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CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

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“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Just Because the Golden Arches are in Vietnam Doesn't Mean the US Won the War

by MARK ASHWILL

As we reflect on the 42nd anniversary of the merciful and jubilant end of the American War in Viet Nam, I have good news to share with US Americans, especially those who remember, or came of age in, that turbulent era: Viet Nam is alive and well and, indeed, prospering in many respects. In fact, it's faring better than the superpower it defeated in terms of optimism, dynamism, and hope.

This leads me to my second message. Contrary to what you may have heard from the US media, overseas Vietnamese, or other sources, each with its own ax to grind, the United States lost the war even though Viet Nam now has a free market economy. Sadly, this is a message that has not penetrated the hearts and minds of most, including those who should know better, among them a public intellectual whom I deeply admire for his courage in speaking out about important issues of the day and his sober recognition that he is a refugee not an immigrant.

Last December, Viet Thanh Nguyen, a chaired professor of English and American Studies and Ethnicity at USC, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer*, described by Amazon as “thrilling, rhythmic, and astonishing, as is the rest of Nguyen’s enthralling portrayal of the Vietnam War,” made the stunning pronouncement in a TV interview that “the US won this conflict” (8:03) because Viet Nam adopted a capitalist system, what is officially referred to as a socialist-oriented market economy.

I could see many viewers nodding their heads in solemn agreement. “Yes”, I could hear them proudly and confidently saying to themselves, chests puffed out and hearts beating red, white, and blue, we belatedly yet ultimately triumphed because Viet Nam acquiesced and became like US. Wasn't that our goal from the beginning?

The Big Lie

This is a line, a fairy tale, a lie that I've heard many times. It somehow makes US Americans feel good that the “commies” finally came around and saw the light. It's a psychological and emotional salve that reassures the gullible, the uninformed, and the nationalists that the sacrifices on their side were not in vain. The problem is it's dead wrong.

3.8 million of Viet Thanh Nguyen's fellow Vietnamese and over 58,000 US Americans did not die in a war of economic systems or ideologies. The world is not binary and the cause for which they gave their all was not about a free market vs. a centrally planned economy. It was about Vietnamese governing Viet Nam without continued foreign interference, occupation, and war. Viet Nam won the war because it expelled yet another foreign invader.

Despite what embittered Vietnamese-Americans and diehard veterans who desperately want to believe, and want you to believe, that the loss of limbs, life and sanity were not in vain, it's really that simple.

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The “hardline communists” of whom you spoke, Mr. Viet, were also pragmatists – out of necessity. They made the fateful decision to bend rather than break with the Đổi Mới (renovation) reforms of 1986, which began to bear fruit in the mid-1990s during my first visit to the country of your birth. Viet Nam has one of the fastest growing economies in the world and is considered to be one of the great success stories of the developing world. It also ranks 5th among countries sending their young people to study in the US.

In spite of extremes of wealth and poverty that are characteristic of any rapidly developing economy, Viet Nam’s government has been praised for converting wealth into national well-being, i.e., helping to create a rising tide that raises all boats, certainly not a claim the US can make, where extreme wealth concentration and a resulting oligarchy are the order of the day. (20 US Americans own as much as wealth as 50% of the population.)

The Communist Party is not a monolith, as you know. In fact, there’s probably more diversity of opinion within this one party than in the US in which “there is only one party... the Property Party ... and it has two right wings: Republican and Democrat”, as another US writer and public intellectual, Gore Vidal, once described the US political system. I know this because Viet Nam is not a country I visit from time to time; I have lived here for over a decade.

Of Errand Boys (and Girls)

Have you ever been to Hàng Dương Cemetery, where about 2,000 independence fighters are buried, most in unmarked graves, on an island used by the French, South Vietnamese, and US Americans as a penal colony in which 20,000 Vietnamese died? Many US Americans who lived through that era know Côn Sơn, part of the Côn Đảo Archipelago off the coast of southern Viet Nam, a melancholy and now peaceful island, as the place where the tiger cages were “discovered” by Tom Harkin and Don Luce in 1970.

In this memorial cemetery is the grave of national heroine Võ Thị Sáu, a Vietnamese schoolgirl who fought against the French colonialists, was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death, becoming the first woman to be executed at Côn Sơn Prison. Every night, a throng of people, mostly Vietnamese, along with a few curious tourists, make the pilgrimage to her grave to pray, burn incense, pay their respects, and leave offerings.

Before her execution in March 1952 at the tender age of 19, Sáu spoke of “the colonialists who stole Viet Nam and the errand boys who sold it to them,” in reference to fellow Vietnamese who did the bidding of the French and, later, the US Americans. You know that the official country of your birth, “South Vietnam”, would have ceased to exist in 1956, four years after Sáu’s death by firing squad, if the US had not intervened and ignored calls for a national election, as stipulated by the Geneva Accords of 1954. Those who supported the Republic of Viet Nam and US patronage in thought, word, and deed, especially in deed, were the “errand boys” of whom Sáu spoke.

It is said that on the morning of Sáu’s execution the prison chaplain offered to baptize her and “wash away her sins” to which she replied “I have no sins. Baptize the people who are about to kill me.” ...I ask only for one thing. When you come to shoot me, don’t cover my face. I am brave enough to look down the barrel.” If you know this part of your country’s history and understand it, you understand beyond the shadow of a doubt that the war was not about capitalism vs. communism.

Reality Check

The myth that the war was a battle of diametrically opposed ideologies is so pervasive that even some young Vietnamese studying in the US have internalized it. In a summer 2016 essay entitled What Vietnam Can Teach Us About a Divided America the author – on the occasion of Remembrance Day, July 27th, a national holiday in Viet Nam for remembering those who died and were wounded in the service of their country, a Vietnamese undergraduate enrolled at a southern university and a graduate of one of the top high schools in Viet Nam,

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remarked that while listening to her grandfather's wartime stories, she "couldn't help admiring and yet pitying my grandfather, a soldier risking his own life and sacrificing everything he had for the ideology he believed in."

Reality check: Her grandfather and millions of others who courageously fought against the US military, its allies, and that of its client state did so for the noble cause of independence not on behalf of an ideology. From a Vietnamese perspective, the war was not about competing economic and social systems. He doesn't need his granddaughter's pity; he needs her understanding, deepest respect, and eternal gratitude. He has mine, and I am neither a relative nor am I Vietnamese.

The US was not ultimately victorious because there are now Starbucks, McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, and Popeyes dotting Viet Nam's commercial landscape. The US didn't win because Pepsi and Coca-Cola are battling for the palates and wallets of thirsty, sugar-deprived Vietnamese, or because prominently displayed Amway advertisements greet visitors as they exit the Nội Bài (Hanoi) and Tân Sơn Nhất (HCMC) international airports.

Viet Nam won because its cause was just, its sacrifice supreme, and its military leadership brilliant. While April 30, 1975 was the day Saigon fell for the US and those locals who hitched their collective cart to the South Vietnamese client state, it was a day of liberation and celebration for most Vietnamese. It was the day Viet Nam became a unified, independent, and sovereign nation.

Mark A. Ashwill is a Hanoi-based international educator who has lived and worked in Viet Nam for over a decade. He is the author of *Vietnam Today: A Guide to a Nation at a Crossroads*.

Killer Drones in the Empire State

by NORMAN SOLOMON

At dusk I stood on a residential street with trim lawns and watched planes approach a runaway along the other side of a chain-link fence. Just a few dozen yards away, a JetBlue airliner landed. Then a United plane followed. But the next aircraft looked different. It was a bit smaller and had no markings or taillights. A propeller whirled at the back. And instead of the high-pitched screech of a jet, the sound was more like... a drone.

During the next half-hour I saw three touch-and-go swoops by drones, their wheels scarcely reaching the runaway before climbing back above Syracuse's commercial airport. Nearby, pilots were at the controls in front of Air Force computers, learning how to operate the MQ-9 Reaper drone that is now a key weapon of U.S. warfare from Afghanistan to the Middle East to Africa.

Since last summer the Defense Department has been using the runway and airspace at the Syracuse Hancock International Airport to train drone operators, who work at the adjoining Air National Guard base. Officials say it's the first time that the federal government has allowed military drones to utilize a commercial airport. It won't be the last time.

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held
on Thursday, June 1st at
7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,
Jacob Creek Road. Veterans and
non-veterans are more than wel-
come to come and help us dialogue
about what we together can do to
bring about peace in this complex
world.



Eureka VA Clinic News**Reminder
Veterans Town Hall Meeting****Tuesday, June 6, 2017 at 4:30 p.m.****Eureka VA Clinic Lobby
930 West Harris Street, Eureka
(Just west of Winco)****Ice Cream Social
Car & Motorcycle Show****Friday, June 30, 2017****11:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.****Eureka VA Clinic Parking Lot**

Everyone is welcome to attend and enjoy the event. Car and motorcycle show entries are limited to veterans. All entries will receive a participation plaque. Awards will be given for: People's Choice; Best Bike; and Best of Show categories. Entry forms to register your car or motorcycle will be available at the Eureka VA Clinic from June 5th to 23rd. Space is limited so don't delay. For additional information, contact Kelly Stephens at 707-269-7549.

Calling All Veteran Artists. The deadline for a **R.E.D.** (Remember Everyone Deployed) logo design has been extended to 4 p.m., June 23rd. Submit a 5"x5" design capable of being enlarged to the VA Clinic Art Committee. *Questions? Contact Kelly Stephens or Steven Buckingham at 707-269-7500.*

Dog Obedience Classes, mentioned in last month's Foghorn, are still congealing. Classes are anticipated to begin in September pending a grant award. Anyone interested in the class will need to submit an application and be interviewed with your dog. *Watch this space for further information as it becomes available.*

Volunteers Wanted – Eureka veteran Thomas Cone is searching for veterans who are willing to donate their time to help with a Veterans Welcoming Table located just outside the entrance to the Eureka VA Clinic. If you would consider helping out or would just like more information, please contact Thomas Cone at 707-442-4688.

Your VA Clinic Communications Council contact is:
'Nate' Lomba 📧 Email: nslomba@reninet.com
Message phone: (707) 269-0528

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No longer will the pilots who steer drones and fire missiles while staring at computer screens be confined to remote areas like the Nevada desert. With scant public information or debate, sizable American communities are becoming enmeshed in drone warfare on other continents. Along the way, how deeply will we understand — in human terms — what the drone war is doing to people far away? And to us?

The takeoffs and landings of military drones at the Syracuse airport get little attention in New York's fifth-largest city. Already routine, the maneuvers are hardly noticed. In an elevator at a hotel near the airport, I mentioned the Reaper drone exercises to an American Airlines flight attendant who had just landed on the same runway as the drones. "I had no idea," she said.

The Reaper drones using the Syracuse runway are unarmed, the Air Force says. But when trainees go operational, their computer work includes aiming and launching Hellfire missiles at targets many thousands of miles away.

Despite the official claims that drone strikes rarely hit civilians, some evidence says otherwise. For example, leaked classified documents (obtained by The Intercept) shed light on a series of U.S. airstrikes codenamed Operation Haymaker. From January 2012 to February 2013, those drone attacks in northeast Afghanistan killed more than 200 people, but only about one-sixth of them were the intended targets.

Even without a missile strike, there are traumatic effects of drones hovering overhead. The former New York Times reporter David Rohde has described what he experienced during captivity by the Taliban in tribal areas of Pakistan: "The drones were terrifying. From the ground, it is impossible to determine who or what they are tracking as they circle overhead. The buzz of a distant propeller is a constant reminder of imminent death."

As civic leaders in Syracuse and elsewhere embrace the expanding domestic involvement in day-to-day drone warfare, clear mention of the human toll far away is almost taboo. Elected officials join with business groups and public-relations officers from the military in extolling the benefits and virtues. Rarely does anyone acknowledge that civilians are maimed and killed as a result of the extolled activities, or that — in the name of a war

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on terror — people in foreign lands are subjected to the airborne presence of drones that is (to use Rohde's word) "terrifying."

Such matters are a far cry from Syracuse, where the local airport's role in drone warfare is visible yet virtually unseen. My random conversations with dozens of Syracuse residents in many walks of life turned up scant knowledge or concern about the nearby drone operations. What's front and center is the metropolitan area's economic distress.

Unlike the well-financed Air National Guard base, the city's crumbling infrastructure and budgets for relieving urban blight are on short rations. When I talked with people in low-income neighborhoods of Syracuse — one of the poorest cities in the United States — despair was often unmistakable. A major study by the Century Foundation identified Syracuse as the city with the highest concentrations of poverty among African Americans and Hispanics in the United States. Locally, the latest influx of federal largesse is for the drone war, not for them.

A group called Upstate Drone Action has been protesting at the Air National Guard base on the outskirts of Syracuse with frequent vigils and persistent civil disobedience. A recent demonstration, on Good Friday, included nine arrests. The participants said in a joint statement: "What if our country were constantly being spied upon by drones, with some of us killed by drones? What if many bystanders, including children, were killed in the process? If that were happening, we would hope that some people in that attacking country would speak up and try to stop the killing. We're speaking up to try and stop the illegal and immoral drone attacks on countries against which Congress has not declared war."

The last couple of months have not gone well for authorities trying to discourage civil disobedience — what organizers call "civil resistance" — at the base. In early March, a jury in the Dewitt Town Court took just half an hour to acquit four defendants on all charges from an action two years ago that could have resulted in a year behind bars for disorderly conduct, trespassing and obstruction of government administration.

Later in March, citing a lack of jurisdiction, a local judge dismissed charges against four people who set up a "nativity tableau" in front of the main gate at the Hancock Air Force Base two days before Christmas last year. In a press release, Upstate Drone Action said that the activists had been "protesting the hunter/killer MQ-9 Reaper drones piloted over Afghanistan by the 174th Attack Wing of the New York Na-

tional Guard" at the base.

The U.S. drone war is escalating in numerous countries. A year ago the head of the Air Combat Command, Gen. Herbert Carlisle, told a Senate subcommittee that "an insatiable demand" was causing U.S. drone operations to grow at a "furious pace." That pace has become even more furious since President Trump took office. In early April a researcher at the Council on Foreign Relations, Micah Zenko, calculated that President Trump had approved an average of one drone attack per day — a fivefold increase from the rate under the Obama administration.

Upstate New York is leading the way for the Pentagon's plan to expand its drone program from isolated areas into populous communities, which offer ready access to workers. One hundred and sixty miles to the west of Syracuse, just outside the city of Niagara Falls, an Air National Guard base — the largest employer in the county — is in the final stages of building a cutting-edge digital tech center with huge bandwidth. There, pilots and sensor operators will do shifts at computer consoles, guiding MQ-9 drones and firing missiles on kill missions. The center is on track to become fully operational in a matter of months.

At the main gate of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, a sergeant from the public-affairs office was upbeat about the base "operating the MQ-9 remotely piloted aircraft." At city hall the mayor of Niagara Falls, a liberal Democrat, sounded no less pleased, while carefully sidestepping my questions about whether he could see any downsides to the upcoming drone role. A local businessman who chairs the Niagara Military Affairs Council — a private organization that has long spearheaded efforts to prevent closure of the base — told me that getting the drone mission was crucial for keeping the base open.

In such ways, functioning locally while enabling globally, the political economy and mass psychology of militarism do the work of the warfare state.

Norman Solomon is executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, where he coordinates ExposeFacts. Solomon is a co-founder of RootsAction.org.



Donald Trump's High Crimes and Misdemeanors

by Amy Goodman, Denis Moynihan

President Donald Trump's alleged attempt to quash the FBI investigation into his former national security adviser, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, and his subsequent firing of FBI Director James Comey, has rightly inspired endless speculation in the mainstream media about whether he could be impeached. Certainly, the evidence presented by The New York Times, along with everything else that is already consuming Trump's first few months in office, warrants an independent investigation. Perhaps, as with the Watergate scandal that forced President Richard Nixon to resign in disgrace in 1974 to avoid impeachment and removal from office, the cover-up will end up being greater than the crime. But what if Donald Trump were actually held responsible for real crimes: killing civilians in drone strikes, forcing refugees to suffer or die by refusing asylum, or driving the planet headlong into climate change catastrophe? What if Donald Trump keeps his outrageous and inflammatory campaign pledges, many of which, if implemented, would amount to high crimes? Sadly, excessive and too-often lethal executive presidential power is now considered normal.

Within days of taking office, Donald Trump, over dinner with his son-in-law Jared Kushner and other associates, approved a SEAL Team 6 raid in Yemen. The raid cost Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens his life, as well as the loss of a U.S. military helicopter. But what about the civilian casualties? Despite Trump administration claims that the raid netted extensive intelligence, reports surfaced of at least 30 civilian deaths, including many children. According to Reuters, U.S. military officials said, "Trump

approved his first covert counterterrorism operation without sufficient intelligence, ground support or adequate backup preparations." This was just one raid in Yemen, among thousands, in a devastating civil war exacerbated by U.S. arms and involvement, both direct and indirect. He is going to visit Saudi Arabia this week, the first foreign country he will visit as president. Donald Trump is the commander in chief, and his casual order over that dinner led to the violent death of tens of innocent people. Is that not a high crime?

Jump ahead to mid-April. The U.S. military dropped a bomb on an alleged ISIS target in Afghanistan, which wouldn't garner a line in the news these days, as the longest war in U.S. history drags on into its 17th year, with promises by Trump to expand it by sending thousands more troops. But this was no ordinary bomb. Trump dropped the MOAB—what the Pentagon has nicknamed "the Mother of All Bombs." The GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb is the largest non-nuclear bomb in the world. It has been in the U.S. arsenal since early in the Iraq War, but was never used - until Commander in Chief Donald J. Trump took office.

Dr. "Hakim," a medical doctor who has provided humanitarian relief in Afghanistan for more than a decade, reacted to the MOAB's first-ever deployment, on the "Democracy Now!" news hour. He works with Afghan Peace Volunteers, an interethnic group of young Afghans dedicated to building nonviolent alternatives to war. Speaking from Kabul, he kept his back turned to the camera, afraid that he would suffer retaliation if identified:

"I think it's an insult to nickname the bomb 'The Mother of All Bombs.' One of the Afghan Peace Volunteers, Ali, said: 'Would any mother do that to Mother Earth? Or would any mother do this to any children?' The effect is what the U.S. military or what militaries across the world want to inflict upon ordinary citizens, which is fear, panic, hunger, anger."



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While the mainstream media have assumed a more oppositional tone since Trump took office, it gets in line when he engages in military action. Then, the media declare, Trump is acting “presidential.”

The same New York Times article that alleged Trump interfered in the Flynn-Russia investigation contained another startling revelation: “Mr. Comey should consider putting reporters in prison for publishing classified information, according to one of Mr. Comey’s associates,” the Times reported. A free press is the bedrock of our democratic society. Trump also has promised to expand libel laws to make it easier to go after his critics.

Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein has just appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller III as special counsel to oversee the ongoing investigation of alleged Russian influence over the 2016 U.S. election. Mueller should pursue the facts vigorously, and make his findings public. But a complete inquiry into the crimes of Donald Trump must go much further.

Congress Wants to Cut Your Health Care — And Billionaires’ Taxes

by Chuck Collins

Members of the House GOP were in a hurry on May 4 to pass their bill to gut Obamacare. They rushed it through before anyone even had a chance to check its cost or calculate its impact on people’s access to insurance.

Their urgency, however, had little to do with health care. The real reason for the rush? To set the table for massive tax cuts.

Indeed, the House health plan would give a \$1 trillion boon to wealthy households and pave the way for still bigger corporate tax cuts to come, as part of the so-called “tax reform” they’re pushing.

Meanwhile, dismantling the Affordable Care Act will cause up to 24 million people to lose their health coverage, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. (Though even that estimate is based on the less extreme version of the bill that failed to pass in April. The new plan may be even worse.)

Why would a GOP politician support an unpopular bill that fewer than 20 percent of voters think is a good idea? Why risk angry constituents showing up at town hall meetings?

Put simply, to please their wealthy donors and Wall Street corporations. For complex legislative reasons, repealing Obamacare’s taxes on the rich first will make it easier for them to slash corporate taxes next.

As the “tax reform” debate begins, prepare for sermons about how cutting taxes for rich and global corporations will be great for the economy. Slashing the corporate tax rate, we’ll be told, will boost U.S. competitiveness.

But if Congress were really concerned about the economy, policy wouldn’t be driven by tax cuts. The real parasite eating the insides of the U.S. economy isn’t taxes, billionaire investor Warren Buffett explained recently, but health care.

In fact, taxes have been steadily going down, especially for the very wealthy and global corporations. “As a percent of GDP,” Buffett told shareholders of his investment firm, the corporate tax haul “has gone down.” But “medical costs, which are borne to a great extent by business,” have increased.

In 1960, corporate taxes in the U.S. were about 4 percent of the economy. Today, they’re less than half that. As taxes have fallen, meanwhile, the share of GDP spent on health care has gone from 5 percent of the economy in the 1960s to 17 percent today.





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If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldncer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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