mission to build a culture of peace.

For peace and life,

Herb Geraghty

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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Life Matters Journal

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Texas's New Abortion Law: A Whole-Life Analysis

By Sophie Trist

In May, Texas passed a new abortion law similar to the heartbeat bills passed in other states.¹ Though comparable laws have often been blocked by federal courts, on September 1, 2021, the Texas law went into effect when the Supreme Court refused to block it. Like the laws in Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, and several other states, SB8 bans abortion after six weeks of pregnancy, or when a preborn child's heartbeat can be detected.² I fully support heartbeat laws in general, as I believe unequivocally that abortion is an act of violence perpetrated against the smallest, most vulnerable of our human siblings, and heartbeat bills make great strides toward protecting many within this vulnerable group. I believe that the Supreme Court of the United States was wrong to legalize and normalize this violence in *Roe v. Wade*, and I hope that anti-abortion legislation eventually paves the way for a society where preborn lives are valued just as much as those already born. This Texas heartbeat bill takes several big steps in the right direction; however, it doesn't present a truly restorative vision for a world beyond abortion.

Rather than having the state's Attorney General and Department of Justice enforce the law, thus allowing abortion clinics and pro-choice advocates to preemptively sue, this law permits private citizens to sue anyone who helps someone obtain an illegal abortion, potentially including abortion facility workers, the pregnant person's family and friends, the crisis counselor who recommended the facility, or even the driver who brought the patient to the clinic. Thankfully, this law understands that people are often coerced and pressured into abortion by societal factors, financial issues, and even the family and friends around them in their neighborhood, in their home, and in the workplace. Therefore, the person who obtained the abortion cannot be sued for it. However, the person bringing the lawsuit does not have to be personally connected to the woman or her preborn child in any way; it would be perfectly legal, under this new law, for a random person on Facebook to sue those who helped a pregnant stranger obtain an abortion after the six-week limit.

Texas Right to Life created a website where people can submit anonymous tips about suspected abortions. With these reports going to a private organization, this system is ripe for abuse. With citizens being offered \$10,000 and attorneys' fees if they manage to successfully prosecute an illegal abortion, opportunists could target vulnerable people under this law without concern for their

wellbeing. Though stopping systems that enable abortion is a good thing, the financial incentive of \$10,000 per report could result in a glut of false reporting and groundless lawsuits, potentially dragging innocent people through a traumatic legal system focused on punishment. With any citizen empowered to sue someone for aiding and abetting an illegal abortion, I worry that Texas is opening the door to a scenario reminiscent of the Salem witch trials or George Orwell's *1984*, where people become their sisters' watchers instead of their sisters' keepers. Not to mention that this system doesn't truly deal with the harms that abortion causes to individuals and communities. Though a financial penalty for physicians and staff who continue performing abortions is of a more restorative nature than the harsh and often dehumanizing retributive model of incarceration, this law falls short of a holistic restorative justice system.

I don't believe that we can create a truly pro-life, nonviolent society with intimidating surveillance and punitive measures. Pro-life feminist Frederica Matthews-Green wrote in 1991, "No one wants an abortion as she wants an ice-cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal, caught in a trap, wants to gnaw off its own leg. Abortion is a tragic attempt to escape a desperate situation by an act of violence and self-loss."³ Many women get abortions because they feel they have no other options and society has taught them to dehumanize preborn children. Financial difficulties and a lack of community support are often given as primary or at least substantial reasons for most abortions.⁴ Pro-life legislators need to address this; bringing an end to abortion has to also involve increasing community support for pregnant people. While the aim of the Texas law — to save preborn lives from the violence of abortion — is a noble one, the enforcement and reporting methods are likely to compound the personal and communal trauma of abortion.

Aimee Murphy of Rehumanize International and Catherine Glenn Foster of Americans United for Life have their own vision of how to handle illegal abortion in a post-*Roe* America. In a white paper titled "Restore the Heart: Healing the Communal Trauma of Abortion Through a Restorative Justice System,"⁵ they outline a model that puts the human dignity of both the preborn child and her mother at the center of the discourse, discarding our current retributive justice system — which favors punishment and fails to mend the rifts in communities caused by acts of aggressive violence. Under their proposed system, judicial matters relating to abortion

would belong in a family court or some other space where the emphasis is on restoration, not criminality. While it is important to recognize the culpability of those who participate in abortions and the harm they cause, it is also vital to find a path forward that is redemptive and acknowledges the social complexity of abortion. In a restorative justice system, a judge acts more as a counselor than an arbiter of punishment, and the preborn victim gets a voice in the proceedings through an advocate. The pregnant person would be connected to post-abortive resources and care. They and anyone who assisted in the abortion would participate in an educational program designed to teach them about nonviolent solutions to social ills and countering dehumanization in all its forms. Through this process, the perpetrators of abortion would undergo a transformative process of acknowledging the harm done, apologizing for said harm, and being reconciled with the community through compassion and healing. Foster and Murphy write,

“In upholding the inherent moral worth of the preborn child, we must be certain not to violate the shared intrinsic dignity of those who have participated in abortions. In our current retributive model of justice we see countless examples of inhumane and dehumanizing conditions that should be considered as unacceptable outright in a pro-life culture. The difference between the current Retributive Justice system and our proposed Restorative Justice model is not one of degree of punishment, but rather... the foundational principle of human dignity at the core of Restorative Justice necessitates a whole paradigm shift away from the question of punishment, and towards the task of creating authentic, human-centered restoration.”

I am encouraged that the Supreme Court has allowed the Texas law to go into effect. It shows that the high court is finally reckoning with its disastrous decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which has cost over sixty million lives. But by emphasizing surveillance and punishment over restoration and healing, the Texas law is not giving pregnant people the compassionate care and community support that will make the violence of abortion unthinkable. Though I am tentatively optimistic that this law will serve as the first step toward a more pro-life future, Texas and the rest of the world still have much work to do to achieve restorative, human-centered justice systems.

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US Foreign Policy, Afghanistan, and the Historical Significance of Accepting Refugees

By Rana Irby

Recent years have seen war, violence, conflict, and persecution being major contributors to people leaving their homes as refugees. In many instances, those effects have been a result of U.S. foreign policy. National and international policy regarding accepting refugees has a history of being a response to the aftermath of war and devastating effects of regime change. The United States' acceptance of refugees, especially those from Afghanistan amidst its current crisis, thus has a significance rooted in historical precedence.

According to the World Atlas, violence, persecution, and human rights violations are among the main factors leading people to become refugees.¹ In terms of international policy, the obligation for countries to accept these people is based on the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention.² Created in light of the refugee crisis that followed World War II, the Convention established a definition of who a refugee is and what their rights are.³ As Holly Yan notes of a statement by the U.N.'s refugee agency, this means "the international community steps in to ensure they [refugees] are safe and protected".⁴ In 1967, the Convention was amended to include refugees worldwide.⁵ This is known as the 1967 Protocol.⁶ Time has seen 142 countries ratifying both the original treaty and the Protocol.⁷ According to the provisions of the Protocol, signatory nations are to, as the Kaidor Center notes, "[treat] refugees in accordance with internationally recognized legal and humanitarian standards," including not sending them "...to a place where they are at risk of persecution, or to a country which might send them to such a place".⁸ In addition, they are to "[provide] refugees with a legal status, including rights such as access to employment, education and social security; and not punishing refugees for entering 'illegally'".⁹ While the United States did not adopt the 1951 Convention, it signed on to the Protocol.¹⁰ This has significant implications, especially in light of current events.

Afghanistan accounts for one of the largest populations of refugees, thanks in no small part to decades of foreign intervention.¹¹ The regime change following the 2001 U.S. invasion of the country and overthrow of the Taliban eventually became unstable.¹² The Taliban regained ground and Afghanistan saw some of the highest records of civilian deaths in addition to being classified as the least peaceful country in the world.¹³ With the U.S. pulling out of the country, there has been a growing call for the U.S. to let in Afghan refugees. Arguments for this have included the fact that

the U.S. evacuated refugees from Vietnam after the 1975 fall of Saigon, another situation precipitated by U.S. intervention.¹⁴ There is historical precedence, then, for the U.S. to allow in as many refugees as possible, including those from Afghanistan. This is especially so given that many of the most vulnerable in Afghanistan are those who have assisted Western governments and entities, including the U.S.

International policy for accepting refugees goes back decades, born as a result of the devastation of war. Those same decades have seen the U.S. grow as a global power and its foreign policy devastate nations not only in the form of war, but also regime changes that have resulted in conflict and violence. At the same time, it is an adoptee of the 1967 Protocol, which binds ratifying nations to accept refugees and treat them as nationals. In light of the current situation in Afghanistan, the U.S. has historical precedence to look to in terms of putting the policy it ratified into practice.

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A Mistake from the Beginning: Looking Back on the Afghanistan War

By John Whitehead

The longest war in American history ended this August as U.S. troops left Afghanistan. What the U.S. withdrawal will ultimately mean for both countries is not yet clear. However, I would argue the original U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was a mistake. Consider the following:

The United States' intervention in Afghanistan was costly in lives. From October 7, 2001, when the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan began, to the final withdrawal, 2,461 U.S. military personnel and civilian employees of the Defense Department were killed because of the intervention.¹ Other lives lost include an estimated 3,917 American contractors, 1,144 troops from allied nations, and 46,319 Afghan civilians.² The majority of Afghan civilians were killed by anti-government militants such as the Taliban, but thousands of civilians were killed by U.S. forces, the security forces of the U.S.-supported Afghan government, and affiliated forces.

The United States' intervention in Afghanistan was costly in money. The U.S. government has spent, according to one estimate, at least \$1 trillion on the Afghanistan intervention and related operations.³ Adjusted for inflation, the United States spent more on Afghanistan than was spent to rebuild western Europe after World War II.⁴

The United States' intervention in Afghanistan was morally compromised. Thousands of civilians were killed by U.S. and affiliated forces. In recent years, many civilians died from an intensified U.S. bombing campaign against anti-government militants. After declining for years, the number of U.S. bombs dropped on Afghanistan dramatically increased starting in 2017, with the number of civilian deaths also increasing. Bombing by U.S. and Afghan government forces killed 1,543 civilians during 2017-2019.⁵ The United States also funded Afghan government security forces even when those forces were implicated in human rights abuses.⁶

The United States' intervention in Afghanistan was ineffective. Almost 20 years of a U.S. military presence and U.S. support to the Afghan government failed to defeat the Taliban's anti-government insurgency. The United States could help prevent the Taliban from taking over the country, but it could not win a decisive victory or enable the Afghan government to do so.

The United States' intervention in Afghanistan was a strategically unwise response to terrorism. The United States invaded Afghanistan shortly after September 11, 2001, and overthrew the

Taliban regime that was sheltering al Qaeda. The intervention's primary goal was to disrupt al Qaeda's activities and prevent further terrorist attacks.

However, countering terrorism through invasion and regime change is not a wise strategy. Establishing a stable new regime is massively costly and difficult. Meanwhile, terrorist groups can find territorial bases elsewhere, as al Qaeda has.⁷ Further, such bases are not necessary to carry out terrorist attacks: such attacks require only small groups with guns, knives, explosives, or even just vehicles. By responding to 9/11 with the Afghanistan intervention, the United States took on a huge, costly responsibility only to deny al Qaeda a moderate advantage.

I do not know if the U.S. war in Afghanistan could have ended better. However, I feel confident that the war should never have been begun. May the war's legacy include a resolution to reject the unwise and costly pursuit of regime change.

*Please consider signing the Peace Action petition on behalf of Afghan refugees and donating to one of the groups working to help them.*⁸

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Torture and the War on Terror

By Judith Evans

Abu Ghraib. Guantanamo.

Extraordinary rendition. Torture. In the years following the attacks of September 11, 2001, these words symbolized some of the worst aspects of the War on Terror. During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States detained terrorism suspects at prisons in Abu Ghraib, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Detainees were subjected to inhumane and degrading conditions as Bush Administration officials showed contempt for international humanitarian law.

WHAT HAPPENED AT ABU GHRAIB

Details and photographs of violent and intimidating acts against detainees at Abu Ghraib emerged in April, 2004. In his report to Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, Major General Antonio Taguba described abuses at the prison, including:

- Punching, slapping, and kicking detainees
- Forcing detainees to remove their clothes and remain naked for days
- Forcing a male detainee to wear a dog collar or chain around his neck to be photographed with a female soldier
- Allowing unmuzzled military dogs to intimidate or even bite detainees
- Arranging and photographing detainees in sexually explicit positions
- Attaching wires to a detainee's body to simulate electric torture¹

The abuse at Abu Ghraib was not an isolated incident. The United States had already been sending terrorism suspects to offshore locations, such as the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. There, detainees faced intimidation tactics such as sleep deprivation, hooding, and extreme temperatures or noise. Other suspects were sent to Syria, Egypt, and other foreign locations – a process known as “extraordinary rendition” – where they faced torture.

President George W. Bush had stated that captured members of the Taliban and Al Qaeda should be humanely treated². Images and reports from Abu Ghraib, however, painted a far different picture. Military interrogators were using techniques that violated humanitarian treaties to which the United States is a party.

THIRD GENEVA CONVENTION: HUMANE TREATMENT

Since 1949, the Third Geneva Convention has protected prisoners of war from abuse by their captors. Article 13 states that “prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated.” It specifically protects prisoners against “acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.”³ The detainees at Abu Ghraib had clearly been subjected to these prohibited acts.

But who exactly is a prisoner of war? According to Article 4, prisoners of war may be “members of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict... Members of other militias and members of other volunteer corps, including organized resistance movements⁴” are considered prisoners of war as long as they meet the following conditions:

1. That of being commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates;
2. That of having a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance;
3. That of carrying arms openly;
4. That of conducting their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war.⁵

When an individual's prisoner of war status is in doubt, Article 5 provides that they are protected by the Convention “until such time as their status has been determined by a competent tribunal.”⁶

Convention Against Torture: No Exceptions

The United Nations Convention Against Torture prohibits “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment throughout the world.”⁷ The United States ratified the Convention in 1994, and is bound by its provisions.

Contrary to assertions by various Bush Administration personnel, the Convention makes no exceptions to the provisions against torture. Article 2 states that there are “no exceptions whatsoever,” including “threats of war” or “political instability.”⁸

THE TORTURE MEMOS

Through a series of memos, Bush Administration lawyers argued that certain human rights provisions of international law did not apply to the conflict in Afghanistan. The memos showed a disturbing disregard for the rule of law.

In January 2002, Deputy Assistant Attorney General John C. Yoo wrote a memo claiming that detainees from the Afghanistan conflict were not entitled to prisoner of war status under the Geneva Conventions⁹. That same month, White House Counsel Alberto R. Gonzalez stated that President Bush could declare combatants from Al Qaeda and the Taliban ineligible for protection¹⁰. These statements disregarded the right of combatants to protection under the Geneva Conventions pending determination of their status by a tribunal.

Jay S. Bybee, of the Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel, further attempted to circumvent International law in an August 2002 memo. “Cruel, inhuman, or degrading acts,” he reasoned, do not necessarily cause pain severe enough to be prohibited by the Convention Against Torture and the federal anti-torture statute¹¹.

A March 2003 memo from John C. Yoo claimed that as commander-in-chief, President Bush had the legal authority to approve whatever techniques were necessary to protect national security¹². This assertion disregards the Convention Against Torture’s “no exceptions whatsoever” provision¹³.

In April 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a memo approving abusive interrogation techniques for Guantanamo prison, including isolation, temperature changes, sleep schedule changes, and increasing fear.¹⁴

Some Bush Administration officials, however, argued that it was in the United States’ best interests to apply the Geneva Conventions to the Afghan conflict. In a January 2002 memo, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell wrote that disregarding the Conventions would “undermine protections of the laws of war for our troops” and result in “adverse consequences for our conduct of foreign policy.”¹⁵

On February 2, 2003, State Department legal advisor William H. Taft IV also noted that failure to apply the Geneva Conventions to the Afghan conflict would endanger our troops if they were captured¹⁶.

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The Bush Administration’s blatant disregard for human rights and the rule of law resulted in an astonishing lack of accountability. Top government officials, including President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, were not charged with any crimes. Eleven US soldiers were convicted of crimes. Other soldiers were reprimanded without criminal charges. The Director of the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center had his conviction and reprimand removed from his record.

Former Abu Ghraib detainees filed a federal class-action lawsuit against a military contractor who provided interrogators. A federal appeals court dismissed the lawsuit in 2007.

IMPACT ON US CREDIBILITY

When a country as powerful as the United States violates human rights laws with little or no accountability, the effects reach around the globe. Amnesty International pointed out in a 2005 report that the United States “sets the tone for governmental behavior worldwide.” The same report stated that governments in Israel, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Nepal, and other countries have violated human rights and humanitarian laws in the name of fighting terrorism.

Western democratic countries are no exception. Human Rights Watch notes that European Union countries such as Sweden,

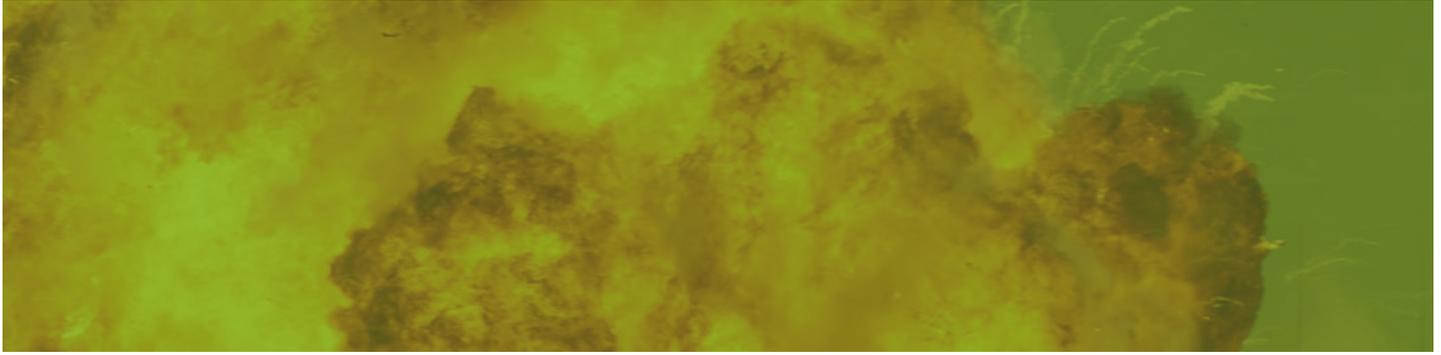
Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, and the United Kingdom have sent or attempted to send terrorism suspects to countries that practice torture¹⁷.

STAIN OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Abu Ghraib prison was closed in April 2004. President Biden has vowed to close the prison at Guantanamo. However, the stain of human rights violations lingers on. Governments must recognize the inherent dignity of every human. Perhaps the United States still “sets the tone” worldwide. A sincere effort at accountability, such as a truth and reconciliation commission, would begin the process of rehumanizing that tone.

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A Global License to Kill: The History of US Targeted Killing

By John Whitehead

Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi, allegedly a top al Qaeda member suspected of involvement in the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, met his death on November 3, 2002. Harethi, with five other alleged al Qaeda members riding with him in a vehicle in Yemen, was killed by a missile fired from a CIA-operated Predator drone.¹ Among the others killed was Ahmed Hijazi, an American citizen.²

This lethal incident almost 19 years ago marked a turning point in US foreign policy. The killing of Harethi, Hijazi, and the others appears to be the first use of targeted killing as part of the United States' post-9/11 Global War on Terrorism. Begun under George W. Bush's administration, the practice has continued under the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations.

Although "killing by drones" is often used as a short-hand for this practice, targeted killing is done not only by pilotless drones but also by air strikes from planes and by covert operatives on the ground — the 2011 killing of Osama Bin Laden is the most well-known example of the latter tactic. What matters more than the precise tool is the larger practice: the U.S. government is killing people, generally alleged terrorists, who 1) do not belong to the armed forces of a nation the United States is at war with; and 2) have not been convicted of any crime in a court of law.

How many people have been killed since 2002 by targeted killing is unclear. Groups such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the New America Foundation have tried to keep a record of targeted killing's cost in lives, basing their numbers on media reports.³

Going by these groups' tallies, which differ somewhat, I would make a conservative estimate that from 2002 to the present the US government has carried out roughly 1,000 counter-terrorist actions (often called "strikes") that have killed approximately 5,000 people. These actions have taken place primarily in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, with a small number of additional actions in

Libya.⁴ (A very large number of drone strikes and similar actions also have taken place in Afghanistan, but I am considering those part of the U.S. war there.)

The Bush administration, although willing to wage major wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, relied less on targeted killing. After the 2002 killing, Bush oversaw around 60 strikes, most in Pakistan.

The Obama administration dramatically escalated targeted killing actions, carrying out almost 600. Most were against Pakistani targets but many were in Yemen. The most well-publicized targeted killings of the Obama years were those of Bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki, an American who had allegedly become an al Qaeda operative.⁵

About 400 actions occurred during the Trump administration (although the Trump years also saw a massive increase in the bombing of Afghanistan).⁶ Trump took a step avoided by his predecessors: killing an official of another government. The United States killed, by drone, the Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, to thwart attacks on US personnel in Iraq that the general was allegedly plotting.⁷

The Biden administration is developing its targeted killing policy. However, Biden already has used drone strikes against al Qaeda-affiliated militants in Somalia and will likely continue targeted killing in some form.⁸

U.S. targeted killing has gradually evolved into ever more dangerous forms. Bush began the practice, Obama escalated it, and Trump expanded it to killing other nations' officials. After almost 19 years, one cannot argue targeted killing is just an extreme tactic adopted only in dire crises. The practice has effectively become American presidents' global license to kill, without the benefit of a trial, anyone designated as a "threat."

Some years ago, I asked "When do targeted killings end?"⁹ We still do not have an answer.

Notes

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"Do You Remember 9/11?"

By Katherine Noble

I've been in the workplace since I was sixteen, and to this day am usually the youngest person at my job, be it restaurant or retail. When people find out my age or birth year, they're often surprised — and there's one question that I've been asked a surprising amount.

"Do you remember 9/11?"

I don't. I was five months old when the Twin Towers fell. I don't remember airports without TSA, or newspapers without mention of Iraq or Afghanistan. I've never known a world without a "War on Terror."

As a child, I remember being told that the Middle East was a scary place. A bad place. I remember being taught that being Muslim is synonymous with being violent. I remember being told that the U.S. needed to intervene or things would have been far worse. I remember being told that we were heroes, that we were saving the mysterious, nonspecific Middle East.

Now, I know that none of this is true. Middle Eastern people don't start wars any more than anyone else. Muslims — and people who look Middle Eastern — face violence and hate crimes at very high rates. About 100-150 anti-Muslim hate crimes were recorded by the FBI post 9/11, a rate five times higher than before 2001.

Do we blame individual people for the many, many crimes of the Catholic Church? For the Crusades, the Inquisition, the terrorization of native peoples, the assault and abuse of thousands of children? Why then, do we blame Muslim individuals, attack them for things done by others of their faith?

I'm a pacifist who grew up in a religious military home. I was taught a lot of contradictory things, like "all life is precious, but" — sometimes the death penalty is merited, and the U.S. military can do no wrong.

Don't get me wrong: I don't hate people in the military. Far from it. I believe that the military industrial complex preys on poor folks, promises them travel and college and healthcare and so many wonderful things, so many things that they desperately need.

I lived on Navy bases. I flew in cargo planes. I went to family days on aircraft carriers. I went to Army-Navy games. My father spent

a year in Afghanistan. I moved four times in my four years of high school. It's true that being in the military means sacrifice. Even and especially for the spouses and children of military members who have to create new lives from scratch every couple of years.

Why would you want to believe that this thing you've idolized is wrong? Why would you want to believe that your parents have been complicit — if not active participants — in atrocities?

You wouldn't. It's a lot easier to believe that these wars are just and warranted than it is to believe that what you've been raised with, the people who are your community, the people you love, aren't doing the right thing after all.

How many people would willingly enlist if they could go to college and have healthcare without it? How many people would join the military if they felt like they had another choice?

Education is expensive. But apparently, spending billions of dollars bombing civilians is not. In 2020, the proposed budget for the Department of Defense was \$705.4 billion dollars. In contrast, the federal government spends just under \$55 billion per year on K-12 education. How do we justify this, when, after twenty years, we just made things worse?

I know I'm not an expert on all of this. I don't know the intricacies of conflict in the Middle East. All I can speak to is what I know. I don't believe we helped anything by being in Afghanistan and Iraq. I know that blood has been shed and lives have been lost. I know that the United States keeps starting unnecessary wars it can't afford. I know that we are taking advantage of people without other options, and we are sacrificing their lives for oil and pride. Above all, I know this needs to change.

Notes

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