

#1552 Invasion of Iraq, 20 years later

[00:00:00]

Intro 3-31-23

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: During today's episode, I'm gonna be telling you about a progressive show I think you should check out. It's *The Laura Flanders Show*. Keep an ear out mid-show when I tell you more about it.

And now, welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast, in which we shall take a look at the history and legacy of the invasion of Iraq by the United States under George W. Bush and his administration, with the support of the vast majority of Americans who had been systematically misled by falsified evidence used to make the case for war. Clips today are from *Democracy Now!*, *AJ+*, *The Mehdi Hasan Show*, *CounterSpin*, and *PBS NewsHour*, with an additional members only clip from *The Majority Report*.

Catastrophic: Iraqi Writers Sinan Antoon & Feurat Alani Reflect on U.S. Invasion 20 Years Later - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-20-23

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: It was 20 years ago today, when the U.S. invaded Iraq on the false pretext that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction. The attack came despite worldwide protest and the lack of authorization from the [00:01:00] United Nations Security Council. At around 5:30 a.m. local time in Baghdad, March 20th 2003, air raid sirens were heard in Baghdad as the U.S. invasion began. Within the hour, President George W. Bush gave a nationally televised speech from the Oval Office announcing the war had begun.

GEORGE W. BUSH: My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger. On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine

Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war. These are opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign. ...

I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from [00:02:00] harm. ...

We come to Iraq with respect for its citizens, for their great civilization and for the religious faiths they practice. We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: This is how we began our broadcast on Democracy Now! 20 years ago today, March 20th 2003.

Welcome to Democracy Now!, The War and Peace Report. I'm Amy Goodman. Just about 9:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time last night, the U.S. military began an unprovoked attack on Iraq. Air raid sirens sounded throughout Baghdad just before the sun rose. Anti-aircraft fire filled the sky, and explosions shook the city. Pentagon officials said over 30 Tomahawk cruise missiles were launched from warships. Two stealth bombers each dropped two one-ton bombs. It's not clear what has been hit or the extent of the [00:03:00] casualties. The Iraqi News Agency has just reported there are 14 injured and one dead. Iraq responded by firing three missiles into northern Kuwait, according to the U.S. military — that could not be independently confirmed.

The attack was not the beginning of the expected massive, what the U.S. government calls "shock and awe" campaign. Instead, it was a targeted strike on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. It is not yet clear whether the assassination attempt was successful. ...

Hours before the attack, Senator Robert Byrd, the oldest voice in the U.S. Congress, condemned the Bush administration's war plans. The West Virginia Democrat said, "Today I weep for my country. No more is the image of America one of strong, yet benevolent peacekeeper. ... Around the globe, our friends mistrust us, our word is disputed, our intentions are questioned." Byrd continued, "We flaunt our superpower status with arrogance. ... After war has ended, the [00:04:00] United States will have to rebuild much more than the country of Iraq. We will have to rebuild America's image around the globe."

Around the world, international leaders condemned the U.S. war. Top officials from France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Greece, Malaysia, Indonesia and New Zealand were among the countries opposing the attack.

How To Start A War And Get Away With It Part 1 - AJ+ - Air Date 3-16-23

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: When the United States invaded on March 19th, 2003, 72% of Americans supported the war. A staggering number for a war that, by all accounts at the time, shouldn't have received that level of popular support. It was going to be expensive, long, there was going to be a lot of life lost. Both among the Americans and the Iraqis, but Americans overwhelmingly wanted the war.

So, how did that happen? It couldn't just be because of post 9/11 hyper nationalism. Could it? For a war against Iraq to be popular, it had to be sold as a just and necessary war. [00:05:00] Iraq and Saddam Hussein had to be seen as a clear and present danger. Despite the longstanding hostile relationship between the two countries, the Bush administration knew that this would require some maneuvering.

So much so that in November 2001, then Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld was already meeting with military brass to figure out justifications for regime change in Iraq. Considering linking Iraq to 9/11, or creating disputes over weapons of mass destruction inspections.

DONALD RUMSFELD: They're also unknown unknowns.

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: The Bush administration, before the dust of the towers had even settled, began building a framework to justify what would lead to two decades of war, surveillance, torture, and destabilization of entire regions. The so-called Global War on Terror.

GEORGE W. BUSH: We must find terror where it exists and pull it out by the roots and bring it to justice.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: The greater danger is that Saddam Hussein, left to his [00:06:00] own devices, will perfect his means of delivery of weapons of mass destruction.

DICK CHENEY: United has entered a struggle of years, a new kind of war against a new kind of enemy.

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: Iraq had to be brought into that fold — into that fight for civilizational survival against terror. It was, in a January 2002

speech, when President George W. Bush introduced Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as part of the so-called Axis of Evil

GEORGE W. BUSH: States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil. Arming to threaten the peace of the world by seeking weapons of mass destruction. These regimes pose a grave and growing danger.

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: While that wasn't the first instance of when the Bush administration had started constructing a narrative connecting Iraq to 9/11, to WMDs and Al-Qaeda. It was the moment that explicitly put the target on Iraq for a regime change. It's from then on [00:07:00] that we see a sustained campaign to mention Iraq, 9/11, terrorism and WMDs in order to rally public opinion. Despite there being zero evidence connecting Iraq and 9/11, or Iraq and Al-Qaeda, or zero conclusive evidence that Iraq still had, or was developing WMDs.

DICK CHENEY: Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction.

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: The lack of evidence didn't stop the Bush administration from making those links.

DONALD RUMSFELD: We know they have weapons of mass destruction. We know they have active programs there. There isn't any debate about it

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: ...and an uncritical news media from helping them manufacture the story.

CBS REPORTER: No one is certain what Saddam has, that they do know what he is capable of doing. He's on a collision course with the United States over weapons of mass destruction.

We go to the UN, make one last diplomatic effort on inspections. Since Saddam says no, it's clearly he who has refused the [00:08:00] diplomatic route.

60 MINUTES: For the first time in four years, UN weapons inspectors will be back in Iraq to scour a country the size of California for evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

CNN: Look, it got to the point; they knew, that we knew, that they knew, that we knew.

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: The US News media and political class very easily accepted the idea that; if Iraq's government did in fact have WMDs, then of course there was just no other choice but to invade. Because a full-blown war isn't catastrophic the way chemical weapons could be.

So wall to wall coverage, a grab for ratings, as well as the default tendency within the news media to uphold the power of government and military, ensured that an impenetrable wall was created against any criticism of the war mongering from US officials. A 2008 study by the Center for Public Integrity and Non-Partisan Group found that; in the two years following 9/11, President Bush and seven other top US officials made a total of 935 [00:09:00] false statements about the threat posed by Iraq.

In addition to being given a consistent platform on cable news, Bush administration officials, as well as anonymous government sources, Iraqi defenders, and Republicans were also unquestioned sources on the war that they had long salivated for.

SEAN HANNITY: You have laid out a very firm case and I give you a lot of credit.

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: Time and time again, the overwhelming majority of voices featured were current or former government officials, the majority of whom were pro-war. A trend that would also continue into post invasion coverage. In a single two week period before the invasion, only one US official out of 267 American guests featured on broadcast news such as NBC, PBS, ABC, and CBS, was somewhat critical of the prospect of war with Iraq. According to Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.

There was no room for dissent, and when it was featured, it either provoked considerable backlash or was usually from non-Americans who didn't exactly carry much authority among [00:10:00] the average American viewer. MSNBC, which had been given a directive to go to the right after 9/11, even fired veteran media personality Phil Donahue for being too critical of the Iraq War, as a leaked memo revealed.

20 years on, should George W. Bush be on trial for Iraq Part 1 - The Mehdi Hasan Show - Air Date 3-16-23

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Maybe just getting Saddam was personal for Bush. An extension of the first Persian Gulf War, and the lingering bad blood between the Iraqi and American ruling families.

GEORGE W. BUSH: ...but there's no doubt his hatred is mainly directed at us. There's no doubt he can't stand us. After all, this is the guy that tried to kill my dad at one time.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Whatever his reasoning, George W. Bush was mad. As journalist Robert Draper learned from a religious leader who met with Bush soon after nine 11.

ROBERT DRAPER: Some religious leaders met with him in the Oval Office and the president confessed to them, "I'm having difficulty containing my blood lust."

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Bush seemed increasingly fixated on Saddam Hussein. In March 2002, just six months after 9/11, as National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice met with [00:11:00] three senators in her office, Time Magazine reported, according to one participant, that Bush poked his head into Rice's office and announced to them all "F Saddam, we are taking him out."

Those words from President Bush were first reported in 2003, and haven't been publicly disputed since. The best check against the march to war might have been a press that asked tough questions, that acted as a true watchdog. Few in the American mainstream media challenged the evidence-free claims over WMDs at that time, or acknowledged the deep cynicism and dishonesty of the man pushing them the hardest.

The man who would talk about terrorism and violence in the Middle East like this.

GEORGE W. BUSH: We must stop the terror. I call upon all nations to do everything they can to stop these terrorist killers. Thank you. Now watch this drive.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Sure. The Gettysburg address [00:12:00] is great, but is there anything more American than George W. Bush cheerleading a war on terror from the first green at the Cape Arundel Golf Club?

He had his war plans for Iraq. He had a complacent press. All that was missing was a pretext invade. Four words, weapons of mass destruction.

MSNBC FOOTAGE: ...a massive stockpile of biological weapons. ...anthrax and botulism toxin, and possibly small pox. ...biological weapons, factories on wheels, and on rails. ...VX, and sarin, and mustard gas. ...attempts to acquire high specification aluminum tubes. ...high quality aluminum tubes. ...high strength aluminum tubes, suitable for nuclear weapons production. ...nuclear weapons. ...we know he is out trying, once again, to produce nuclear weapons. ...we have solid evidence of the presence in Iraq of Al-Qaeda members. ...various terrorist groups including the Al-Qaeda organization. ...Al-Qaeda leaders have sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire weapon of weapons of mass [00:13:00] destruction. ...weapons of mass destruction. ...it's weapons of mass destruction. ...we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud. ...facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Guess what? There were no WMDs. We know that now, but the key fact here is that they should have known that then. They had almost no intel to suggest Saddam had actual WMDs, certainly not a "massive stockpile", to quote Bush, or that Saddam played any role in 9/11, or had any working relationship with Al-Qaeda.

These were just wishes masquerading as evidence, and the most egregious example was the claim that Saddam was developing nuclear weapons. Take a moment and just listen to 16 crucial words that help get the American public on board with going to war. The line that scared the bejesus out of them.

GEORGE W. BUSH: The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: President Bush in his 2003 State of the Union. Those [00:14:00] 16 words, reported on and repeated uncritically by much of our media at the time, played a massive role in convincing people in America and abroad that Saddam posed a nuclear threat to all of us. It was one thing if Iraq had biological or chemical weapons, but the idea of the regime with a nuclear weapon, perhaps sharing it with terrorists, was a whole other level of immediate danger.

Bush claimed there were receipts, thing is those receipts did not stand up to even the lightest scrutiny. In 2001 the US received intelligence from Italy's

government suggesting that Saddam Hussein had tried, in the 1990s, to buy yellow cake uranium powder from Niger. Yellow cake is used for nuclear energy production, but also for nuclear weapons.

This intel was flimsy, to say the least. It wasn't corroborated, and the idea that Iraq would buy 500 tons of this uranium without the ability to process it was pretty absurd. Nonetheless, the White House wanted any information to prove that Iraq had looked to buy yellow cake uranium. So just months after 9/11, the CIA sent someone to [00:15:00] Niger to check it out.

They sent the former US ambassador to that country, Joseph Wilson. He had plenty of contacts, and would surely be able to see if there was any trace of such a sale. When Wilson got back to the US he told the CIA he could find no evidence that Iraq had tried to buy yellow cake uranium powder. The CIA warned the White House, "don't say that they did in Bush's speech, the US intelligence didn't support it."

What then do you do if you are the Bush White House and your Intel services won't confirm the story you want to tell? The Bush White House found a workaround. Let's play those 16 words again, but this time pay close attention to the source of that intelligence on Iraq and uranium.

GEORGE W. BUSH: The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: The British government has learned. Bush cited another country's unproven intelligence, and acted like US [00:16:00] intelligence experts hadn't already debunked it. You can imagine Joe Wilson's surprise when he heard that speech in January, 2003, almost a year after his trip to Niger.

You actually don't have to imagine. Wilson wrote a New York Times op-ed shortly after the Iraq invasion quote, "if my information was deemed inaccurate, I understand. Though I would be very interested to know why. If, however, the information was ignored because it did not fit certain preconceptions about Iraq, then a legitimate argument can be made that we went to war under false pretenses."

It wasn't just Wilson's revelations that shook the public. Bush's case for war had already begun to crumble even before the first bomb dropped. In early March 2003 the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency told the United

Nations that the documents, which appeared to show Niger's government selling uranium to Iraq, were actually forgeries.

Over the next year the Bush administration's claims about nuclear weapons, aluminum tubes, chemical weapons, mobile biolabs all fell [00:17:00] apart.

How To Start A War And Get Away With It Part 2 - AJ+ - Air Date 3-16-23

SANA SAEED - REPORTER, AJ+: What does the coverage before the invasion of Iraq tell us about the depth of persuasion? When political power and the power of the press lock hands. Now we know that not a single member of the Bush administration, from President George W. Bush himself to the legal architect of torture John Yu, saw a day of accountability.

President Bush gives candy to Michelle Obama and paints his days away. John Yu teaches at Berkeley Law. Condoleezza Rice is at Stanford. David Frum, the speech writer who wrote the Axis of Evil speech, is a columnist for The Atlantic. Dick Cheney was applauded for his 2022 rebuke of Trump after supporting his presidency in 2016, and Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld are dead.

Except for Judith Miller, almost every other media cheerleader went on to have an illustrious career. David Remnick is still the editor-in-chief of The New Yorker. Jeffrey Goldberg went on to become the editor-in-Chief of the Atlantic, where George Packer is also a staff writer. Jonathan Chait is now a columnist for New York Magazine. Thomas Friedman still has a [00:18:00] career, of course, at the Times.

Broadcast news networks have barely acknowledged the role they played. The war was a lucrative time for most news channels. Government officials and other pro-war pundits continued to flood national news channels after it was clear that the premise justifying the invasion had crumbled.

The New York Times in 2004 published what some referred to as a mea culpa, but it barely even scratched the surface of its role in pushing war propaganda that resulted in a minimum of 100,000 Iraqi deaths. There were scattered apologies from individual journalists like Benard and Zakaria, but there was no real accountability, no consequences.

In that lack of consequences, that lack of accountability, we find the unsettling truth about the relationship between power and the US news media. That truth — that not much changes despite glaring failures, patterns of misinformation and disinformation about US foreign policy decisions and aggression, [00:19:00] have continued.

The architects who held office or sat behind news desks have thrived in their careers and moved on to manufacturing other countries as threats, using the same blueprint as Iraq War with some sharper edges. There is always deference to not just US government talking points, especially on foreign policy and national security, but to US interest.

While that's inevitable, it's gonna happen. It's a media landscape that's made up of Americans, of course. The veneer of objectivity needs to fall. The coverage leading up to the invasion of Iraq shouldn't be forgotten. It is the foundation of understanding how an entire population, and an entire news media, came to support something so brutal, destructive, and illegal.

There are a lot of consequences in not acknowledging and holding to account what went so fundamentally wrong by design 20 years ago. The most devastating injustice done is to the people of Iraq. [00:20:00] The victims of that war, dead and alive, who lost everything for a war our leaders, and our news media, lied about.

Norman Solomon on the Iraq Invasion, 20 Years Later - CounterSpin - Air Date 3-24-23

JANINE JACKSON - HOST, COUNTERSPIN: To me, the fact that when you look at the architects and the folks who are most prominent in mouth piecing for this invasion, the fact that they are all still in high paid and prominent positions, it underscores the fact that corporate media's debate, it has a patina of rationality and of debate, but it's really just a club. There's just certain folks that they listen to and whose ideas they promote, and it doesn't matter if those folks are wrong or right or if they're reliable or not, or if they're lying or ignorant, they're just on the list. And then there are other people who are just not on the list, whether or not their predictions turn out to be right or whether or not [00:21:00] they're reliable. And with Iraq, that was historians and regional specialists, and human rights researchers. They're just never gonna be led into the conversation no matter how correct they were.

NORMAN SOLOMON: There really are tacit media boundaries that I think are well understood, however consciously or not, and when a mis-assessment was later shown to be egregiously wrong with a war or peace at stake, there's later on a sense of a clean slate. Let's wipe the record clean, because we all make mistakes and so forth, and that goes to individuals and also to media organizations. We like to think, or we might want to think, "the ones that are really top quality, they will cop to their mistakes, distortions, errors, even, or especially, when the errors were extremely important," and yet that's not the [00:22:00] case.

One example, which at least has to do with history, and we're told that journalism is the first draft of history. Okay, later on there should be a better draft. Of course, one would hope that the first one was accurate, given that that is the most important while these events are unfolding. So one example that comes to mind, The New York Times reported early on in this whole 20 year span that the invasion came after Saddam Hussein had kicked out un weapons inspectors from the country in 1998.

So this was the New York Times telling all of its readers that, "hey, those UN weapons inspectors pulled out of the country several years before the invasion, they were kicked out. Saddam Hussein did not allow them to inspect anymore." And FAIR, Fairness and [00:23:00] Accuracy In Reporting, made the clear and accurate point and mobilized some messaging to the New York Times that that's an interesting story, which happens to be false, and that Saddam Hussein did not kick out the UN weapons inspectors in 1998, they were withdrawn by the United Nations because the government of, under that point, president Bill Clinton, had made clear it was about to bomb Iraq and what became known as Operation Desert Fox. And so it was because the US government announced essentially it was about to bomb the country that the UN thought it was prudent to save the lives, perhaps, of the UN inspectors to withdraw. And so that was something that FAIR activists, were able to get the New York Times to publish a subsequent correction.

Fast forward many years to the time of the 20th [00:24:00] anniversary that we've just gone through, and the New York Times again publishes the falsehood that Saddam Hussein kicked out the weapons inspectors from the country in 1998, which sort of reminds me of something that George Orwell wrote in 1984, " those who control the present, control the past. Those who control the past, control the future."

And I think that's a good cautionary note to anybody who thinks, "well, this is just history. Why talk about it now?" because all of this is prefigurative. It is

actually reinforcing mindsets. These distortions are messaging to people, subtly and not so subtly, that at the end of the day, I think. As you put it, uh, at the beginning of our discussion, Janine, the US government can be wrong, but it's still okay. We can go into war and okay, we made mistakes, et cetera, et cetera, which is easy for us to say, while other people experience it [00:25:00] with more suffering by far than those in the US, but it's still the pretense, subtly or not, is "it's okay because we mean well. "

There was a short story written a hundred years ago called *Editha*, and there's a character in it, and this is in about 1905 when it's published, which is in the aftermath really of the US slaughter of people in the Philippines. And there's a character who says, "what a wonderful thing it is to live in a country that might be wrong, but when it's wrong, is right anyway.

20 years on, should George W. Bush be on trial for Iraq Part 2 - The Mehdi Hasan Show - Air Date 3-16-23

MSNBC FOOTAGE: Protestors came by the thousands, building block after block around the United Nations, to make a single dramatic statement against going to war.

The anti-war protests were on a scale not seen since the Vietnam War. ...millions around the globe marched this past weekend. ...more than a million people jammed into Trafalgar Square to protest US plans for war in Iraq.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: [00:26:00] These were some of the biggest global demonstrations in human history. In London we were marching against, not just British Prime Minister Tony Blair who rallied the UK to join the American War effort, but against American President George W. Bush himself.

We were right to protest then, and we've been sadly proven right in the 20 years since. 4,000+ American service members and 400,000+ Iraqi civilians died as a result of the invasion, an illegal invasion launched by George W. Bush.

I'm actually appalled at the way in which almost everyone seems to have moved on from talking about President Bush, and his responsibility for one of the great crimes of the 21st century. People in our politics, in our media, in our popular

culture, haven't just brushed Iraq under the carpet and let Bush off the hook, they've rehabilitated him. They've begun to celebrate him.

NEWS FOOTAGE: In the middle of a presidential campaign filled with rencor, we were struck by a very different image over the weekend. First Lady Michelle [00:27:00] Obama embracing former President George W. Bush.

...so good to see the two of them together. I wish the rest of our politicians could get along as well as they do.

...so what led you to painting?

In retrospect it was longing for learning. If that old boy can paint, I can paint. That old boy can paint, I can paint.

...former president, now a painter in his prime.

...can you enlighten us to the painting George W. Rembrandt?

...the portraits that you have done are beautiful.

Thank you.

...you're really talented. I can't believe you just started five years ago.

I painted — these are painted with a lot of passion.

...you were involved in many notable faux pas, which we had a lot of fun with. You're opening the door, there was mission accomplished,

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: A faux pas, how is any of that okay? Sorry, I don't care how good his portraits are. I, for one, am not gonna laugh and smile about George Bush offering cough drops to Michelle Obama. [00:28:00] He can offer up his old medicine cabinet as far as I care. I get that the rise of Donald J. Trump has made some Americans look back at George W. Bush and say, "maybe he wasn't so bad."

I myself wrote a snarky 2015 op-ed about how the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the GOP, of Trump, of Ben Carson, of Mike Huckabee made me miss George W. The fact is that the party has certainly gotten more extreme and more bigoted since he left office, but I certainly don't look at Bush and wax nostalgic the way

so many Americans, and even so many Democrats, now seem to. I haven't forgotten about Iraq. I, for one, certainly didn't need the reminder that SNL's President Bush, a k a Will Ferrell, felt compelled to give during the Trump years.

WILL FERRELL: So I just wanted to address my fellow Americans tonight and remind you guys that I was really bad, like [00:29:00] historically not good.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Remember during his last year in office, President Bush's approval rating was in the twenties, but by 2018 in the second year of the Trump presidency, it was up to 61% approval. His support among Democrats had quintupled. Nowadays, Americans apparently see W as a cuddly former president with some cute hobbies who wasn't as bad as the Donald.

Meanwhile, remember, there's an insurgency in Iraq. The body count is mounting. The WMDs aren't there. This is how the then-president responds to it all, just one year after the invasion, at a gala with DC journalists. This is an actual gag that the Bush White House came up with at the time. I kid you not.

GEORGE W. BUSH: I'm gonna do one of my slideshows, . These are actual unstaged photos pulled from the files of the White House photo office. Those weapons of mass destruction gotta be somewhere[00:30:00]

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Nothing but laughs and jokes. So when people say, "oh look at Michelle and W and their friendship, their sharing of cough drops", I think of that clip of Bush that we just played. Having lied about WMDs, having got American soldiers killed, already thousands of Iraqis killed at that point, and laughing about it, mocking the whole thing, not giving a damn, but hey, all is forgotten, all is forgiven.

“To Start a War” by Robert Draper - PBS - Air Date 8-7-20

ROBERT COSTA - ANCHOR, PBS: You've spent a lot of time in your career reporting on George W. Bush. You've written a book previously, *Dead Certain*, based on your own interviews with President Bush. When you came back to evaluate the Iraq decision, what is something new you learned about W.

ROBERT DRAPER: The main thing that I learned... you're right Bob, that I've spent a great deal of time with him when I was doing my previous Bush book,

Dead Certain, which was published in 2007, and I'd spent a lot of time for that matter when we were both living in Texas and he was governor and I was a staff writer at Texas Monthly.

What was not clear to me, even with all that time I [00:31:00] spent with him for the biography of his presidency, was, it was not clear to me how much the intelligence really mattered. And I think I've alluded to how unfortunately it didn't matter as much as it would've liked to, because as it's often said, 9/11 was a failure of the imagination. I think it can also be said that Iraq was a failure of too much imagination.

And for the president of the United States to say, as he did in that clip that you showed, that essentially Saddam would like nothing better than than to team up with other people who hate us and hate our freedoms and hand over his weapons to them and allow the destruction of America without leaving any thumbprint. This was something he said repeatedly, and it just wasn't supported by any of the facts. It was something instead that he believed, and by the way, obviously, this connects to where we are today.

You showed the clip of Trump saying and distinguishing himself in the Republican primary by saying, look, you guys may have all this supposed experience and expertise, but you were so gullible, you bought into this stupid war, and I was smart enough to oppose it from the start, so he claims, and I alone can fix these [00:32:00] things by keeping us out of endless wars.

But the commonality between Bush and Trump is that there really was a departure from the facts. There was not an honest search for the truth in the lead up to war. And of course, now we have a president today who simply embraces what, his counselor memorably termed alternative facts.

Death, Destruction & Resilience Nadjé Al-Ali on the 20th Anniversary of U.S. Invasion of Iraq - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-16-23

NADJE AL-ALI:

The invasion had a devastating impact on Iraqi society. I, myself, have been trying to document the gap between the rhetoric of liberation and bringing

human rights, democracy, and particularly in relation to women's rights, to Iraq, and the reality of what happened in the aftermath, with putting it against the historical background of 13 years of the most comprehensive sanctions that a country ever experienced. I think that's really important, that when we think about the devastation and destruction of Iraqi society, it actually doesn't start in 2003. It started with the sanctions regime on the 2nd of August, [00:33:00] 1990.

But, yeah, to my mind, really, the biggest losers in the post-invasion scenario have been women. —the very same people that actually President Bush used them as a symbol of the midwives of the new Iraq, as he used to say. And while it is true that women have — initially, in the aftermath, there was some hope, there was quite a bit of mobilization, a mushrooming of women's rights organizations. What we have seen systematically since 2003 is an erosion of the kinds of rights and the access to resources—to healthcare, to education, to labor force—that women actually had during the Baath regime. And I'm in no business of justifying the atrocities that Saddam Hussein committed during the 35 years of Baath, but the fact is that the 2003 invasion led to greater gender-based [00:34:00] inequality, towards a shift towards greater social conservatism. It led to lawlessness, chaos, a destroyed infrastructure. Healthcare is in shambles. Education is struggling. And so, everyday life has become really, really hard, not only for the thousands and thousands of Iraqis who have been displaced internally or have become refugees in neighboring countries or come to Europe or to the U.S., but people who stayed behind.

For me, the story of the past 20 years is a story of destruction, devastation, corruption, incompetence, but also a story of resilience. Iraqis are not just passive victims, and when I think about the 20 years, I'm not just thinking about the U.S. and the U.K. and their responsibility; I am also thinking about corrupt Iraqi politicians, sectarian militia [00:35:00] leaders, and criminal gangs who have been terrorizing the country. While they have been facilitated by the invasion, they also have to take responsibility.

So it's a very complex picture, but I think one of the things that we have seen is that there is a new generation of Iraqis who's really trying to turn things around. We have seen large-scale protest movements over the past few years. So there is some hope, but what we've seen, really, is a tragedy that has been unfolding and that was definitely not necessary. Although I don't think that there is a “good invasion,” I think that in addition to the invasion, the U.S. did everything wrong that it could have done in the aftermath of the invasion.

NERMEEN SHAIKH - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: So, Professor Al-Ali, could you elaborate on that? What did the U.S. do after the invasion that was wrong?

NADJE AL-ALI: Most notably, the disbanding of the military, and all of a sudden we have a [00:36:00] million-plus young men on the street without jobs, with arms. That contributed to the creation of militia and of grievances within this element of population.

The other thing is to go into Iraq and think of it in sectarian terms. So, the Coalition Provisional Authority that was established by the U.S. was all based on so many Sunnis, so many Shias, so many Christians, so many Kurds, instead of thinking about the country in terms of political terms. So that actually reified and contributed to the sectarian divisions in Iraq.

Aside from the fact that women's rights were the first things that dropped off the agenda. You have, in the aftermath of the invasion, when there was an explosion of lawlessness and chaos and gender-based violence, you have had U.S. [00:37:00] military personnel who were approached by Iraqi women's rights activists and who were told, "Well, we don't do women." So, despite all this rhetoric of, "Yes, we are contributing to the liberation of women," the opposite took place. The U.S. administration, military, and also the Coalition Provisional Authorities turned a blind eye when we saw the mushrooming of gender-based violence.

And then, also de-Baathification, although, of course, it was very important, the process of coming to terms with the past 35 years of a brutal dictatorship, but the way that de-Baathification actually ended up working was that it really alienated a large percentage of the population, and it contributed, again, to the sectarian divisions. And we know, of course, that ISIS is one side effect of the invasion and [00:38:00] the occupation.

NERMEEN SHAIKH - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: Professor Al-Ali, you mentioned, I mean, to look at the context in which this invasion took place. It came after 11 years of these brutal sanctions against Iraq — more than 11 years, I think it was 13 years.

NADJE AL-ALI: Thirteen. Thirteen years, yes.

NERMEEN SHAIKH - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: Thirteen years, yes, sorry. Thirteen years of sanctions, and just prior to that, Iraq having

emerged from an eight-year war with Iran. So, if you could talk about both those things?

NADJE AL-ALI: We really need to think more carefully about the 35 years, because in the '70s, actually, Iraq was, despite being a dictatorship, it was flourishing economically. There was the push for women to enter the labor force, education. There was a welfare state.

Things started to get worse during the '80s, as you mentioned, from 1980-88, the war with Iran. During this period, [00:39:00] every man between the ages of 15 and 65 had to go to the front. Women during this period became “superwomen,” because Saddam Hussein at some point came out in '85 and said, “Every good Iraqi woman should have five children.” At the same time, while women were under pressure to produce the future soldiers of Iraq, you would find them in all kinds of jobs. And when I was visiting Iraq during that time, I saw women working at petrol stations, driving trucks. Women filled up many of the jobs that were previously held by men, so not a good situation, but a situation where women did play an active role.

And then, following the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, we had the onset of sanctions. And although the idea was the justification was to contain Saddam, it actually had the opposite effect. Saddam controlled the [00:40:00] limited resources. It's during this time that we saw this incredible shift in terms of increased poverty. We saw the feminization of poverty. We saw that all the welfare services that the state provided, like free child care, free transportation to work, a robust healthcare system, a robust education system, all this eroded during this period. And I remember my aunt telling me during this time, she said the first Gulf War, 1991, following the invasion of Kuwait, bridges were destroyed, but sanctions destroyed our society, and you cannot recover from that.

Catastrophic Iraqi Writers Sinan Antoon & Feurat Alani Reflect on U.S. Invasion 20 Years Later Part 2 - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-20-23

FEURAT ALANI: As he relentlessly said, the figures are enough to explain how this invasion — I refuse the term “war,” because a lot of people and observers are talking about the Iraq War. It was an Iraq invasion, [00:41:00] illegal, and its consequences on many points are a disaster.

What is really important to me, as a French of Iraqi descent, is to remember that Iraq was a country. Iraq was a concept. We didn't know anything about the sectarian view that the U.S. brought in 2003. Of course, it was in history, but Iraqis used to describe themselves as Iraqis. There was a sense of identity, of citizenship. When I was a kid, I had the chance to go to Iraq. I was 9 the first time, in '89. It was the only year of peace from the last 40 years. The country, I discovered, was the opposite of all the clichés I had [00:42:00] about the country, and at the same time I was rational of the nature of the regime. I still remember, and I refuse to forget, that Iraq was safe. Iraq had a daily life that was comparable sometimes to the life I had in France.

Again, I would like to remind that Iraq was, of course, a dictatorship. It was difficult or impossible to go against the regime. People were jailed, killed or silenced. My father was an opponent to the regime. He left Iraq in the '70s, so we know that and we knew that at home back in France.

The idea that 20 years later we still are talking about how Iraq now is a better place, how Iraq is a democracy, when it's even almost impossible to have a [00:43:00] sense of what the Iraqi citizenship is today. Iraqis are described with their sect or origin or ethnicity. Iraqis today are described as Sunnis and Shia, Kurds and Arabs, Christians and Muslims, which is something I would oppose to what Iraq was. To me, 20 years later, Iraq is part of a collective amnesia. I think it's very important to highlight how Iraq was, and maybe to talk about the future of Iraq.

NERMEEN SHAIKH - CO-HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: Well, Feurat if you could talk about — your piece, you've just elaborated on what exactly has happened to Iraqi identity. To what do you attribute the fact that Iraq came to be seen along purely sectarian lines? That now, as you say, people continue to identify as Sunni, Shia, [00:44:00] Kurd, etc.?

FEURAT ALANI: When the American Army and the U.S. administration of George W. Bush invaded Iraq, they came with the idea that Iraqis, again, were not Iraqis. They were qualified by their sects. From the day after the fall of the regime, we have seen on TV people that all Iraqis didn't really know. The Iraqi elite that came with the U.S. Army, representing a concept of Iraq through sects, and religion, and confessions.

We have to remind that everything was destroyed as a country. The Iraqi Army was disbanded. The institutions were dismantled. Iraq went from a very — [00:45:00] a dictatorship to a security and political vacuum that was filled with those ideas that Iraqis discovered to be really clear. The concept of dividing the

people, of talking about a majority and a minority was really dangerous, because this security and political vacuum I was talking about was filled with people having a short-term vision about Iraq with their own interests. With probably revenge against the regime, and again, this idea — this very binary vision of Iraq, that the Iraqi people was divided in two. Like people who supported Saddam and people who were against, of course, it was much more complex than that.

A lot of mistakes came after the invasion of Iraq. Paul Bremer, who was the American administrator of the country, did so many [00:46:00] mistakes by dismantling the Army, talking about de-Baathification, not allowing a lot of Iraqis to express themselves, to be part of a common project. I clearly remember that all Iraqis — Sunnis or Shia, Christian or Muslim — wanted to be part of something, wanted to be part of a common project. The system brought by the U.S. mindset at that time were completely against that. This is something that needs to be highlighted today, if you want to understand how Iraq is divided today.

20 years on, should George W. Bush be on trial for Iraq Part 3 - The Mehdi Hasan Show - Air Date 3-16-23

GEORGE W. BUSH: Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: For George W. Bush the war was a story he thought he could spin. A story with a definite beginning and a definite end. He chose the beginning [00:47:00]

With a shock and awe spectacle on March the 20th, 2003 that captivated the media. He even tried to choose when it would end; just 43 days later with him in a flight suit, swaggering onto the deck of an aircraft carrier, framed by cheering troops and a banner reading "mission accomplished", but Bush knew it wasn't over.

The US occupation had another hundred and three months to go, and the US inflicted atrocities were just beginning. The torture and sexual abuse of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison. The use of white phosphorus to fire bomb Fallujah, a major Iraqi city with a quarter million residents. Of course, the

massacres of ordinary Iraqis — ordinary civilians at Haditha, and Mahmudiyah, and Hamdania.

So just what are the effects on a country of invasion and occupation by an unapologetic, [00:48:00] heavily armed, high-tech foreign army? You may have been told of the costs here at home in blood and treasure; 4,418 American service members dead, and nearly 32,000 wounded, according to the Pentagon.

Our coffers depleted by around two to three trillion dollars. Our entire politics upended, our faith in our media forever shaken, but what of the cost to Iraqis? Between 275,000 and 306,000 civilians died from direct war related violence caused by the US, its allies, the Iraqi military and police, according to Brown University's *Costs of War* project.

As many as a third of a million people. They add several times as many Iraqi civilians may have died as an indirect result of the war, due to damage to the systems that provide food, healthcare, and clean drinking water. As a result, illness, infectious diseases and malnutrition that could otherwise have been avoided or treated.

Shockingly, according to reporting by Al Jazeera, based on [00:49:00] Iraqi government data childhood cancers increased twelve fold in the six years after the US assault on Fallujah. Which involved the use of white phosphorus and depleted uranium weapons. 15% of all babies there had birth defects, a rate many times worse than in the aftermath of the nuclear bombs dropped by the US on Japan during World War II.

What do Iraqis have to show for this war and occupation of ours? Yes, Saddam Hussein is gone, a good thing, but the country remains plagued by violence, corruption, and a lack of proper democracy.

Remember, this wasn't just a tragic accident, it was a crime. An illegal war built on blatant lies, and waged so brutally by George W. Bush, the commander-in-chief. A war which caused chaos in the region, and in the wider world, a war whose perpetrators have never faced any consequences.

It's time for us to be honest. As the president, as the commander-in-Chief, George W. [00:50:00] Bush was responsible for war crimes on multiple fronts.

The Bush administration misled the world, and when the United Nations refused to back Bush's unprovoked war of aggression, he launched it anyway.

Back in 2004 the leader of the United Nations at the time, the then Secretary General Kofi Annan, left no doubt as to what that meant.

MSNBC FOOTAGE: Now the UN Secretary General has made his strongest statement yet denouncing the war.

It's not in conformity with the UN charter, from our point of view and from the charter point of view, it was illegal.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: He wasn't alone. An independent inquiry by the Dutch government in 2010 also concluded that the invasion was an illegal violation of UN Security Council resolutions, the UN charter led by the US. That's just a decision to go to war. Prominent human rights groups have said Bush and his allies should have been held to account for all of the torture and alleged war crimes, and crimes against humanity that occurred inside of Iraq on his watch, at the hands of forces [00:51:00] he commanded.

Two such groups in New York and Geneva filed criminal complaints against Bush in 2011 for violating the International Convention on Torture. A move so serious, that Bush canceled a speech he'd had planned in Switzerland. His team cited security concerns, but one lawyer for human rights watch speculated to a reporter. "He's avoiding the handcuffs."

If we can talk about criminal culpability in relation to Trump, why can't we talk about it in relation to Bush? Why the double standard?

Not even the worst of Trump's alleged crimes; the incitement of an armed insurrection at the Capitol, come anywhere close to the death and destruction that George W. Bush brought to Iraq. I should also point out, many would argue there's a pretty straight line between the imperial presidency of Bush and the faux populist autocracy of Trump.

Where else did Trump get the idea that a disengaged tycoon trading on a family named brand could attain the highest office in the [00:52:00] country?

That he could cover his bumbling mistakes and ignorance with swagger, and spin an alternate reality based on fear and loathing.

Iraq and Bush helped pave the way for 2016 and the rise of Trump. Iraq and Bush also helped pave the way for 2020, and the big election lie. Don't take my

word for it, listen to author Robert Draper who's written two books on Bush, and one on the Trump GOP.

MSNBC FOOTAGE: What's the legacy of the war in Iraq for the US, for America's foreign policy?

In a way I think that the legacy is what we heard before I got on the air, with people talking about their conspiracy theories relating to mail-in balloting, that there has been a sort of war on truth that was made possible by the recognition that the US government was not on the level with us after Iraq.

It became possible then for a reality TV show star, with zero political experience, to say during the Republican primaries, "Look at all you guys with all of your [00:53:00] experience, what experience did that get us?"

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: In the 20 years since the United States invaded a country that had not attacked us, to install a government that wasn't representative, on the basis of a threat that did not exist, there's been no real introspection, reflection or reckoning with how that disaster came about. How to hold the architects of that disaster to account.

Even as one subsequent American leader threw all of Bush's time tested media manipulation tactics, and then some, into assaulting, literally and figuratively, the very foundation of our democracy.

As another world leader on the other side of the globe actively used our own illegal invasion of Iraq to justify his own illegal invasion of Ukraine. Yet another geopolitical disaster and humanitarian crisis built on brazen lies and a total disregard for international law.

Thanks to George W. Bush, and thanks to our tolerance of our indulgence of George W. Bush, America has no real standing or credibility when it comes to calling out the crimes of Vladimir Putin [00:54:00] in Ukraine today. Yet in the words of George W. Bush today; Ukraine like Iraq has just become another laugh line.

GEORGE W. BUSH: The result is an absence of checks and balances in Russia, and the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq — I mean of Ukraine. Iraq. Anyway,

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Iraq too, of course he doesn't really mean it. That wasn't a Freudian slip, even now, Bush

doesn't actually believe there was anything wrong with his invasion of Iraq. The former president has had multiple opportunities over two decades to show regret, remorse, contrition for what he did, but he refuses to.

MSNBC FOOTAGE: Knowing what you know now about Iraq, do you still think it was a good idea to go in?

Absolutely.

You still do?

Oh, absolutely. I really do. [00:55:00] I'm absolutely confident that that getting rid of Saddam Hussein made our country safer and gave people a chance of Iraq, of living in a free society.

On this 20th anniversary of his greatest crime; let us remember George W. Bush not hagiographically, as the artist with paint on his hands, but more honestly, more bluntly as the invader with blood on his hands.

Lessons America Refuses To Learn From The Iraq Disaster w Spencer Ackerman - The Majority Report - Air Date 3-21-23

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: It occurred to me by like 2005-2006, the American public had—maybe it was even 2004—the American public had no seemingly awareness or deep awareness that we were engaged in a war. It seems to me that there was no sense that we were at war. People are just going about their lives, no context—and I'm talking during it — there was no sense that we were in any way a war where hundreds of thousands of people were killed.[00:56:00]

SPENCER ACKERMAN: Yeah, that was the system working the way it's supposed to work. That ultimately one of the inevitable consequences of the 1973 creation of the all volunteer military uh, at the tail end of the Vietnam War, supposedly incorporating a lesson of the Vietnam War, is that all of society no longer goes to war. Increasingly, we're dependent on a professional military class to do this, and that inevitably is going to create a significant social fracture within a country. I heard this so many times, not primarily from civilians, but primarily from the military, that America was not at war, the Army and the Marine Corps was at war.

You remember shortly after 9/11, George W. Bush telling people that, yes, there's this now, endless crusade to preserve freedom and so on and so forth, but you should go [00:57:00] shopping. Things are gonna be normal for you. The tax burden on the wealthy is going to come down, which ultimately means the burden is going to be more acutely felt by the working and what'll remain of the middle classes, and that's gonna be it.

We should recognize, I think that once we sort of funnel ourselves into this mode where America decides that it has the right and responsibility to police the world, that the mechanism that is going to do that is going to be one that most of the country is not going to be impacted by and not going to have a burden of supporting beyond a kind of awkward "thank you for your service" distance.

And it is not surprising that many veterans who chose to do that often didn't [inaudible] choose in the way that we understand the word "choosing", because there is such a thing that [00:58:00] veterans talk about called the poverty draft, which is that the military is a pathway to the middle class while so many pathways to the middle class are failing and not becoming available.

And you can hear, to this day, a justifiable anger and bitterness that the rest of the country wasn't really with them, that certainly didn't understand what they were doing. But that is a structural... you can't even call it defect because it's not a bug, it's a feature.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: That feature not only inhibits the the reaction in real time, but it also makes it that much harder to learn that lesson because can't get lesson number two unlearned without lesson one seeing the actual cost of this. We have no reports back from Iraq these days. We haven't had it in years and years and years. I don't know if we ever really had it outside of a couple of independent journalists who weren't embedded with us forces to get a sense of just how much devastation, how much we [00:59:00] commiserated this country. We didn't even know during the the Clinton embargo years, and so we had no sense of what was going on there at the time.

Summary 3-31-23

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today starting with *Democracy Now!*, noting the anniversary of the invasion and replaying their original reporting from 20 years ago. *AJ+* in two clips explained the propaganda machine and the complicit media that helped sell the invasion. *The Mehdi Hasan Show* dug into the details of the false intelligence reports and debunked rationales for invasion. *CounterSpin* continued the discussion about

the role of the media in perpetuating pro-invasion narratives and never giving voice to those who were right to oppose from the beginning. *The Mehdi Hasan Show* looked at the post-presidency rehabilitation of George W. Bush. *PBS NewsHour* made the connection between the departure from the facts under Bush and how that paved the way for Trump. *Democracy Now!* In two interviews discussed the impacts of the invasion on Iraq's civil society and [01:00:00] sectarianism. And *The Mehdi Hasan Show* concluded by looking at those impacts and arguing for the prosecution of war crimes.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard a bonus clip from *The Majority Report*, describing a bit of the feelings one had in the US while living through the war. To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

And now we'll hear from you.

Leftists are now war mongers - Ronald Bruce Meyer

VOICEMAILER: RONALD FROM BALTIMORE: Hi, Jay. This is Ronald from Baltimore, longtime listener, occasional caller. I was a little dismayed at your episode of 1551 called "Making Sense of the Senseless War in Ukraine". Thank you for letting me know that progressives are supposed to be warmongers now. I guess I'll have to turn in my leftist membership card because I can't get on board with this point of [01:01:00] view. It seems to me that aside from some token words of peace from Medea Benjamin, your episode was full-on mainstream pro-war propaganda. Perhaps I'm mistaken. Perhaps I'm not supposed to have lived long enough to actually remember what took place in Ukraine and in the world that preceded the Russian invasion, which of course, I condemn as senseless, but not for the reasons portrayed in your episode.

First, a little global context. There's 6.3 billion people living outside of the West. You know what that means? That means the West is not the world. In fact, two thirds of the world's population is not supporting the West toward Ukraine, not agreeing with sanctions against Russia. I observed that the West ignores the Global South except when they're expected to march to Western war drums.

But the West are the colonizers. And the Global South remember. It's understandable why they're wary of aligning with the West and against their own interests. Russia and China are not colonizers. They form the core of the BRICS block - Brazil, Russia, India, China, [01:02:00] South Africa - a sizeable portion of the non-aligned world by population and by economic activity. But nobody in the mainstream news reports on what they think. It's a multipolar world now, and the NATO and NATO-aligned nations have blinders on.

Now, some background: I'm just barely old enough to remember the Cuban Missile Crisis when the US lost its shit and nearly started a nuclear war over Russia parking nukes 90 miles off the US homeland. I'm also old enough to remember when US Secretary of State, James Baker, promised Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev - let's see, that was February 9th, 1990 - that NATO would enlarge not one inch eastward. In fact, without any real evidence of a threat from Russia, except providing cheap energy to the EU, NATO instead expanded to Russia's doorstep. You don't think that was threatening? That wasn't just on paper. NATO countries are expected to buy weapons from the US and others, pretty much NATO's *raison d'être* in the [01:03:00] post-Soviet world. NATO was never a defensive alliance as it likes to claim. Its sole purpose was to contain the USSR, but now it's just to marginalize a competing world power. Imagine how the US would feel if Russia or China persuaded Canada or Mexico to park nukes on their borders with the US. I think I remember that it was your sainted Barack Obama who approved the Maidan coup in Ukraine in 2014, which put real Nazis in power there, setting the stage for the Russian invasion of 2022. But don't take my word for it. Senator Chris Murphy in 2014 and Victoria Newland last year pretty much admitted it. If Ukraine had remained neutral, if the US had not surrounded Russia with armed and hostile NATO states, if the Minsk II accords had been implemented, which Mr. Zelensky was elected to implement, all this blood and destruction could have been avoided. To say that the Russian attack on Ukraine was unprovoked and that the US is not actually benefiting from a fight to the last Ukrainian [01:04:00] life, it's to admit that you really were born yesterday. But again, don't take my word for it. Joe Biden has said he would end the Nord Stream pipeline and Newland rejoiced in it afterward. Biden said the "regime change" part out loud when he remarked a year ago that Putin cannot remain in power, and called him a war criminal, essentially calling for the overthrow of a leader of a nuclear armed state. And that was well ahead of the ICC arrest warrant. Another example of US hypocrisy because the US doesn't recognize the International Criminal Court because it might indict the many war criminals with commentator contracts on CNN and MSNBC. Now, media have their hair on fire about Russia parking nukes in Belarus, in spite of NATO having parked nukes in Greece, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

As I said at the beginning, if progressives are against peace, then I guess I'll have to turn in my membership card. It's just as well, you've demonstrated that the war mongers have won.

Senseless war - VoicedMailer Marg

VOICEDMAILER: MARG: Hi Jay, this is Marg. Thanks for your excellent work on the podcast. I have [01:05:00] some thoughts about your reflections at the end of the latest episode on the Ukraine War. Like you, my political consciousness was formed in opposition to war and US militarism, starting with the Vietnam War. Until the Ukraine war I've been a supporter of Code Pink. The anti-war left may invoke history, but their telling of the story is full of inaccuracies and misinformation. For example, the Maidan Revolution of Dignity was a grass roots Occupy-type popular uprising that lasted 4 months through a bitter winter. The issues were brutal state violence, corruption, and a broken campaign promise. A peace agreement was brokered with the help of the Polish Foreign Minister and supported by the Ukrainian Parliament. The next day Yanukovich fled to Russia. Sorry, but Code Pink promotes conspiracy theories instead of history. Another example: There is also robust historical evidence of the long standing aggression and subjugation of Ukraine by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. For example, the Holodomor, the Executed Renaissance, Stalin's gulag, and mass deportation campaigns. All of this predates NATO and represents more plausible [01:06:00] causality and context than the idea that "it's the fault of US imperialism and NATO expansion."

I agree with you that the anti-war left fails to look forward, especially regarding alternatives to NATO. It seems that there are only 3 options to guarantee any peace agreement and Ukraine's future: NATO membership; an alternative security alliance, such as was proposed last spring during peace negotiations in Turkey; or for Ukraine to become a strong enough military to be able to defend itself, or die trying. Which would Code Pink prefer?

"NATO expansion" is itself an imperialistic frame. I say that because it gives all of the agency to the Western great power expanders. Erased from the story is the agency of the Baltic States and other Eastern European countries who begged for protection.

Ironically, Code Pink is a good example of inverted nationalism: instead of "my country right or wrong..." it's "my country always wrong". Sigh! Thanks for listening

Comment on your recent Ukraine podcast - VOICEDMAILER TREVOR

VOICEDMAILER: TREVOR: Hi this is Trevor. I very much enjoyed your recent podcast on the Ukraine and was in particular your summary of the pro- and anti-war positions as looking forward or backwards in time, respectively.[01:07:00] The heart pulling towards the anti-war position based on the need for historical Western self-criticism, with the head pulling towards the prescriptive clarity of a just war. You were keen to learn of ideas that made a prescriptive anti-war case. When reading the following profile of Tim Snyder, I came across the following paragraph that might fit with your request.

ARTICLE AUTHOR: This emphasis on ideas has led Snyder to be criticised by some in the realist school of international relations. Emma Ashford, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center, a thinktank, counts herself an admirer of Snyder's historical work, but she also says that his...

EMMA ASHFORD: "understanding of world affairs is almost indelibly shaped by what he thinks are the big important ideas, whereas I would say that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was motivated as much by trying to prop up its falling security in the region".

ARTICLE AUTHOR: The dispute is not academic. If you believe, as Ashford does, that Russia is motivated by strategic fears, then every additional degree of Western involvement risks exacerbating the original causes of the war and prolonging the conflict. By contrast, if you believe with Snyder that the war's roots lie in [01:08:00] Putin's fascist worldview, then victory on the battlefield becomes imperative.

TIMOTHY SNYDER: "A lot of smart people have said it before me, but fascism was never discredited. It was only defeated,"

ARTICLE AUTHOR: he says.

TIMOTHY SNYDER: "The Russians have to be defeated, just like the Germans were defeated."

VOICEDMAILER: TREVOR: While the paragraph doesn't suggest a viable anti-war alternative to the clarity of Western support for Ukraine in the war, it does suggest the need for greater caution in the gradual ratcheting up of that support. If every Western weapon system increases Russia's fear about its own

security, we may hasten their use of nuclear weapons. Russia makes both these arguments itself, but the West may not be hearing these arguments clearly if our analysis defaults to the simplicity of defeating a fascist.

The point may not be whether strong support for Ukraine is required - it is - but instead the persistence of that support rather than its military scale. Generating chronic anti-war disillusionment within Russia may be a better goal than the imposition of an external humiliation. This may lengthen the suffering of the Ukrainian people, but would lower the risk of nuclear war.

Final comments on the moral responsibility of inaction in Ukraine

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: Thanks to those who called or wrote in. If you would like to leave a comment or question of your own [01:09:00] to be played on the show, you can record or text us a message at 202-999-3991 or send me an email to jay@bestoftheleft.com. Now, I definitely appreciate Trevor managing to find a tiny scrap of forward-looking analysis from an article in *The Guardian* newspaper. Personally, I think the debate between whether Putin was provoked and is genuinely fearful of Russia's security, or is a megalomaniac with his sights set on reincorporating the constituent states of the Soviet Union, while also seeking access to profitable resources in Ukraine, is mostly a dead end debate because the answer is almost certainly both. And so the more important thing is to take that as granted and figure out what to do going forward.

Now, as for the backward looking anti-interventionists I asked to please explain their vision [01:10:00] for the future, the first call we heard was perfectly in line with what I've come to expect from that anti-interventionist crowd. Ronald took the time to write and record a full page, single spaced essay, meticulously crafted to have just the right amount of snark, condescension, and a carefully curated selection of backward-looking causes for the war, but not an ounce of effort put into answering the one request I had for someone - anyone - to please make a forward-looking case against helping Ukraine.

Keep it in mind that one can both support Ukraine in their efforts in the war and at negotiating an end to the war at the same time. In fact, that would be considered the best possible way of helping. I particularly appreciated Marge's reframing of the agency of others besides the US. I also regret that [01:11:00] NATO expanded eastward after promising not to. However, to frame the later expansion as having been entirely driven by the US or NATO, without giving

any agency to those countries who were asking to join, is just as blind to reality as anyone who dismisses Russia's security concerns out of hand. And, frankly, I would say something similar about our role in the current conflict, arguing that we stop sending support is to give the US the power to unilaterally decide the fate of Ukrainians who are asking for help. Why does their agency not matter in that calculation.

Try this analogy on for size. You're probably familiar with the old trolley problem, right? A trolley is rolling down the tracks. It's about to kill a group of people, but you have the ability to throw a switch, to shift the trolley to another track where only one person will be hit. What do you do? Well, in my analogy, we only need one person in [01:12:00] danger, but they've been tied to the track. The person who tied them up, should the trolley come by and kill the victim, has committed murder. Plain and simple. But if the tied up person is pleading for help and yells to a passerby to throw the switch in front of them to redirect the trolley and that person decides not to do that, what does that make them? Maybe not a murderer, but not an innocent bystander either. Now I'll grant you that war and international relations are a bit more nuanced than the trolley problem. But the point I'm making is quite simple, which is that having the capacity to help inescapably makes one morally responsible for their actions regardless of what they choose to do, including inaction.

Another analogy is even more anchored in the real world, and that's having the ability to vote. People often think that it's only the choice between candidates that comes with moral responsibility [01:13:00] attached, but the choice to not vote also carries with it moral consequences of that action, because when you have the ability to intervene or, in an election, the ability to vote, inaction still counts as an action. For any country with the capacity to help Ukraine, choosing to help or not help are both active choices with moral consequences. Americans choosing to help is not pro-war, and choosing to abstain is not anti-war because unlike our invasion of Iraq, we are not the ones who are choosing war. Only the invading country is choosing war, and it's happening regardless of what we do now, just as an election happens regardless of if we personally vote, just as that hypothetical person is tied to those train tracks regardless of whether we choose to throw the switch or not. [01:14:00] If one has the ability to intervene, there is no escaping the responsibility of your actions, regardless of your choice.

So again, if you oppose supporting Ukraine, then please explain why that active choice of yours will lead to a better outcome for the world. And if part of your calculation is that the lives of thousands of Ukrainians and possibly the existence of the country of Ukraine need to be sacrificed for the greater good, in

your estimation, then please explain that, too. This is not snark. I am genuinely open to hearing any argument that anyone can muster in this direction.

As always, keep the comments coming in. You can leave a voicemail or text message at 202-999-3991, or you can email me to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

That is gonna be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Dion Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, [01:15:00] and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Brian, and Le Wendy, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support, through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good and often funny bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content, no ads, and chapter markers in all of our regular episodes, all through regular podcast player.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show, from bestoftheleft.com.