

Behind the New York Times' concern about Washington's "forever wars": Plans for new war authorization and conscription

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24 October 2017

The *New York Times* Monday published a worried editorial titled "America's Forever Wars" that began with a fairly accurate and sobering sketch of the ever-expanding operations of the US military on every continent of the globe.

"The United States has been at war continuously since the attacks of 9/11 and now has just over 240,000 active-duty and reserve troops in at least 172 countries and territories," the *Times* notes. "While the number of men and women deployed overseas has shrunk considerably over the past 60 years, the military's reach has not. American forces are actively engaged not only in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen that have dominated the news, but also in Niger and Somalia, both recently the scene of deadly attacks, as well as Jordan, Thailand and elsewhere."

It adds the extraordinary fact that the Pentagon publicly lists the countries in which 37,813 troops are currently deployed as "unknown," apparently referring to special operations units assigned to secret wars being waged behind the backs of the American people.

"So far, Americans seem to accept that these missions and the deployments they require will continue indefinitely," the editorial continues. "Still, it's a very real question whether, in addition to endorsing these commitments, which have cost trillions of dollars and many lives over 16 years, they will embrace new entanglements of the sort President Trump has seemed to portend with his rash threats and questionable decisions on North Korea and Iran."

Heaping the blame for unbridled American militarism on the American people, the *Times* asserts that "the public is quiet" because "so few families bear so much of this military burden, and partly because America is not involved in anything comparable to the Vietnam War,

when huge American casualties produced sustained public protest." It goes on to note that while in Vietnam and previous wars "the draft put most families at risk of having a loved one go to war ... now America has all-volunteer armed forces."

"The idea that Americans could be inured to war and all its horrors is chilling," the *Times* editors bemoan.

Who do they think they're kidding? Does the newspaper's editorial page editor James Bennet (a man with the closest ties to the US state, with a brother who is a right-wing Democratic senator from Colorado and a father who was a top State Department official who headed the Agency for International Development (AID), a frequent conduit for CIA operations) think that the *Times*' readership is plagued by collective amnesia?

The "newspaper of record" has done everything in its power to "inure" the American public to war and, whenever possible, to conceal from it the real extent of its horrors—at least when the bloodshed is the handiwork of the Pentagon.

The *Times* editorial board has played a critical role in selling every US war of aggression for the past 25 years. Its most infamous role was played in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when its senior correspondent Judith Miller conspired with the government to promote and embellish upon the lies about "weapons of mass destruction," and its ineffable foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman brazenly embraced a "war of choice," justifying it in the name of democracy, human rights and oil. Once the *Times* got the war it sought, it systematically obscured its real human costs, which included the estimated loss of a million Iraqi lives.

The newspaper subsequently played a similar role promoting US regime change interventions in Libya and Syria in the name of "human rights," which claimed the

lives of hundreds of thousands more and turned millions into refugees.

So why the sudden squeamishness?

In the first instance, the editorial appears to be a response to roiling and bitter public debate that has erupted in the wake of the October 4 deaths of four US special forces troops in a firefight in Niger. The episode, revealing that some 1,000 US troops are deployed in the landlocked West African nation—without the knowledge, much less the approval, of Congress—has been accompanied by shameful attacks of the White House on the widow of one of the slain soldiers. This has been combined with the open assertions of the unquestionable power of the military and the “commander-in-chief,” casting a bit too much light on both US militarism abroad and the increasing turn toward military dictatorship at home for the taste of the *Times* editors.

What does the *Times* propose? The editorial laments the failure of Congress to debate US imperialism’s multiple ongoing wars, and to “put the war against the Islamic State, which has broad popular support but no congressional authorization, on a firm legal footing.”

In other words, the editorial proposes the passage of another Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF). Both Trump and his Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, have claimed that the AUMFs passed in 2001 in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks and in 2002 in advance of the Iraqi invasion provided them with all the power they need to wage war anywhere on the planet.

The invocation of these decade-and-a-half-old resolutions has been used to override both the US Constitution, which declares that only Congress can declare war, and the 1973 War Powers Act, passed in the midst of the crisis gripping US imperialism over its debacle in Vietnam. The latter placed strict limits and timetables on interventions ordered by US presidents, requiring that they either receive Congressional authorization or be terminated.

Neither the Democratic Party nor the Republican Party has shown any interests in challenging this arrogation of dictatorial power to the presidency on the issue of war, and no significant section of Congress has shown any inclination to debate the matter. All of them are well aware that, for their paymasters in America’s parasitical financial oligarchy, global military aggression is a critical instrument in its drive to secure profits, markets and resources.

It is true that the invocation of the 2001 and 2002

AUMFs has become increasingly absurd. The Obama administration utilized these measures supposedly authorizing a war against Al Qaeda to justify interventions in Libya and Syria, in which Washington backed Al Qaeda-linked militias to overthrow secular Arab regimes that, like the one in Iraq, had nothing to do with 9/11.

The real concerns of the *Times*, however, are indicated by its references to the “huge American casualties” of Vietnam, the question of the draft and the prospect of new wars against North Korea and Iran. In the face of bloody calamities on the horizon, the newspaper’s editors believe that at least a pseudo-legal fig leaf of congressional authorization is in order.

Its concerns reflect discussions ongoing within the US military itself. The most recent edition of *Parameters*, the journal of the US Army War College, includes an article by two Army colonels titled “Mobilizing for Major War,” citing the conviction within the Pentagon senior command that armed conflict with “near-peer competitors” is “virtually guaranteed at some point” and “more probable than at any time since the Cold War.”

It goes on to note: “During both World Wars, conscription enabled the US Army to expand greatly to play critical roles in defeating large-scale aggression. For both political and practical reasons, Congress abolished the military draft in 1973, and transitioned to a large-standing all-volunteer force (AVF) ... The all-volunteer force has not yet, however, had to confront a great power. ... The all-volunteer force has never fought a conflict requiring a full mobilization on short- or no-notice. It is, therefore, not safe to assume today’s Army can successfully prosecute such a conflict.”

In other words, the preparations for a Third World War include plans for the return of the draft and the dragooning of millions of young Americans to serve as cannon fodder in conflicts that will entail unimaginable carnage. Such measures will inevitably entail the acceleration of the drive toward outright dictatorship, on the one hand, and the eruption of mass revolutionary struggles within working class, on the other.



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