

## Will The US War Machine Roll On?

**Ross** Welcome to Renegade Inc. The Biden administration has wasted no time in showing that they, too, are going to continue the great American tradition of forever war. So will there be another unjustified precursor to the next US led conflict or have American citizens grown suspicious of forever war abroad, especially now as there's so much economic demise and division at home?

**Video clip (Noam Chomsky)** What happened certainly arouses very severe suspicions. The OPCW came out with a report blaming Syria for a chemical attack. Reporters like Robert Fisk and others thought it was pretty shady at the time but didn't know. Then came the bombshell. Some of their leading investigators, top ones, came out and said that their own analysis undermined the OPCW reports and that they were being silenced, OK? That asks the question, what then comes a long series of efforts to silence them up to what you just described. The United States and its allies want the evidence provided by some of the top inspectors to be banned. We won't discuss it. We won't see if they're right or wrong. We'll just ban it. Well, tells a reasonable person something. They want to ensure that it's not discussed, meaning they have no confidence in their own conclusions, meaning the US bombing of Syria was undertaken on false pretences.

**Ross** Robert Fantina, welcome and thanks for coming on Renegade Inc.

**Robert Fantina** Thank you. I'm very happy to be here.

**Ross** Your book about propaganda, lies and false flags, there's a stat in it which is just remarkable. The United States has been at war for 227 years of its 244 year history. I mean, when people hear that, flabbergasting, isn't it?

**Robert Fantina** It's astounding. And yet it's a very clear fact, the US populace should be aware of it because they know the US is always at war and yet it continues. The war making by the US is one of the constants in the history of the US.

**Ross** Isn't it the case, though, that it is actually part of the business model, dare I say, in that way, as in wars aren't meant to be won or ended? They're meant to be prolonged because they're so profitable?

**Robert Fantina** Absolutely. That is the case. We look at the war in Afghanistan, which is now approaching 20 years in duration. If the United States wanted to win the war in Afghanistan - I'm not saying that would be, just if it did - but if it did, would it take 20 years for the United States to defeat Afghanistan, a third world country, a mountainous country with not a very effective military whatsoever? And yet the United States has chosen to be at war with that country for 20 years. Someone is making a lot of money from that war. And it's not the people of Afghanistan.

**Ross** Cui bono. Who benefits?

**Robert Fantina** Well, it benefits the United States in a number of ways. It benefits the arms manufacturers who, of course, have astronomical profits and contribute large amounts of money to candidates running for election and re-election in the United States. So it certainly benefits them. It benefits the US government officials and that they can say they are strong against the enemy of terrorism. That's the current bugaboo. It was communism for many years, but it was terrorism. And by maintaining this war, having this war, see, they could say the United States is doing all we can to fight terrorism. It's a lie, of course, but it's a lie that the American public, the US public, I should say, buys into.

**Ross** We've had the war against communism, now terrorism. What, in your view, will be the next ism to come under attack?

**Robert Fantina** It's hard to say, but Islam, which isn't exactly an ism, but that's being associated now very closely with terrorism, which is just another one of the US's huge lies. But I think the war against terrorism will be sustainable by the United States for many years. No matter what happens in the world, some lone person in Paris decides to set off a bomb, we have to clamp down again. We have to have another war somewhere because this person was from, who knows, Iraq. We have to attack Iraq again, whatever it is. But this will continue for as long as it's profitable for the people who are in power.

**Ross** You talk about oligarchic transition. You've just had a election in the US. Mr Biden now is the president. How different is the US foreign policy going to be under President Biden in comparison to Trump and Obama?

**Robert Fantina** There will be some cosmetic differences between the Trump administration and the Biden administration. For example, Biden will not proclaim America first and the rest of world be damned. He will reach out to US allies. So there will be a difference there. There will be a minor difference in the US foreign policy toward Palestine in that the United States will restore the minimal funding that it gave to Palestine under previous administrations prior to Trump. But we're not seeing a change in Iran, which is disappointing. Biden said he wanted to re-enter the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and now he's saying, or his administration is saying, that Iran needs to comply first and then the United States will come back into compliance. It's the United States who violated the JCPOA, not Iran. Iran maintained its commitments for a full year after United States withdrew and issued sanctions again and forced many of its allies to stop trading with Iran. So it is Iran that has been in the right. The United States has been in the wrong. It's up to the United States to fix it and to re-enter. Biden has said he's not going to do this, or at least Blinken, his secretary of state, has said this isn't going to happen until Iran recommits or gets back into full compliance. So we'll see some minor changes. But as far as war making, which you mentioned earlier, I hesitate to think where Biden is going to start or escalate a war. I don't think he will end the war in Afghanistan by any means. He will probably continue his sabre rattling against Iran. Who knows what kind of action he might take against Venezuela. And there will be some changes. He has said he will not support the Saudi onslaught and slaughter of the people of Yemen, but he hasn't said anything about Israel and Palestine, about Indian Kashmir and many of the places where the US president could make a significant difference.

**Ross** Let's stay in the Middle East, if we can, for a second. We talked about Iran. We have to talk about Israel. Will President Biden speak to the administration in Israel and say, actually,

an awful lot of what you're doing here breaches international human rights, better knock this on the head?

**Robert Fantina** He may say that. He may reach out. He hasn't as yet. He may reach out and say this is a violation of international law, human rights of the people of Palestine. But he will also say you can keep doing it. We, the United States government, will not cut any of the funding we give to you, but we hope you'll stop. That has no meaning whatsoever. The United States could end today the occupation of Palestine by simply cutting funding to Israel. It refuses to do so and has refused to do so for decades.

**Ross** We can't talk about US foreign policy without talking about the bogeyman for Biden. He ran on a ticket where he said he was going to stand up to Vladimir Putin. Now, one of the things he's done of late is flown a few bombers into Norway and made the statement publicly that he's going to, quote, 'stand up to Russian aggression'. What does all this mean? And doesn't he understand the stakes, the high stakes, of the game that he's playing?

**Robert Fantina** He understands them at least in the context of U.S. governance. This is just more of that US warmongering. He said he's going to stand up to Putin. That didn't mean for him diplomacy. That didn't mean meeting with him, talking about areas of concern, looking for solutions. It meant sending destroyers close to Russia. It meant threatening the usual things that the United States does. There are so many countries in the world today who are nuclear armed, and they're in there in major conflicts. Any kind of so-called nuclear war between two countries would have devastating global consequences for decades to come. We have in power people like Biden, previously Trump, who I think was far more dangerous than Biden, although Biden by name, is not dangerous. We have Netanyahu. We have Modi. We have so many people who are nuclear armed and are running amok on the world stage. Biden is only fanning those flames by being more militaristic toward Russia when he should be in a position of reaching out diplomatically to any nation the US deals with.

**Ross** You say that a forgotten past will always be repeated. It seems to me, when we look at various administrations through the years, and I mean that incalculable figure of being at war for 227 years out of 244. If you've been that bellicose and if you've had that much conflict, you have to have, as a nation, a selective amnesia. You have to airbrush out various bits and carry on as if nothing's happened. Do you think that that juggernaut, that gravy train for all the profits for the arms companies and all the rest of it, do you think that will ever shudder to a halt or do we helplessly shrug and just say, well, that's how they roll in the US?

**Robert Fantina** We are seeing some minimal progress, limited progress. We have some progressive socialist democrats winning elections. They are not nearly as interested in war-making as the mainstream, if I can call it that, Democratic Party and certainly the Republican Party. We're seeing some minor change there. But as you said, the selective amnesia. There are a few aspects to it. One is that in the last few years, we've seen the US government trying to put a new spin on the war in Vietnam, saying that this was a noble undertaking and honouring it. That was nothing short of a disaster from start to finish. There was nothing noble about it. The damage it did in that part of the world, the suffering that it caused in the United States, is just untold. That's one thing. Another thing is there is this thought of US exceptionalism. Whatever the US does is right, even if it means bombing innocent men, women and children. The US portrays it as it's all being done for some noble reason. And the

US populace buys into this, not recognising that people who are suffering in Iraq and Syria and Yemen and Palestine are the same as them. They love their children the way we love our children. They bleed the way we bleed. They don't see it as the same.

**Ross** The other irony that burns is that Biden and his administration talk about Russian meddling. The US has been interfering in other country's internal affairs since dot hasn't it?

**Robert Fantina** Since the dawn of the US basically. And also there's all this talk about Russia interfering in US elections. Let's talk about Israeli interference in U.S. elections. AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which is a very large lobby committee, donates millions and millions and millions of dollars to candidates either running for election or re-election. And then once they're elected, AIPAC writes legislation for them to introduce into the US Congress. Is that not interference in US governance?

**Ross** Robert Fantina, your book about propaganda, lies and false flags. It's our Book of the Week this week. What we'd like you to do is pitch it to us and tell us why we should all be reading it.

**Robert Fantina** The book tells the true history of US foreign policy and the reasons for its wars. It's information you won't get in school. You don't get on CNN or Fox News. It goes beyond what the government says to the actual reasons the US wages war.

**Ross** Congratulations on About Propaganda, Lies And False Flags. Thank you very much for your time.

**Robert Fantina** Thank you.

**Video clip (Eisenhower)** In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought, or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defence with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together.

**Ross** Piers, great to have you back on Renegade Inc. That clip turns out President Eisenhower was correct. Quite a warning, wasn't it, 60 years ago?

**Piers Robinson** Yes, it was a very clear warning from a US president stepping down, a very clear warning to the American public - he coined the phrase, of course, the military-industrial complex - about what was happening in America with the growing strength of the intelligence and industrial lobby. And essentially what has become the war lobby has a very clear warning. And we can run through Afghanistan, we can run through US-South America in the 70s, Central America in the 80s, Afghanistan, war on terror. All that we have seen since then is a growing intensification of the problem that he identified to the point where we are now 20 years in on the global war on terror, where we are still embroiled in major conflicts around the world - most prominently in Iraq and in Syria - and really it's testament to what he said. And I think Barack Obama made a comment about this, that the war lobby in

America is very difficult to fight against. And you see this across presidencies, right? You see it's a different president, but it's the same policy. And we see this with Biden and Syria. It's a different president but the policy is carrying on. And that's testament, I think, to the kind of the strength of the war lobby and the strength of the military industrial complex that Eisenhower warned us about 60 years ago.

**Ross** So presidents have become really a showpiece. Who's actually running things?

**Piers Robinson** Well, I mean, I think some scholars refer to the deep state. Some scholars refer to the permanent state. There are other terms that you could use. But I think who runs the show? I think what you're looking at is a coalition of interests very tightly interwoven, which push policy in a particular way. And I think that's the reality of what you have. You have this kind of interlinking between politicians, between big business, and of course, this is well documented in case of the American political system. And something from my own perspective, you have the revolving door between academia and policy making. These things ceased to be in terms of structure. These aren't independent entities. Academia is not independent. The mainstream media isn't independent. The executive is not properly independent of the executive and so on. And then you have the defence industry and intelligence services and they're so interwoven that it becomes a very difficult juggernaut to stop.

**Ross** Why do you think that mainstream media, or sometimes described as corporate media, haven't understood that if they don't hold power to account, ultimately their business model is shot because it's based on trust capital?

**Piers Robinson** I think in some ways for a long time we're going starting with Eisenhower. That was back in a time when 70 percent of the American population had a very high level of trust in network news. And so for a long period of time, I think journalists have not felt that pressure and have been more than willing to toe the line during the Cold War, for example, toe the line during the war on terror. Why journalists haven't woken up and realised that, it's very difficult to tell. I mean, there are multiple reasons journalists are reluctant to rock the boat because of their careers, jobs, got to pay the mortgage and so on. Another reason is that even if journalists know that's what they're pushing is not the truth - a classic example, Iraq and WMD - I think journalists are very intimidated, as are many people in the public, are very intimidated with the idea of challenging, of raising the question, that maybe their governments are not benign, maybe their governments are not on the side of right. And it's a very difficult thing psychologically, I think, for people to get over that hurdle. And this, of course, is a point which critical scholars like Chomsky have made a long time ago. So that belief in our own goodness is a powerful one. And I think psychologically that keeps journalists in line and has kept them in line for a very long time, even when they know that they're losing public support.

**Ross** As a critical academic, you set up the Syrian Working Group with contemporaries of yours. You came in for an awful lot of flack, to use a military expression. Why did you do that? From a propaganda point of view, you saw something that other people weren't seeing and you wanted to discuss it. Did you realise at that point that you were a really significant mosquito in the tent, you were treading on an awful lot of toes because there's an awful lot of

money and status, if you like, to be pushed to be able to win those wars or at least prolong them because they're very profitable?

**Piers Robinson** Well, it's interesting. On the one hand, the establishment of the Syria Working Group was, in a sense, purely this kind of academic enterprise. I'd been working on propaganda and the media and the Iraq conflict. My field was foreign policy and international conflict and media. I'd just finished a whole lot of work on the September dossier, the dodgy dossier on the Iraq invasion, and the sort of massaged evidence regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. So it was my area and then started to become conscious of the war in Syria. I started to pay more attention to it around 2015. And it was simply the obvious thing to do. You need to start to, let's look at this current conflict. It seems that there's likely to be, judging by previous conflicts, a high level of propaganda associated with it. So let's start looking at it and so I started looking at it. And then I did become conscious that we became aware through some material given to us that the FCO, was engaged in what we would describe as a very major propaganda operation. And I thought to myself, well, we're going to be stepping on some toes here. And these are powerful people. And so part of the logic of the Syria Working Group was to say, look, this is a really important topic. We need to start looking at Syria and media and the question of propaganda. But another factor in thinking that we needed to establish as a group was that we needed some kind of safety in numbers, that we would be attacked because it was likely to be the case that we were treading on an ongoing propaganda operation, that we would be more robust against attacks and so on. And I think that's true. And it's the right thing to do it. If had just been me saying, OK, I'm going to start trying to publish this and trying to do this work, it would have been quite easy to take me out, as it were, and stop me from researching. But when you've got a group of people from different disciplines and so on, then it does give you a degree of security, I think. And so that was the other reason for forming the group was that we knew we were up against, powerful enemies who wouldn't want us to be doing what we were doing but the numbers would give us the strength, I think, to carry things through. And I think that's been proven. I mean, it is the case that our work on the question of Douma, for example, has been vindicated by the leaks, by the OPCW whistleblowers and by what we know now.

**Ross** President Biden in the big job now. Whether he's a showpiece, a figurehead, remains to be seen. But we can make a judgement on him insofar as he's back bombing - Syria, Iraq border lately. Conditions normal? Is this what we're to expect from the Biden-Harris administration?

**Piers Robinson** Yes, I think this was expected. I think that the war in Syria has been running for 10 years now and the groups who have been pushing for this - whatever you want to call them, neocons or regime change or the kind of liberal centre ground who are fighting humanitarian wars - this, I think, is their last opportunity to really drive through a number of regime change operations. Look at the planning documents or discussions between Bush and Blair just after 9/11 and they're talking about Syria, Iran, Iraq and when to hit and when to go in and so on. And here in 2020, with Biden coming in, I think they see it as, this is our last chance to try and see through what can only be described as an attempt to reorder the Middle East. It's an attempt which was planned in the 90s and it got underway after 9/11. And it is now where it is now. And you can see that there are those elements within the US establishment who ultimately want to engage regime change in Iran. And that's the kind of end game with this.

**Ross** Post-Covid, economies are absolutely beleaguered, smashed to pieces in some places - job opportunities gone, furlough schemes coming to an end. The economic picture is far from rosy. When you talk about a constituency of people supporting this military adventurism in far flung places, how possibly can a politician put to their own people, actually, we're going to spend a hell of a lot of money bombing people over there when, actually, we haven't looked after our people at home?

**Piers Robinson** Looking at it from that perspective, they'll have great difficulties. They do not have the constituency for action, which they perhaps could have claimed to have had after 9/11 with a war on terror and so on. What they do have in their favour is populations in the West who are battling with the issue of Covid, battling with potential restrictions coming in, a civil liberties battle, which I think is now looming and so on. And you have people who are struggling, obviously, with the economy, whose attention is taken away from Syria, Iraq and so on. So that plays in their favour in a sense, because you don't get the resistance. But then that only lasts so long, I think. I think the basic point you make is correct, that the sort of idea of pushing on with these wars in a context where there's no real rationale for it, and in the context where people want our own societies to be put back in order and want democracy to be restored, will work against them in this in the coming years. I think the stock of knowledge in the general population about the deceptions that we've seen over the last 20 years grows and grows and it will just continue to grow over time. And I think that awareness that we're fighting wars under false pretences will become stronger and stronger. And I think that idea of a tipping point at some point, we're already seeing it with very low levels of trust in the mainstream media and we're seeing this flowing out in some of the issues related to Covid. And that awareness that the media, in the classic formulation manufacturers consent, is going to reach significant levels in the coming years. And it creates the opportunity for people to, as it were, a wake up and then push for change. That's going to be the tricky part.

**Ross** As you mentioned in that answer, manufacturing consent, we always jump at the opportunity to play a Noam Chomsky-Andrew Marr clip because we just think it's so wonderful. We'll do that in the credits on the way out. But Piers Robinson, thank you very much for your time.

**Piers Robinson** Thank you.

**Chomsky to Marr (Video clip)** I'm sure you're speaking for the majority of journalists who are trained, have it driven into their heads, that this is a crusading profession - adversarial, we stand up against power - a very self-serving view. On the other hand, in my opinion - I hate to make a value judgement - but the better journalists and, in fact, the ones who are often regarded as the best journalists, are quite a different picture and, I think, a very realistic one.

**Marr to Chomsky** How can you know that I'm self-censoring?

**Chomsky to Marr** I'm sure you believe everything you're saying. But what I'm saying is that if you believed something different, you wouldn't be sitting where you're sitting.