

Icons of American Militarism

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At this moment, it's hard to think of a better symbol of American militarism than a giant bomb with a U.S. flag on it. President Donald Trump touted the use of the "mother of all bombs" (MOAB) in Afghanistan as a "very, very successful mission" even though evidence of that success is scant. He further cited MOAB as evidence of the "tremendous difference, tremendous difference" between his administration's willingness to use force and Obama's. In short, Trump loved MOAB precisely because Obama didn't use it. To Trump, MOAB was a sort of penis extender and a big middle finger all-in-one. Virility and vulgarity.



MOAB is an icon of U.S. militarism, as are other weapons in the American arsenal. Weapons like our warplanes, aircraft carriers, Predator and Reaper drones, and Tomahawk and Hellfire missiles. U.S. foreign policy often hinges on or pivots about the deployment of these icons of power, whether it's aircraft carriers and anti-missile systems being sent to Korea or more bombs and missiles being used in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, among other countries.

Weapons sales further define U.S. foreign policy. Witness the recent announcement of [\\$100 billion](#) in arms for the Saudis, soon to be confirmed by Trump in his forthcoming trip to Saudi Arabia. This sale sets up even more military

aid for Israel, in that Washington insists Israel must always maintain a qualitative edge in weaponry over its Arab rivals.

Unlike, say, Wilhelmine Germany, which elevated Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg to iconic status during and after World War I, America today is lacking in winning generals. Sure, there have been a few pretenders. William Westmoreland in Vietnam, H. Norman Schwarzkopf in Desert Storm, Tommy Franks in Iraqi Freedom, and David Petraeus of “Surge” fame come to mind, but their “victories” were either illusory or lacking in staying power. Since we can’t idolize our generals, we celebrate our weapons instead.

These weapons are indeed iconic symbols. They capture an ideology of destruction. A predilection for spreading misery worldwide, as Tom Engelhardt notes in his latest [must-read article](#) at TomDispatch.com. As Engelhardt notes in his “send-out” message to his piece:

The first part of my latest post focuses on the now seven month-long U.S.-backed Iraqi military offensive against the city of Mosul, which shows little sign of ending and has reduced that city, like so many other places in the region, to ruins, if not rubble. Mosul, in other words, has been on my mind, but perhaps not completely for the reason you might expect. Its destruction (and the generation of yet more uprooted people and refugees) has led me to wonder what ever happened to the globalizers who for so many years told us about the wonders of tying the planet ever more tightly together and leveling all playing fields. It seems obvious to me that war, American-style, these last 15 years, has played a distinctly globalizing role on this ever smaller planet of ours — just globalizing misery, not happy news. In this piece I use the destruction of Mosul to lay out my thoughts on just what globalization really means in 2017, why the Trump presidency is linked to such grim events, and just why the globalizers have stopped talking about the phenomenon.

When I read Tom’s note above about the “leveling” of “playing fields,” my first thought was that America is indeed working to level the world — just not in the figurative sense of promoting economic equality, but in the literal sense of leveling areas with bombs, cities like Mosul, for example, or alleged training areas for terrorists in Afghanistan. As Engelhardt himself notes in his article, U.S. military action isn’t making the world flatter in the sense of equitable globalization; it’s simply flattening areas with overwhelming explosive force.

Most Americans simply don’t know or care much about foreign cities being leveled/flattened by America’s icons of power. You might say it’s not on our radar screens. The media and our leaders do a very good job of keeping us [divided, distracted, and downtrodden](#). What American has time to worry about Mosul or some obscure region of Afghanistan? Unless or until the leveling and flattening come our way, to our cities and valleys, but by that point it will be far too late to act.

With all our talk of MOAB and aircraft carriers and missiles and their “[beauty](#)” and “tremendous success,” are we that far away from the lost souls in the [movie](#) “Beneath the Planet of the Apes,” who elevated the [atomic bomb](#) as their false idol, their version of the Biblical golden calf?

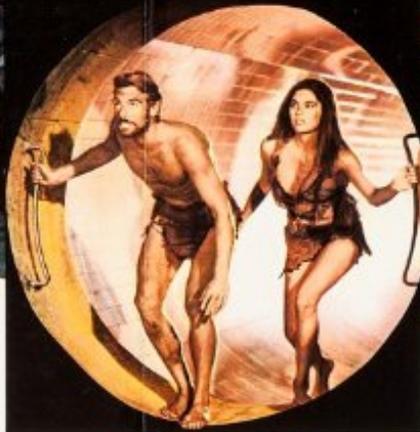
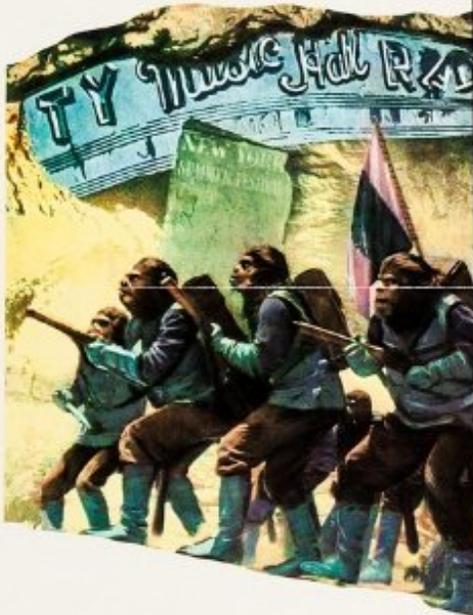


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