

DEATH TOLL FROM MODERN AMERICAN WARS

KILLED IN THE NAME OF "FREEDOM"

OVER 12 MILLION DEAD IN AMERICA'S WARS

SINCE WORLD WAR II



America has been in 19 wars since World War II, but we will list the death toll from three of the bloodiest conflicts: The Korean War, The Vietnam War and wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The total death toll of people killed by American troops in all these wars put together is over 12 million.

Each of these three conflicts have something in common: they were wars fought in the name of making the world "safe for democracy."

A particular horror was the largest use of chemical weapons against civilians since World War II, the massive use of Agent Orange against Indochina where it continues to poison people today. It may take Vietnam and Laos thousands of years to recover. In the case of Iraq, American spy satellites helped Saddam Hussein use poison gas against the troops of Iran.

We are not condemning all aspects of these wars. Nor do we suggest that a lot of American enemies are wonderful people. However, we need to take a hard look at the horrors that were unleashed. Was it really necessary to invade places like Vietnam and Iraq and kill millions in these wars? We are not convinced that the answer is yes.

THE KOREAN WAR: 3-4 MILLION DEAD

Source for death toll: [Necrometrics](#)

Few people know that more bombs were dropped on Korea from 1950-1953 than on all of Asia and the Pacific islands during World War II. In fact, the war became such a mess that President Truman even came seriously close to deploying an atomic bomb. U.S. Major General Emmett O'Donnell Jr. testified before senate and stated: "I would say that the entire, almost the entire Korean Peninsula is just a terrible mess. Everything is destroyed. There is nothing standing worthy of the name . . . There [are] no more targets in Korea." ([Truth Out](#), 2014).

The split between North and South Korea was the result of the aftermath of World War II. Korea had been previously occupied by Japan since 1910, but in 1945 the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, and by agreement with the United States, the Soviet Union occupied Korea north of the 38th parallel and U.S. forces subsequently occupied the south. By 1948, two separate governments had been set up and both claimed to be the legitimate government of Korea. The conflict escalated into a full fledged war when North Korean forces - supported by the Soviet Union and China - invaded South Korea on June 25th 1950. Twenty one countries of the United Nations came to the aid of South Korea, with the United States providing 88% of the UN's military personnel.

On the ground, it was a war of attrition where China nearly won the war for the North in 1951 by forcing a retreat of UN forces. Yet the war in the sky was a different story.

U.S. LAUNCHES A BRUTAL CAMPAIGN IN THE AIR OVER NORTH KOREA

WIPES OUT MAJORITY OF CITIES AND KILLS CIVILIANS INDISCRIMINATELY

The United States launched a brutal assault on North Korea from the sky. They bombed 18 out of 22 North Korean cities. 81% of North Korea's cities were reduced to flame and rubble. Hungarian journalist Tibor Meray further commented on the bloodshed: "I saw destruction and horrible things committed by American forces...Everything which moved in North Korea was a military target, peasants in the fields often were machine gunned by pilots who I, this was my impression, amused themselves to shoot targets which moved." When Meray had crossed the Yalu in August 1951 and witnessed "a complete devastation between the Yalu River and the capital, Pyongyang. There were simply 'no more cities in North Korea.'" [1]

Even 60 years later, North Korea has not recovered from the war. Despite the massive blood shed involved, the Korean War has come to be known as the "forgotten war," because 60 years later, Koreans are still waiting for a peace treaty to bring an official end to the conflict.

[1] Cumings, Bruce. *North Korea: Another Country*. (The New Press, May 10th 2011) page 32

[Timeline of Korean War](#)

VIETNAMESE AND INDOCHINA WAR: A TOTAL OF 5.5 MILLION DEAD

THE VIETNAM WAR - 3.8 MILLION DEAD

1.7 MILLION MORE DEAD IN THE CAMBODIAN, KHMER ROUGE GENOCIDE

Source for death toll: [Necrometrics](#) and [British Medical Journal, 2008](#)

The Vietnam War was yet another conflict in which a nation was divided between communists and anti-communists. Much like the Korean War, China, the Soviet Union and other communist allies supported Northern Vietnam, while the United States and other anti-communist allies fought for the South. At the time, the U.S. espoused what was known as the "domino theory," the idea that if one state went communist, other states would follow. This was the rhetoric that the United States used to give support to the French colonists in the region. At height of the war, America deployed around 500,000 soldiers. Yet even after 20 years of U.S. involvement in the region, the North still won the war.

U.S. Presidential candidate John Kerry himself testified before the U.S. Senate and described the war crimes committed in Vietnam according to the testimony of 150 U.S. veterans:

"They told the stories of times that they had personally raped, cut off the ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in a fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country." ([Richmond.edu](#)).

THE U.S. LAUNCHES A CAMPAIGN OF CHEMICAL WARFARE

SPRAYING AGENT ORANGE OVER 4.5 MILLION ACRES OF VIETNAMESE LAND

One particularly pernicious and long lasting effect of the war were the side effects caused by the massive use of the deadly chemical "Agent Orange." Agent Orange was a powerful mixture of chemical defoliants used by U.S. military forces during the Vietnam War to eliminate forest cover for North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, as well as the crops that might be used to feed them. The U.S. program of defoliation sprayed more than 19 million gallons of herbicide over 4.5 million acres of land in Vietnam from 1961-1972. During this time the crops and water sources of non-combatants were infected. Thorough studies on the substance have shown that even minute doses can cause long lasting health effects such as muscular dysfunction, inflammation, birth defects, nervous system disorders and even the development of various cancers. Both U.S. veterans of the war and Vietnamese civilians have suffered long lasting health problems; up to half a million Vietnamese children have been born with serious birth defects and around 2 million people are suffering from cancer or other illnesses caused by Agent Orange ([History.com](#)).

CHIEF ARCHITECTS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

A PRODUCT OF THE LIBERAL ESTABLISHMENT

[McGeorge Bundy](#) and [Robert McNamara](#) are two men who played a chief role in escalating the war. Bundy moved into politics in 1961 when he was appointed National Security Advisor to the administration of President John F. Kennedy. He played a key role in all of the major foreign policy defense decisions of the Kennedy administration and was retained by Lyndon B. Johnson for part of his tenure. Bundy was involved in the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War. In 1964 under Johnson he was also responsible for coordinating government covert operations. He was a strong proponent of the Vietnam War during his tenure and claimed that the war effort was an essential battle in containing communism. He supported escalating U.S. involvement, including the commitment of hundreds of thousands of ground troops in the region and the sustained bombing of North Vietnam in 1965. **Later studies of the memorandums and policy papers showed that Bundy along with other advisors understood the risks involved, but proceeded with these actions anyways for domestic political reasons, rather than out of any belief that**

the U.S. had a realistic chance of winning the war. [2] Later he went on to become the head of the Ford Foundation from 1966-1979.

Robert McNamara also played a role in escalating the war effort as the Secretary of Defense, serving from 1961 to 1968 under President John. F Kennedy and Lyndon B. In fact, he played such a large role that some went as far to call Vietnam "McNamara's role." McNamara did not object. He said himself "I am pleased to be identified with it...and do whatever I can to win it." Half a million American soldiers went to war on his watch and more than 42,000 died. Some say the war became his personal nightmare. Nothing he did could win the war, or stop the armies of the North Vietnamese and their South Vietnamese allies. He concluded well before leaving the Pentagon that the war was a futile effort. Yet he didn't share this insight with the public until later in life. In 1995 he took a stand against his own conduct, confessing in a memoir that the war was "wrong, terribly wrong."([New York Times](#)). Yet much like his counterpart McGeorge Bundy, his career took him from blunder in Vietnam to becoming a major business success. McNamara became the head of the World Bank from 1968-1981.

[2] Bird, Kai. *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms* (Simon and Shuster, June 21st 2000)

[Timeline of the Vietnam War](#)

LOSS OF LIVES IN VIETNAM AND DISENCHANTMENT WITH WESTERN DEMOCRACY DRIVES CAMBODIANS TO JOIN KHMER ROUGE

KHMER ROUGE UNLEASH A GENOCIDE THAT ELIMINATES 25% OF THE CAMBODIAN POPULATION

The Cambodian Genocide resulted in the death of 25% of Cambodia's population in just three short years ([world without genocide](#)). As the Vietnam War progressed, Cambodia's elected Prime Minister Norodom Sihanouk adopted an official policy of neutrality. Sihanouk was ousted in 1970 in a military coup led by his own general Lon Nol, which is a testament to the turbulent climate of Southeast Asia during this time. Lon Nol was made president of the new Khmer Republic while Prince Sihanouk and his loyal followers joined forces with a communist guerilla organization known as the Khmer Rouge. Soon after, a civil war in Cambodia began.

Although the Khmer Rouge movement was small at first, many Cambodians joined over time out of a feeling of disenchantment with western democracy due to the huge loss of Cambodian lives that resulted from the U.S. strategy to involve Cambodia in the Vietnam War. The heavy U.S. bombardment and Lon Nol's collaboration with the U.S. drove new recruits to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge guerilla movement.

By 1975, Pol Pot's forces had grown to over 700,000 men. When he took over Phnom Phen (the capital and largest city in Cambodia) he unleashed a radical, communist transformation of Cambodian society that sought to expunge all western elements from the country. The Khmer Rouge launched a violent campaign of genocide that targeted the religious, members of the upper class, intellectuals, the media, as well as ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Cambodians with Chinese, Vietnamese or Thai ancestry. It is estimated that anywhere from 1-3 million Cambodians lost their lives at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The average of official estimates, places the number somewhere around 1.7 million ([necrometrics](#)). Yet the real number is probably much higher due to the unreported numbers of people who died from starvation and disease.

[Timeline of Cambodian Genocide](#)

AMERICA'S WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST - 4 MILLION OR MORE DEAD

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. became much less concerned over the "threat of communism." In the end of the Cold War, the U.S. emerged as the world's

chief economic and military super power.

Yet in 2001, the world's most powerful empire was struck a blow by a handful of fanatics with box cutters. On September 11th, 2001, four passenger airliners were hijacked by 19 Al-Qaeda operatives. These airliners were flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. This was a tragedy for America, where 3,000 lives were lost. However, in response to this tragedy, the Bush Administration and then later the Obama Administration launched a global "war on terror" that has no international boundaries or apparent end in sight. Iraq was one of the largest targets of this war, even though the Iraqi government had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.

In the wars that followed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. not only killed millions, but systematically destroyed the infrastructure necessary for healthy, prosperous life in those countries. Then they [used rebuilding efforts as opportunities for profit](#), rather than to benefit the occupied populations. To further add to the genocidal pattern of behavior, there is ample evidence of torture and [persistent rumors of sexual assault from the aftermath of Iraq's fall](#). It appears likely the U.S. has contributed to further destabilization and death in the region by [supporting the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria](#) by arming rebel groups on all sides of the conflict.

A vast majority of the victims in these wars (along with those killed by ISIS) are muslims. Some have even called these actions a genocide against muslims, since there have been so many killed, and the literal meaning of the word "genocide" itself means "death of a people."

First we will take a look at the sanctions that America imposed on Iraq before the war, and then we will mention the overall death toll from both the war in Iraq, as well as the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

BUSH UNLEASHES TIDAL WAVE OF FEAR THROUGHOUT MIDDLE EAST BY DECLARING A "CRUSADE" ON TERROR

In a speech after 9/11, President Bush vowed to 'rid the world of evil-doers,' and then cautioned: 'This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while.' (Whitehouse.gov).

The crusades refer back to one of the most historically bloody genocides unleashed by the West against muslims and the Middle East back in the Middle Ages. A particularly ominous statement about the events to come.

TOTAL IRAQI'S KILLED IN AMERICAN WARS (1990-PRESENT) - 3 MILLION

IRAQI SANCTIONS: 1.7 MILLION TOTAL DEAD [1]

500,000 CHILDREN DEAD [2][3]

Sanctions against Iraq began in 1990, four days after Iraq's invasion in Kuwait, and stayed largely in force until 2003. Initially, the sanctions were enacted to pressure Iraq into leaving Kuwait. However, the sanctions soon took on a new purpose: to get Iraq to comply with the cease fire terms listed in the UN Resolution 687, which included the elimination of its weapons of mass destruction and recognizing the sovereignty of Kuwait. However, throughout various stages of the sanctions, U.S. officials often stated that these sanctions would not be lifted until the regime of Saddam Hussein had ended.

[1] [Behind the War on Terror. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed. 2003.](#)

[2] Food and Agricultural Organization Study (1995)

[3] [Iraq Sanctions Kill Children, U.N Reports](#) (New York Times, 1995)

EFFECTS OF SANCTIONS ON IRAQI PEOPLE:

The sanctions were not limited to military supplies. There were heavy sanctions on food and basic medical supplies for the Iraqi population.

Due to these sanctions, there were high rates of malnutrition and the spread of diseases. On May 2000, a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey noted that almost half of the children under 5 years of age suffered from diarrhea.

In addition to damaging public health, these sanctions also caused lasting destruction in the fields of education and literacy. The overall literacy rate had been 78% in 1977, and 87% for adult women by 1985. At this point, Iraq had been one of the few countries in the Middle East that invested in women's education, but the situation changed dramatically during the sanctions.

UNICEF estimates that around 500,000 children have died as a result of these sanctions and the collateral effects of war. The death rate of children under five doubled during the period of the sanctions. Many of these deaths were due to malnutrition and disease caused by a lack of food, basic medical supplies and clean water.

DEATH TOLL KILLED IN AMERICA'S "WAR ON TERROR" AFTER 2001: 2 - 4.5 MILLION [\[4\]](#)

The "War on Terror" began after the attacks of September 11th 2001 on the United States Pentagon and World Trade Center. It was U.S. President George Bush who first used the term "War on Terror."

George Bush took the war to Iraq in 2003 with claims that the Iraqi government had clandestine plans to build weapons of mass destruction. The United States along with the United Kingdom and several coalition allies launched a "shock and awe" campaign where they attacked without officially declaring war. Iraqi forces were quickly overwhelmed as U.S. forces swept across the country. The invasion led to a collapse of the Ba'athist government, the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003, and his consequential execution by a military court three years later. Yet the problem with this invasion is that there was no concrete proof of these "weapons of mass destruction," and it was later found that these theoretical weapons didn't even exist.

Destroying the government of Saddam Hussein did not take very long. Yet the goal of setting up a stable government in its place (compatible with U.S. political and economic interests of course) has still not been achieved, even 12 years later.

After toppling the Ba'athist government, a power vacuum emerged which led to the explosion of Shia and Sunni sectarian violence. The U.S plan was to set up an American styled Democracy, train troops to protect this newly created government and then eventually exit the country. Yet things did not work out as planned. The U.S. formally withdrew all combat troops from Iraq by December 2011. Yet the man who became Prime Minister between 2006-2014, Nouri al-Maliki, imposed policies that alienated the country's Sunni sect, which only intensified sectarian tensions. In 2014, the extreme terrorist group known as "ISIS" (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) declared a worldwide Islamic Caliphate and launched a military offensive against Northern Iraq. Due to the weakness of the Iraqi government and widespread sectarian tensions, ISIS took over much of northern Iraq without much resistance.

The irony of this situation is that ISIS is made up of many Syrian insurgents who received funding, training and arms from America in order to "liberate" Syria from president Bashar al-Assad. So now the situation in Syria and Iraq has exploded into a mess of epic proportions. The situation has become so bad that American troops have been forced to Iraq after the official "end of the war."

Update: In a new report, the estimate of people killed in conflicts after 9/11 has increased to 4.5 million.

[4] [A Potential Death Toll of 4.5 Million From U.S. Wars After 9/11](#) (Brown University, 2023)

[Post-9/11 wars have contributed to some 4.5 million deaths, report suggests](#) (Washington Post, 5-15-23)

['Death Outlives War': Analysis Estimates Post-9/11 US Conflicts Killed Over 4.5 Million](#) (Common Dreams, 5-15-23)

[Report on the Body Count of the War on Terror](#) (Physicians For Social Responsibility NGO, 2015) (PDF)

[Timeline of War in Iraq](#)

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

DEATH TOLL OF THOSE KILLED DIRECTLY IN WAR: 1,300-8,000 [5]

DEATH TOLL OF THOSE KILLED INDIRECTLY: 50,000 [6]

DEATH TOLL OF THOSE KILLED IN DRONE STRIKES: 3,058 [7]

America invaded Afghanistan after 9/11 with the goal to dismantle Al-Qaeda and deny the group a safe base of operations in the country by removing the Taliban from power. President Bush demanded that Afghanistan hand over Osama bin Laden and expel Al-Qaeda from the country. Yet the Taliban declined this request. In December of 2001 the United Nations Security Council established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to assist the Afghan interim authorities with securing Kabul. While ISAF continued to battle the Taliban, the fighting crossed into North-Western Pakistan. In 2004 the Pakistani army began to clash with local tribes hosting Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants. It is during this period that the United States began to launch drone attacks at insurgent targets in Pakistan.

After President Bush left office, many people assumed that the new Liberal President, Barack Obama, would de-escalate the wars abroad and take a more peaceful, diplomatic approach to the situation. Yet the reality is that President Obama has actually launched more drone strikes than his predecessor. The Obama Administration has been maintaining a secretive list of targets to attack as part of the surgical drone strike program. There are claims that this process is very precise and only targets militants or "terrorists."

Yet what exactly defines a terrorist? Is there a strict set of legal guidelines that dictates who is a terrorist and who is not? Or is the process arbitrary? Much of this decision making process is highly secretive, so it is hard to tell. The New York Times has said the following about President Obama's role in this drone war.

"Mr. Obama has placed himself at the helm of a top secret "nominations" process to designate terrorists for kill or capture...Mr Obama is the liberal law professor who campaigned against the Iraq war and torture, and then insisted on approving every new name on an expanding "kill list," poring over terrorist suspects' biographies on what one official calls the macabre "baseball cards" of an unconventional war ([New York Times](#))."

In 2011, After much urging from the ACLU to reveal public information on the clandestine Drones Program, the White House's top counter-terrorism advisor John Brennan broke the silence by telling reporters the following: "in the last year 'there hasn't been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency, precision of the capabilities that we've been able to develop ([ACLU](#))."

However, independent estimates place that number at 3,500 ([International Security](#)), a much bigger number than John Brennan's zero. More often than not, the targets are located by a drone that is 30,000 feet in the air. It is not even required for the Defense Department to know the names of the people being targeted. **"Today, the Defense Department can attack suspects in Yemen whose names they don't know ([New York Times](#))."**

Which raises the question; How accurate can these strikes really be?

And the other question is, who is a militant and who isn't?

"Mr. Obama embraced a disputed method for counting civilian casualties that did little to box him in. It in effect counts **all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants**, according to

several administration officials, unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent ([New York Times](#))."

Basically, anyone in an area of "known terrorist activity", or seen with a top Al Qaeda operative, are guilty until proven innocent. The State Department has also complained that the criteria used by the C.I.A for identifying a terrorist signature strike is too lax. "The joke was that when the C.I.A. sees 'three guys doing jumping jacks,' the agency thinks it is a terrorist training camp, said one senior [State Department] official. Men loading a truck with fertilizer could be bomb-makers — but they might also be farmers, skeptics argued ([New York Times](#))."

[5] [Report on the Body Count of the War on Terror](#) (Physicians For Social Responsibility NGO, 2015) (PDF)

[6] ["Forgotten Victims," The Guardian](#)

[7] [New America Foundation](#)

HAS THE "WAR ON TERROR" PRODUCED LESS TERROR?

The answer is no. According to the [Global Terrorism Index](#), there has been a five fold increase in fatalities in attacks associated with terrorism since 9/11. In fact, the amount of terror is actually greatest in the countries that the U.S. has invaded, with Iraq now having the largest incidents of terror attacks in the world. So this raises many questions about the U.S. counter terrorism strategy in the middle east, as well as the idea that invading a country, topping their government, and trying to set up an American style democracy in its place is the magic solution against terror.

DEMOCRACY IS A POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

NOT A MAGIC BULLET AGAINST TERROR

The reality is that democracy is a political ideology, but not religion. Here at World Future Fund we support democracy and citizen activism. But we also understand that democracy is something that involves active citizen participation to function, it is not an ideology that can be forced upon unwilling subjects. Will the death of millions cause democracy to flower in countries that don't want the ideology? Probably not.

SOURCES FOR NUMBERS DEAD IN WAR ON TERROR

[Report on the Body Count of the War on Terror](#) (Physicians For Social Responsibility NGO, 2015) (PDF)

[Fifty years of violent war deaths from Vietnam to Bosnia: analysis of data from the world health survey programme](#) (British Medical Journal, 2008)

WEBSITES ON THE DEATH TOLL

[Death Tolls for the Major Wars and Atrocities of the Twentieth Century](#)

[Statistical Information about Fatal Casualties of the Vietnam War Archives](#)

[US Military Operations: Casualty Breakdown](#) (Global Security)