

# SUBSCRIBE NOW AND RECEIVE *CRISIS AND LEVIATHAN*\* FREE!



"*The Independent Review* does not accept pronouncements of government officials nor the conventional wisdom at face value."

—**JOHN R. MACARTHUR**, Publisher, *Harper's*

"*The Independent Review* is excellent."

—**GARY BECKER**, Noble Laureate in Economic Sciences

Subscribe to [\*The Independent Review\*](#) and receive a free book of your choice\* such as the 25th Anniversary Edition of *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government*, by Founding Editor Robert Higgs. This quarterly journal, guided by co-editors Christopher J. Coyne, and Michael C. Munger, and Robert M. Whaples offers leading-edge insights on today's most critical issues in economics, healthcare, education, law, history, political science, philosophy, and sociology.

Thought-provoking and educational, [\*The Independent Review\*](#) is blazing the way toward informed debate!

Student? Educator? Journalist? Business or civic leader? Engaged citizen? This journal is for YOU!



\*Order today for more **FREE** book options

**SUBSCRIBE**

Perfect for students or anyone on the go! *The Independent Review* is available on mobile devices or tablets: iOS devices, Amazon Kindle Fire, or Android through Magzter.



---

*Etceteras . . .*

## Caging the Dogs of War

### *How Major U.S. Neoimperialist Wars End*

ROBERT HIGGS

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

—Frederick Douglass, “The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies,”

August 3, 1857

**A**ll wars end, but someone must bring them to an end: someone in authority must order the men to stop fighting, or the fighters themselves must decide to stop fighting even if doing so requires that they disobey standing orders. Either way, someone makes a decision to bring the war to an end, and we may presume (in conformity to the precepts of methodological individualism) that the actor makes the decision only because he believes that it serves his interest, however he may conceive of that interest. In general, in our day nations do not go to war spontaneously, nor do they lay down their arms spontaneously. National leaders make those decisions, and they make them in their own interest.

Any other view is romantic and obscurantist, notwithstanding the torrents of propaganda by which leaders and their court intellectuals attempt to represent themselves as “servants” of the nation, as embodiments of “the national will,” or as executors of “the public interest.” Even if political and military leaders were inclined to put the public’s interest ahead of their own, they would have no way to identify such a foggy and multifaceted entity. Each individual has many interests; different individuals have different sets of interests; and nobody has discovered a defensible

method of aggregating all these interests into a single “social interest.” Although we may feel confident that for the great multitude, peace is preferred to war, other things being equal, even this claim is contestable. Anyone who circulates in American society knows full well that many Americans love war and killing, and, other things being equal, they would be delighted to have the U.S. military constantly engaged in slaughtering people around the world. Fortunately, such individuals count no more heavily than their peace-loving neighbors so long as they do not hold positions of high political authority. “The people” do not directly decide questions of war and peace, and even their indirect effect on the decision process is usually tenuous and variable. As a first approximation, the realistic political scientist may take for granted that in this country “the masses don’t count.” In most cases, they can be brought to acquiesce in anything the movers and shakers dictate that they do, notwithstanding a modicum of grumbling and disobedience at the margins.

Although some people recognize that specific, self-interested leaders make the decisions that plunge a nation or another large social group into war, many fewer people employ this insight systematically in seeking to understand why wars end. Too often, people simply presume that one side unequivocally “defeats” the other, and therefore the other capitulates because it has no capacity for further fighting. Rarely, however, is this depiction accurate. Even in horribly damaged and occupied societies, individuals may continue to fight in some fashion, if only as loosely organized civilian insurgents or guerillas combating an occupation force. In 1945, for example, the Germans and the Japanese might have continued to fight in various ways, and, indeed, the U.S. authorities were surprised when they did not do so.<sup>1</sup>

In Iraq during the U.S. occupation of the past five years, resistance has been stout, if temporally fluctuating and spatially shifting. Given the circumstances there, it seems unlikely that the resistance fighters will give up completely until U.S. and other foreign forces leave the country. Therefore, if the war is to end—rather than to continue indefinitely, as Senator John McCain is pleased to contemplate—that end will come only when U.S. leaders determine the war’s continuation no longer serves their interest. (I am setting aside the possibility of a general mutiny in which the U.S. armed forces refuse to continue fighting. Although this event is conceivable, I cannot foresee its occurrence in the prevailing circumstances.) Therefore, the question becomes: What events might bring the U.S. authorities to conclude that stopping the war serves their interest?

We have two important precedents for the ending of a major U.S. neoimperialist war: the Korean War and the Vietnam War, especially the latter. Although neither case provides a perfect analogy, comparisons may still be worthwhile as we try to identify

---

1. In Germany, U.S. officials expected “‘werewolves,’ or cells of fanatical, violent Nazis [to] harass the occupation army in suicide attacks and sabotage,” but “[n]othing of the sort happened” (Payne 2006, 215). Likewise, although Japanese soldiers had fought fanatically during the war and rarely surrendered even when defeated in battle, “for the most part the Japanese populace acquiesced to the directives of the occupying forces” (Coyne 2008, 123).

the events and influences that bring U.S. political leaders to perceive that continuation of such a war no longer serves their interest.

## The Iraq War: A Catastrophic Success

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

—Matthew 6:21

On the campaign trail in October 2004, Vice President Dick Cheney created a small stir when, speaking of the Iraq War, he declared: “I think it has been a remarkable success story to date when you look at what has been accomplished overall” (“Vice President” 2004). In view of the rampant violence raging in Iraq, the widespread devastation of the country’s human and material resources, and the dim prospects for its future peace and prosperity, Cheney’s statement seemed bizarre, and the Democrats seized on it as still another example of the disconnect between the Bush administration and reality. Yet, on closer inspection, we can see that the war has indeed been a huge success, though not in the way that the vice president intended to claim.

In a characteristically unwitting way, President George W. Bush himself stumbled upon a resolution of the seeming paradox when he told *Time* magazine in the summer of 2004 that the war had proved to be a “catastrophic success.” By that oxymoron, he sought to convey the idea that in the invasion, the U.S. military forces had overcome the enemy unexpectedly quickly, “being so successful so fast that an enemy that should have surrendered or been done in escaped and lived to fight another day” (qtd. in Gibbs and Dickerson 2004). Although this hypothesis seems far-fetched as an explanation of the nature and extent of the ongoing resistance waged against the U.S. occupation forces and their collaborators in Iraq, the term *catastrophic success* does express the character of the war precisely. We need only bear in mind that the catastrophe afflicts one set of people, whereas the success accrues to an entirely different set.

Moreover, to appreciate the war’s success, we must keep in the forefront of our thinking its perpetrators’ instrumental rationality. We must ask: Who bears the responsibility for launching and continuing the war? What are these individuals trying to achieve? And have they in fact achieved these objectives? Having answered these questions correctly, we shall be obliged to conclude that the war has been a huge success for those who brought it about, however disastrous it has been for many others, especially for the unfortunate people of Iraq.

A short list of the war’s perpetrators must include the president and his close advisers; the neoconservative intriguers who stirred up and continue to stoke elite and popular opinion in support of the war; the members of Congress who abdicated their exclusive constitutional responsibility to declare war, authorized the president to take

the nation to war if he pleased, and then financed the war by a series of enormous appropriations from the Treasury; certain politically well-placed persons in the munitions, petrochemical, and financial industries; and members of other interest groups who have chosen to support, sometimes for reasons based on religious beliefs, a war that they perceive as promoting Israel's interests or as bringing about the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Each of these responsible parties has gained greatly from the war.

President Bush sought above all to be reelected. In his 2004 campaign, he made no apologies for the war; indeed, he sought to take credit for launching it and for waging it relentlessly since the invasion. Vice President Cheney also campaigned actively on the same basis. Bush and Cheney's efforts yielded them the prize they sought.

In reshuffling his cabinet for a second term, the president retained the belligerent Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense. Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and other key warmongers remained in their top positions at the Pentagon, and certain neo-conservative desk warriors—such as Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, and Elliott Abrams, a special assistant to the president at the National Security Council—retained their important offices elsewhere in the government: continued success for one and all. Even George “Slam Dunk” Tenet, who resigned as Director of Central Intelligence of his own accord, not because the president held him accountable for the manifest failures of U.S. intelligence efforts during his tenure, later emerged from the darkness to accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of what the president described as Tenet's “tireless efforts” in service to the nation (“President Presents” 2004).

Members of Congress had no regrets about authorizing Bush to attack Iraq or about continuing to fund the war lavishly. These career politicians crave nothing more than they crave reelection to office, and nearly all the incumbents who sought reelection in the 2004 elections gained this supreme objective: all but one (Tom Daschle) of the 26 incumbent senators who ran and all but 6 of the 402 incumbent representatives who ran succeeded—outcomes that imply a reelection rate greater than 98 percent for incumbents who ran in both houses combined.<sup>2</sup> Backing the war obviously proved to be entirely compatible with, if not absolutely essential to, these legislators' quest for continued tenure in office. If, as a consequence of their political actions and in the service of their personal ambitions, thousands of Iraqi children had to lose their eyesight or their legs or even their lives, well, *c'est la guerre*. Politics is no place for sissies.

While authorizing enormous increases in military spending during the past seven years, members of Congress have helped themselves to generous servings of pork from the defense-appropriations bills they have passed. According to Winslow T. Wheeler of the Center for Defense Information in Washington, D.C., “by the time Congress

---

2. Election results and related data are available from, among other sources, the University of Michigan Documents Center at <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/elec2004.html#results>.

had finished with the [fiscal year 2005 appropriations bill for the Defense Department] in July [2004], House and Senate members had added more than 2,000 of these ‘earmarks’ for home-district projects, thereby dishing out to themselves a record-setting “\$8.9 billion in pork” to use in buying votes from their constituents (Wheeler 2004). Nor did they stop at that point: each succeeding year has offered a new opportunity for more of the same. In this workaday plundering of the taxpayers for wholly self-serving reasons, both congressional doves and hawks, Democrats and Republicans, have relished the opportunity to act as pork-hawks (Higgs 2004).

Between fiscal years 2001 and 2007, national-defense outlays, defined narrowly as in the government’s official reports, rose by nearly 88 percent (50 percent after official adjustment for inflation). This still-continuing upsurge ranks with the great military buildups of the 1960s and the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> The beauty of all this increased spending, of course, is that every dollar of it lands in somebody’s pocket. Those to whom the pockets belong make a practice of lobbying hard for increased military spending, and they are prepared to compensate in various ways, some legal and some not, the politicians and bureaucrats who steer the money their way (Higgs 2007).<sup>4</sup>

Procurement of goods and services from private contractors has been a major item in the increased military spending of recent years. In fiscal year 2000, the top ten contractors together received prime contract awards of \$50.6 billion; just six years later, in fiscal year 2006, they got \$107.8 billion—an increase of 113 percent (70 percent even after a generous adjustment for inflation).<sup>5</sup>

A useful gauge of how greatly the run-up in the volume of military contracting enriched the owners of these companies, who include many members of Congress, is the Philadelphia Stock Exchange Defense Sector Index. This measure tracks the stock prices of sixteen leading aerospace and defense companies, including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, and Raytheon, which are the biggest boys on this block nowadays. At the time of the U.S. attack on Iraq in March 2003, this index began to rise steadily, and it continued to rise with only brief and slight setbacks, until the general market downturn late last year, by which time it had increased by approximately 185 percent.<sup>6</sup> During the same period, the Dow Jones Industrials and the Standard and Poor’s 500 indexes had advanced less than half as

---

3. A convenient source of official data on military spending, sliced and diced in various ways, is the so-called Green Book published annually by the Department of Defense. My calculations here rely on data in U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) 2007.

4. Members of Congress also hold many millions of dollars worth of personal investments in companies that do substantial business with the Pentagon. For estimates, see Mayer 2008.

5. For fiscal year 2000 data, see U.S. Department of Defense 2001; for fiscal year 2006 data, see Marte 2007, 6.

6. For a chart of this index’s movements since its inception in November 2001, go to <http://www.marketwatch.com/tools/quotes/intchart.asp?symb=DFX.X&time=20&freq=1&comp=&compidx=aaaaa%7E0&compind=&uf=0&ma=&maval=&lf=1&lf2=&lf3=&ctype=2&size=1&txtstyle=&style=&submitted=true&intflavor=basic&origurl=%2Ftools%2Fquotes%2Fintchart.asp>

much, and the NASDAQ Composite Index only about two-thirds as much. In short, the past five years have brought a bonanza to the merchants of death.

Lest anyone think that an aspiring smaller fellow cannot play in this major league, let Halliburton serve as an inspiring counterexample. Back in fiscal year 2002, this company ranked thirty-seventh among the Defense Department's prime contractors. Thanks to the war and Halliburton's foot in the door as oil-field-service expert and caterer to the troops in Iraq and its environs, the company leaped to seventh place in the rankings in fiscal year 2003, with prime contracts in that year valued at \$3.9 billion (U.S. Department of Defense 2004). Furthermore, even this outstanding corporate success seems to have been but a springboard to greater accomplishments. By the end of 2004, Halliburton's contracts for Iraq work had accumulated to approximately \$10.8 billion, with more in the works. During the three fiscal years from 2004 through 2006, the company received prime contract awards from the Department of Defense valued at approximately \$20 billion, and in fiscal year 2006 it ranked sixth in the Pentagon's list of top contractors (Marte 2007, 6). Perhaps it helps to have friends in high places.

Notwithstanding the success that Halliburton, Bechtel, Dyncorp, and other "old boy" service contractors have achieved in connection with the Iraq War, the really big military money still goes to the suppliers of whiz-bang weapons platforms and related products: aircraft, rockets, ships, tanks and other combat vehicles, satellites, and communications and other electronic equipment, along with software, maintenance, training, and upgrades for these products. In this arena of institutionalized cronyism, the living dead have arisen from the Cold War graveyard to haunt the halls of Congress whenever the defense-appropriations subcommittees were in session. You might wonder how the military will employ, say, an F/A-22 fighter, a B-2 bomber, or an SSN-774 attack submarine to protect you from a small nuke or a vial of anthrax slipped into the country along with the many shipments of contraband goods that enter unseen by government agents. But never mind; just keep repeating: "there must be a connection between the war on terror and the hundreds of billions being spent on useless Cold War weaponry." It is important to Congress, the Pentagon, and the big contractors that you make this connection.

As for the Christian (dispensationalist) soldiers marching onward as to war—in this case, the phrase is more than a metaphor—in order to ease the worries of God's chosen people about Israel's hostile neighbors or to hasten the glorious mayhem of the prophesied end times, suffice it to say that these fundamentalists worked hard to elect their favorite man to the presidency, and they succeeded in doing so. Indeed, one can scarcely imagine a viable national politician who would come closer to satisfying this interest group than George W. "Faith-Based" Bush.

In sum, when we ask ourselves who took the United States to war in Iraq (and keeps it engaged there) and what those individuals hoped (and still hope) to gain by doing so, we quickly come to appreciate what a roaring success this venture has been and continues to be for all of them. In view of the endless death and destruction being

visited upon the hapless people of Iraq, however, not to mention the great and growing number of deaths, injuries, and mental disorders being suffered by U.S. troops in the Mesopotamian killing fields, we might well describe this adventure as a catastrophic success.

## War Weariness

Governments that violate peace must be treated as robbers and murderers are treated within each state.

—Ludwig von Mises, c. 1940, qtd. in Jörg Guido Hülsmann's *Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism*

War weariness is the prevailing public sentiment in the third stage of a major U.S. neoimperialist war. In this prolonged stage, most people have grown tired of the war. They have surrendered their prior illusions about the glorious outcomes it was supposed to bring. They have come to understand that for them it is worse than pointless, that its costs have been real and its benefits a chimera, and that it seems likely to damage their interests further as it continues. Yet the war goes on and on, with no end in sight. We are now well into this stage of the present war in Iraq.

I recall all too well the war weariness of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By 1968, most Americans had come to understand that no good outcome lay in store for them as a result of the war in Vietnam. The war was unwinnable in any meaningful sense. Yet its daily horrors continued with no prospect of stopping: more bombing, more shelling, more close-contact combat in the jungles and rice paddies. Each year tens of thousands of young Americans were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner, many of them draftees sucked into the maelstrom as de facto military slaves, and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and other Asians were slaughtered. Each horrible day was followed by another horrible day, each horrible month by another horrible month, each horrible year by another horrible year until, weighted down by despair, one wondered whether the madness would ever end. The war in Iraq now elicits the same hopeless feeling.

By “major U.S. neoimperialist wars,” I mean, so far, those in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq. Long before them, in the Philippines from 1899 to 1902, the American people had a foretaste of neoimperialist wars to come, but the Philippine war never reached a great enough magnitude or affected the general public deeply enough to become a large factor in the public’s outlook on national affairs. Then, as now, some people actually approved of the war from start to finish. In those days, racism was more flagrant and redder in tooth and claw than it is now, which helps to explain why so many Americans supported a totally inexcusable imperialist venture.

In Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, the U.S. experience presented a similar course of events. In each case (except in Iraq, where the conflict has not yet run its full course), the war moved through four stages: I, upper-echelon plotting; II, outbreak and early



combat; III, sustained combat and strategic stalemate; and IV, cessation of combat and workable resolution.

The stages may vary in length and form. Stage I, in which U.S. leaders and their official and unofficial advisers concoct their war plans, may go on for years, as it did for the present Iraq War, or it may go on for only a short while, as it did for the Korean War, when U.S. diplomatic blunders and unanticipated events provoked the North Korean invasion and triggered U.S. engagement in the fighting. Stage II may occupy weeks or months, whereas Stage III always drags on for years. Stage IV may take different forms. The tense, heavily armed truce in Korea bore no resemblance to the hasty, unceremonious, and humiliating U.S. exodus from Vietnam, yet each outcome served the same purpose—to silence the guns.

Each stage elicits or corresponds to a particular public mood. Stage I goes along with blissful public ignorance. Few people appreciate that their national leaders and wannabe leaders, secreted in their inner sanctums, are up to no good. The onset of Stage II invariably ignites great public enthusiasm as the people rally around their national leaders, “support the troops,” and reflexively accept the tales they are told about the enemy’s wickedness and their own nation’s blamelessness and its well-grounded justification for sending its armed forces into combat. Note well: in neo-imperialist wars, by definition, the fighting always occurs “over there,” where it remains conveniently out of sight of the American public, which relies heavily on what its leaders say about relevant events and conditions on the ground—declarations that are at best biased and distorted accounts and at worst brazen and calculated lies.

In Stage III, as the war drags on, the casualties and financial costs accumulate, the “cake walks” fail to eventuate, and hence the initial enthusiasm for the war fades. When military reversals, gross leadership mistakes, and embarrassing U.S. atrocities come to light, the public shifts even more quickly from support to disapproval.

However disillusioned and embittered the public may become, however, it cannot—or perhaps it simply will not—do anything effective to change the government’s course. Even if the war-making president is chased from office, as Lyndon B. Johnson was in effect in the elections of 1968, his successor may simply continue the U.S. engagement, as Richard M. Nixon did for many years, even widening the war in the process. Once the U.S. government goes to war, the public is simply stuck with it because in this country the public will not actually rebel against the government, and nothing short of rebellion can ensure an affirmative government response to the public’s preferences.

No president will admit that his decision to undertake the war was a mistake from the get-go. Notice, for example, George W. Bush’s complete, intractable dismissal of every sort of public disapproval of his war in Iraq, despite polls that show huge drops in support for the war and in approval of his leadership, and despite the Democratic takeover of the House and Senate in the midterm elections of 2006. He continued to order the armed forces to fight, and they continued to obey. In our system of government, no one can stop this hell-bent Caesar. People can only hope

that he will actually step down when his term expires and that his successor will set a new course, as Dwight D. Eisenhower did in 1953.

In general, however (to repeat my earlier point), only when the ruling political elites conclude that *their personal interests*—and, of course, the interests of the special-interest coalition that props them up financially—will suffer if the war is continued will they act decisively to end it on the best terms available. Thus does Stage IV finally arrive, bringing the general public a sense of relief, although in the higher political circles, leaders and strategists always at this point launch into finger-pointing and blame casting with regard to who “lost China” this time around.

Not only are these characteristic stages of a U.S. neoimperialist war descriptive, but they also reflect the political logic of the U.S. system of government. Most important, they arise from the Reality of Rule, which is to say, from the government’s effectively having gone to war permanently against the bulk of the American people, as well as episodically against unfortunate groups of foreigners in the Third World, where the U.S. government seeks to establish or maintain its hegemony. By saying that the government has placed itself in a state of war against most of the people—namely, all those outside its own supportive coalition—I mean no more and no less than John Locke meant when he wrote about this condition in his *Second Treatise of Government*:

whenever the Legislators endeavour to take away, and destroy the Property of the People [by which Locke means their lives, liberties, and estates], or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power [as done most recently by enactment of the Military Commissions Act of 2006], they put themselves into a state of War with the People, who are thereupon absolved from any farther Obedience. . . . [The same] holds true also concerning the supreme Executor, who having a double trust put in him, both to have a part in the Legislative, and the supreme Execution of the Law, Acts against both, when he goes about to set up his own Arbitrary Will [now termed the “inherent powers of the presidency”], as the Law of the Society. (Locke [1690] 1988, 412, §222)

As Locke argued, people cannot be presumed to have consented to the exercise of government powers that do not protect, but rather destroy their natural rights to life, liberty, and property, and therefore when the government takes such destructive actions, it acts as a mere robber or murderer—that is, it places itself in a state of war against them. Can anyone seriously deny that the U.S. government has chronically violated the people’s natural rights to life, liberty, and property from its very inception and that recently its audacity in this regard has risen to heights that the absolute monarchs of old would have envied?

Because the government is always in a state of war against most of the people,

whom it exploits and torments for the profit or pleasure of its supporting coalition, it invariably finds that as the immediate fear and knee-jerk nationalism of Stage II wear away, the people come to see more and more plainly that they are being sacrificed on the altar of their rulers' ambition, folly, and corruption. They understand increasingly that they are being made to play the patsy for the reptilian creatures who control the government. In short, they begin to see, as F. A. Hayek warned in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), that under a system of unchecked government powers, the worst really have got on top, and the masses down on the bottom are in danger of suffocation under the crushing weight of gross, impudent oppression.

Yet, notwithstanding this growing awareness, the people have been so deeply conditioned and so callously propagandized to equate loyalty to the country and loyalty to the government that they hesitate to act vigorously in their own self-defense. Many fall for cheap tricks that divert their attention or shift the blame for their troubles onto socially marginalized or unpopular groups such as, currently, immigrants and Muslims. They are also bombarded ceaselessly with official disinformation, which the cooperative mainstream news media dish out in ample servings each hour of each day. The government, we are told, has never made any serious mistakes, and if it ever should err, it will do so only with the best of intentions. Holding actions of this sort help the government to retard the growth of public resentment against its crimes as Stage III drags on.

Thus, in the wake of the 2006 elections, in which one faction of the War Party displaced the other in control of Congress, we had scant grounds for expecting a great change of course in the conduct of the Iraq War. The Democrats announced grand plans to fleece and bully the public in the greater service of the leading special-interest groups that helped to elect them, and the Republicans, eminently pleased to serve as the loyal, not-much-opposed opposition, looked forward to bipartisan cooperation in logrolling those splendid 1,500-page statutes in which every species of outrage and robbery is declared to be the law of the land. The war was certain to continue, at least for another two years and perhaps for another five or ten. And why not? Only the people at large—those beyond the precincts of the ruling figures and their major supporters—stand to lose. And what member of the power elite really gives a damn about them?

Perhaps these exploited outsiders, given their slow-witted willingness to tolerate their own oppression, don't really care much about themselves. They have their creature comforts and their amusements, so the sacrifice of their rights to life, liberty, and property does not strike them as an especially big deal. In any event, they imagine that when the government's hammer comes down hard, it will strike their Muslim neighbor or the Mexican immigrant on the other side of town, not themselves.

More and more, however, like everyone except the political schemers who brought this war to pass, they cannot help but feel the growing weight of war weariness.

## What Might Induce U.S. Leaders to End the War?

Guns on an empty stomach  
 Are not to every people's taste.  
 Merely swallowing gas  
 They say, does not quench thirst  
 And without woollen pants  
 A soldier, it could be, is brave only in summer.

—Bertolt Brecht, "Guns Before Butter," 1939

What might cause our government's leaders to reach a new conclusion about what serves their personal interest? Several developments might turn the trick. Nearly all of them work by heightening the public's anger with their leaders' decision to continue the war.

The decisive development in similar situations has historically been the cumulation of public costs, especially the costs in life and limb. In both the Korean War and the Vietnam War, the public's disfavor regarding the engagement closely tracked the cumulation of casualties. As political scientist John Mueller shows in his book *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, "every time American casualties increased by a factor of 10, support for the war dropped by about 15 percentage points" in the polls (1973, 60–61). Support for the present war has also dropped dramatically since its beginning. Indeed, as Mueller has noted recently, "Casualty for casualty, support has declined far more quickly than it did during either the Korean War or the Vietnam War" (2005). Yet it seems to me that the *intensity* of the public's abhorrence of this war is much less than it was during the revulsion against the Vietnam War.

One reason the public has continued to tolerate the leaders' continued prosecution of the war in Iraq is that the casualties have not been nearly so great, by an order of magnitude, as they were in Korea and Vietnam. So far, somewhat more than four thousand U.S. military personnel have died in Iraq. That amounts to only one death for every seventy-five thousand persons living in the United States, and therefore the loss of life has not cut deeply into the public psyche: most Americans have not been personally acquainted with anyone killed in the war. (The vastly greater loss of Iraqi lives seems to have made even less impression on Americans.) As Mueller notes, "the military has worked enterprisingly to keep Americans from seeing pictures of body bags or flag-draped coffins in the hope that this will somehow arrest the decline in enthusiasm for the war effort" (2005). Sad to say, the public may not turn decisively—which is to say, intensely and angrily—against the leaders' continued prosecution of the war until many more American soldiers have died.

Economic costs have also mounted, and they have loomed relatively much larger in this war than in the earlier wars in Korea and Vietnam. Who says the military leaders never learn? They have certainly learned how to increase hugely the financial costs of fighting a war. Estimates of the costs to date vary widely depending on how one

accounts for various joint, indirect, and entailed costs, but a total cost in the neighborhood of a trillion dollars to date is not implausible, and delayed costs, including those associated with decades of care for the war's legions of physically and mentally disabled, will add enormously to the total (see, for example, Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008, whose controversial estimate of the war's total cost reaches \$3 trillion).

In earlier wars, even though the costs were relatively greater in blood than in dollars, the public eventually wearied of the economic sacrifices entailed by the financial expenses of continued fighting. Economist Hugh Mosley concluded that the Johnson administration "was reluctant to resort to increased taxes to finance the war for fear of losing public support for its policy of military escalation" (1985, 153). Historian Stephen Ambrose wrote that President Richard Nixon "realized that for economic reasons (the war was simply costing too much) and for the sake of domestic peace and tranquility he had to cut back on the American commitment to Vietnam"; the retrenchment was "forced on [him] by public opinion" (1985, 242–43).

If the current recession (or stagflation) worsens, the public may well object more strenuously to the government's squandering of such vast amounts of tax money on a senseless continuation of the war in Iraq. When people's purses are not so full, they may resent every additional dollar spent on the war more than they did previously. They ultimately may become so angry that they will take actions to punish severely the political leaders who continue to support the war. Serious political challengers might attract a mass following by embracing the example of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who promised in the 1952 campaign to end the enormously unpopular war in Korea and, after he took office, kept his promise expeditiously. So far, however, this prospect appears extremely unlikely.

When substantial negative feedback begins to jeopardize the incumbents' personal job security, not to speak of the respect and fawning the electorate lavishes on them, they will begin to take notice and to discount more heavily the political contributions from big defense contractors, big financial establishments, petrochemical companies, and other high rollers who have encouraged them to stay the hopeless course (though not hopeless for these special interests, of course; as I have noted, the war has been a bonanza for them). George W. Bush parlayed a campaign of fear mongering into his reelection in 2004, but unless another major terrorist attack occurs in the United States, the public will grow increasingly resistant to such appeals and more eager to throw the rascals out as the war's costs continue to mount.

It is terribly unfortunate that escalating costs in blood and money are the only proven means of bringing the general public to resist strongly political leaders who are committed to a continuation of an unnecessary, unwise, and immoral war. Some of us wish that rational argument, cogent evidence, and humane sentiment would persuade a preponderance of the public to demand an end to the war. History suggests, however, that only personal grief and economic pain will induce the American public to act against their perfidious leaders. Needless to say, if the public remains as passive and as easily bamboozled as it has been during the past seven years, the war will

continue, maybe even for the hundred years that Senator McCain declares the U.S. occupation of Iraq would be “fine with me” (qtd. in Phillips 2008).

## References

- Ambrose, Stephen E. 1985. *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938*. 4th ed. New York: Penguin.
- Brecht, Bertolt. 1976. Guns before Butter. In *Bertolt Brecht: Poems, 1913–1956*, edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, with the cooperation of Erich Fried, 300. New York: Methuen.
- Coyne, Christopher J. 2008. *After War: The Political Economy of Exporting Democracy*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Douglass, Frederick. [1857] 1985. The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies. Speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 3. In *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, series one, vol. 3, edited by John W. Blasingame, 204. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Gibbs, Nancy, and John F. Dickerson. 2004. Inside the Mind of George W. Bush. *Time*, August 29. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,689400-1,00.html>.
- Hayek, F. A. 1944. *The Road to Serfdom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Higgs, Robert. 2004. Beware the Pork Hawk: In Pursuit of Reelection, Congress Sells Out the Nation’s Defense. In *Against Leviathan: Government Power and a Free Society*, by Robert Higgs, 235–45. Oakland, Calif.: The Independent Institute.
- . 2007. Military-Economic Fascism: How Business Corrupts Government and Vice Versa. *The Independent Review* 12, no. 2 (fall): 299–316.
- Hülsmann, Jörg Guido. 2007. *Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism*. Auburn, Ala.: Ludwig von Mises Institute.
- Locke, John. [1690] 1988. *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Marte, Ana. 2007. The U.S. Military: By the Numbers. *Defense Monitor* 36, no. 6 (November–December): 1–10.
- Mayer, Lindsay Renick. 2008. Strategic Assets. *Capital Eye*, April 3. Available at: [http://www.capitaleye.org/capital\\_eye/inside.php?ID=342](http://www.capitaleye.org/capital_eye/inside.php?ID=342).
- Mosley, Hugh G. 1985. *The Arms Race: Economic and Social Consequences*. Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath.
- Mueller, John E. 1973. *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. New York: John Wiley.
- . 2005. The Iraq Syndrome. *Foreign Affairs* (November–December). Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20051101faessay84605/john-mueller/the-iraq-syndrome.html>.
- Payne, James L. 2006. Did the United States Create Democracy in Germany? *The Independent Review* 11, no. 2 (fall 2006): 209–21.

- Phillips, Kate. 2008. McCain Said “100”; Opponents Latch On. *New York Times*, March 27. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/27/us/politics/27check.html>.
- President Presents Medal of Freedom. 2004. White House news release, December 14. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/12/20041214-3.html>.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E., and Linda J. Bilmes. 2008. *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*. New York: Norton.
- U.S. Department of Defense. 2001. *100 Companies Receiving the Largest Dollar Volume of Prime Contract Awards—Fiscal Year 2000*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense.
- . 2004. *100 Companies Receiving the Largest Dollar Volume of Prime Contract Awards—Fiscal Year 2003*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense.
- U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller). 2007. *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2008*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense. Available at: [http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2008/fy2008\\_greenbook.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2008/fy2008_greenbook.pdf).
- Vice President and Mrs. Cheney’s Remarks in Wilmington, Ohio. 2004. Roberts Convention Center, Wilmington, Ohio, October 25. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/10/20041026-7.html>.
- Wheeler, Winslow T. 2004. Don’t Mind If I Do: Congress Says It’s Going All Out for the Troops. Here’s \$8.9 Billion in Pork That Says It’s Not. *Washington Post*, August 22. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A20380-2004Aug20.html>.