

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: 18 Years Ago Today

#StopAAPIHate

We at Win Without War were heartbroken to learn of the murders of eight people in Georgia this week, including six Asian women. These murders are a part of a surge of violence against Asian Americans that began with the onset of the Covid-19 crisis last year, which itself emerged from centuries of anti-Asian racism, orientalism, and dehumanization. And a U.S. foreign policy that has converged on a bipartisan consensus of fear-mongering about China is partly to blame.

Read our full statement [here](#).

The Takeaway:

- Today, even the Washington foreign policy establishment recognizes the invasion of Iraq as the catastrophe that it was. But while there may be greater reluctance to launch a new ground war, the underlying logic that led to the war in Iraq lives on.
- Suffocating sanctions, the weaponization of concepts of democracy and human rights, white supremacy, military solutionism, and more — the mindset that led us to war in Iraq lives on across U.S. foreign policy, and especially today, in the case of Iran.
- But to say the mindset endures is not to say that nothing has changed. Our movement is strong, and momentum is on our side. With a new administration, we have a chance not just to end our wars, but to root out the mindset that led to them.

18 years since the invasion of Iraq — How much has really changed?

18 years ago today, the United States invaded Iraq. As was all too obvious even then, this was an indescribably catastrophic decision: an unimaginable human disaster, a terrible injustice, and a total foreign policy failure. Eighteen years on, the invasion of Iraq has become the paradigmatic example of all that is wrong with modern U.S. foreign policy. So clear was this failure that then-nominee Barack Obama won the presidential primary in part on a promise not “to just end the war, but... to end the mindset that got us into war in the first place.” Yet while he

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did bring all U.S. troops home from Iraq, the fact that he sent thousands of them back only a few years later showed just how entrenched that mindset was. Today, 18 years since the invasion of Iraq, the logic that brought us there continues to reign.

“We Think the Price is Worth It”

While today we remember the Iraq war as purely a post-9/11 phenomenon, we would do well to remember that it was preceded by over a decade of violent broad-based sanctions, periodic bombing campaigns, and the first Gulf War — all attempting to bend Iraq to the United States’ will. Asked in 1996 about the deadly cost of these sanctions on the entire population — including a (disputed) estimate of 500,000 deaths of children alone — then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright responded: “we think the price is worth it.” If this glib justification of immeasurable human suffering for the sake of a policy without an iota of proof of success sounds familiar, that’s because it is the exact rationale that continues to suffocate the people of Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, and beyond.

Maximum Failure

This reliance on deadly sanctions is only one part of a broader rationale labeled by Trump as “maximum pressure” — in short, the belief that the United States can change the behaviors of other governments through hostility, aggression, and bellicosity while totally eschewing diplomacy. In this view, only hostile coercion will influence governments — or in an even more delusional paradigm, the sanctions will become so tough that the people living under repressive governments will rise up and demand regime change. These assumptions proved wrong in the years before the Iraq invasion, and remain wrong today. In fact, “maximum pressure” campaigns in countries like Iran have [only served](#) to rally support for hardliners in government while causing harm and suffering, and undermining local movements and changemakers.

Bombs for Democracy

“We must invade to spread democracy.” “We need to launch a war to protect their human rights.” “We can bomb our way to peace.” One of the defining rhetorical features of the march to war with Iraq was the sometimes-mistaken and sometimes-bad faith weaponization of progressive values like democracy and human rights in the name of war. Despite the quite obvious fact that decades of endless war have umm.. *not exactly* led to peace, democracy, or respect for human rights, this mindset lives on today. To see it in action, one need look no further than the very name of one of the most egregious collections of Iran warmongers in Washington: the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. 🙄

Dehumanization & Repression

War is both fueled by, and fuels, the dehumanization of the people seen as the “enemy” — a group invariably defined beyond actual military allegiance and instead by race and ethnicity. Though it neither began nor ended there, the run-up to the Iraq war saw a concerted campaign of demonization of people of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent both here and abroad.

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From Trump's Muslim and African bans, to the continued overpolicing and surveillance of Arab American, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Muslim communities at home, to the casual acceptance of civilian casualties abroad, white supremacy and other forms of dehumanization continue to define U.S. foreign policy today.

Disinformation

The road to war in Iraq was paved with lies — none more consequential than the completely falsified threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Today, exaggerations, half truths, and outright lies remain par for the course among DC war hawks. Such disinformation remains particularly dangerous in the case of Iran. Unlike with Iraq, Iran actually *does* have a limited nuclear program, but warmongers like John Bolton have been known to [twist](#) intelligence to falsely amplify threats and suit their own [warmongering needs](#).

Military Solutionism

With decades of fruitless, destructive war under our belt, it is probably fair to say that there is less stomach in Washington today for all-out invasions of other countries by U.S. forces. But that doesn't mean that the belief that war is the solution to all of our problems is gone. Today, the foreign policy blob simply prefers to rely on more flexible, covert operations, deadly drone warfare with its attendant casualties, and the outsourcing of violence to private contractors and security "partners" through arms sales and training. While the less-blatant U.S. military footprint may be more politically palatable, it doesn't change the basic fact that *war is not the answer*.

Diplomacy or War

The underlying logic that led to the invasion of Iraq 18 years ago endures today across all of U.S. foreign policy, but nowhere is it more evident than in the U.S. approach to Iran. While Iraq and Iran are two entirely different places with different cultures, histories, and political contexts, the parallels in U.S. posture toward both are stark: the use of devastating sanctions, the attempt to strong arm governments into bowing to U.S. pressure while undermining local changemakers, the weaponization of concepts of democracy and human rights, the disinformation campaigns, the dehumanization of entire populations, and the eschewing of diplomacy in favor of military solutionism. Today, we face a choice: continue with the same failed mindset that led to war in Iraq, or turn to the proven path of diplomacy — beginning with a *swift* reentry into the Iran nuclear deal.

Fighting for Peace

To say that the Iraq war mindset continues to dominate in Washington, though, is not to say that there's no room for alternative. Over the years, our movement has built great power, won great victories, and made great progress. One need look only to recent progress on U.S. policy towards the war in Yemen to know that the Iraq war mentality, while enduring, is on the backfoot. But now we need to keep up the pressure. As a movement, we must show up not only to prevent the worst, but to build a positive alternative: to fight *for* peace and diplomacy as hard

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as we fight against war. With Iran, we have the opportunity to do just that, striking an impactful blow at the military mindset and winning an immediate victory for the pro-peace alternative. Together, we can make sure Biden succeeds where his predecessor failed: we can end the mindset that got us into war in the first place.

You're Invited!

Last month, President Biden announced an end to U.S. support for offensive operations in Yemen. This was a monumental victory that was only won thanks to anti-war activists like you... now what? Join us **Thursday March 25, 12pm ET** for a virtual discussion about how this historic achievement was won and what comes next for #YemenCantWait. [RSVP here today!](#)

(For a sneak preview of what the administration should do next on Yemen, [read](#) our Kate Kizer's latest in *Inkstick*).

BURIED LEDES

When Jared Kushner compliments you....maybe it's time for some long, hard self-reflection? **Kushner praised Biden's foreign policy on Iran this week — meaning an [immediate course correction](#) is in order.**

Course correction #1: rejoin the JCPOA. We know we sound like a broken record at this point, but **President Biden should follow [his own advice](#)** and commit to diplomacy with Iran.

[71 Korean American leaders](#) from across the political spectrum are calling upon Biden to declare an official end to the Korean War. In a classic case of endless war, it's long, long overdue. And it's necessary to advance the peace process in the Korean Peninsula.

Momentum is building on the Hill to put [#PeopleOverPentagon](#) — this week, **50 House members urged Biden to ["significantly" reduce](#) the Department of Defense budget.**

Broad sanctions harm everyday people. The UN agrees — **[it has ruled](#) the U.S. use of emergency declarations to unilaterally impose blanket sanctions violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.**

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While Covid vaccinations are well underway in rich countries like the U.S, people in lower-income countries may not be vaccinated until 2024. It's grossly inequitable, *and* a threat to all of us. The solution? [Waive WTO rules that are obstructing global production.](#)

In another effort to ensure vaccine equity, 19 members of Congress [are requesting](#) that the State Department **urge Israel to vaccinate Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.**

[“Back in full force”](#) — that’s how the UN mediator described the war in Yemen this week, despite the UAE’s dubious [claims of withdrawal](#). U.S. complicity in the war must end, and Biden can start by **cancelling Trump’s \$23 billion arms sale to the UAE.**

And finally, happy Nowruz! For the Iranian new year, [giant egg paintings](#) spark joy in Tehran.