

Israel's Robust Debate on Iran Threat

For decades, the debate about Israeli security has been far more robust in Israel than in the United States. The same holds true today as Israeli opposition leader Shaul Mofaz challenges the government's bellicose rhetoric on Iran while U.S. politicians and pundits pander or stay silent, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

An admirable characteristic of Israeli democracy has been the vigor and frankness with which those who are permitted to participate in it conduct political debate. There is a refreshing directness and openness that, on some of the very same topics, is usually missing from political discourse in the United States.

The Israeli style of debate over policy is in full view every day in the opinion pages of Israeli publications, and there was an especially up-tempo version of it in [a blast on Thursday from Kadima Party leader Shaul Mofaz against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.](#)

Mofaz may have been in an irritated mood partly because the occasion was a special session of the Knesset called to approve the selection of former internal-security-service chief Avi Dichter as minister for defense of the home front. In taking this job, Dichter left the Kadima Party, which he had represented in the Knesset. And this all not long after Mofaz himself had left a short-lived coalition with Netanyahu and returned to be leader of the opposition.

Mofaz had harsh things to say about the government's policies on homeland security, the subject of Dichter's new portfolio, but he linked this to the latest burst of saber rattling against Iran by Netanyahu and defense minister Ehud Barak. In referring to Netanyahu's "incessant prattle about a nuclear Iran," Mofaz said:

"You are headed for a rash confrontation at an unnecessary cost while abandoning the home front. Over the past few months, Israel has waged an extensive and relentless PR campaign with the sole objective of preparing the ground for a premature military adventure. This PR campaign has deeply penetrated the 'zone of immunity' of our national security, threatens to weaken our deterrence, and our relations with our best friends. . . .

"[You are] making threats and sowing the seeds of fear and terror. Mr. Prime

Minister, you are playing a dangerous and irresponsible game with the future of an entire nation. ... You're creating panic. You are trying to frighten us and terrify us. And in truth we are scared: scared by your lack of judgment, scared that you both lead and don't lead, scared that you are executing a dangerous and irresponsible policy."

It would enormously improve U.S. debate on this same subject if American politicians could be this direct. But instead they operate in fear of being seen to stray at all from the established dogma that Iran with its nuclear program is The Greatest Threat in the World.

The severe constraints on American debate on the subject contribute to ineffective policy, such as endlessly piling on sanctions without a diplomatic posture that would give the sanctions any chance to yield a favorable result. And the whole issue never gets put in proper perspective because no American politician is brave and honest enough to observe that if we have a crisis it is mostly because of Netanyahu's "incessant prattle about a nuclear Iran."

As for the political game that prevents American debate on this subject from getting any better, Mofaz had some blunt and honest things to say about that too:

"Mr. Prime Minister, you want a crude, rude, unprecedented, reckless, and risky intervention in the U.S. elections. Tell us who you serve and for what? Why are you putting your hand deep into the ballot boxes of the American electorate?"

Of course, this subject is even more strictly off limits for American politicians. Among the many ill effects of the topic's untouchable status is one we are seeing in the current presidential election campaign: one candidate appeals for votes (and maybe even more so, for dollars) by posing as the more unabashed lover of Israel even though on things that really contribute to Israel's security every recent U.S. presidential administration has continued unrelenting support no matter what Israel does.

Isn't it ironic that Israeli politicians seem to be able to talk more freely and critically about subjects pertaining to Israel than American politicians are?

For the record, it should be noted that the Israeli ambassador to the United States stated earlier this year, in what has to be one of the most risible ambassadorial assertions we have heard lately, that "Israel does not interfere in internal political affairs of the United States."

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Hiroshima and Historical Truth

On the 50th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, historians at the Smithsonian tried to present a truthful accounting of that U.S. decision-making but were stopped by right-wing politicians led by then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich who insisted on maintaining comforting myths, recalls Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Last week was the 67th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the whole truth of which has been heavily censored and mythologized starting with the news of the event that created understandable joy because of the end of that awful war.

Most Americans took in, as gospel truth, the heavily edited stories about the end of the war. To the average American, the war's end was such a relief that there was no questioning. For many soldiers who were particularly war-weary, no moral questions were raised regarding the justification of using atomic bombs.

The immediate history was written by the victors, of course, with no balancing input from the losing side. But, several decades later, after intensive research by unbiased historians, we now know that the patriotic narrative contained a lot of false information, often orchestrated by war-justifying militarists – starting with General Douglas MacArthur.

MacArthur, aka “the American Caesar,” successfully imposed near total censorship of what really happened at Ground Zero. One of his first acts after taking over as viceroy of Japan was to confiscate and/or destroy all the unpleasant photographic evidence documenting the horrors of the atomic bombings.

In 1995, the Smithsonian Institute was preparing to correct the pseudo-patriotic myths by staging an honest, historically accurate 50th anniversary display exploring all sides of the atomic bombings. This provoked serious right-wing reactionary outrage from veterans groups and other “patriot” groups, including House Speaker Newt Gingrich from the GOP-dominated Congress.

The Smithsonian felt compelled to remove all of the contextually important aspects of the story, especially the bomb-related civilian atrocity stories. So again we had another example of powerful politically-motivated groups that

falsified history because of a fear that “unpatriotic” truths, albeit historical, would contradict their deeply held beliefs, an intolerable psychological situation for many blindered super-patriots.

The Smithsonian historians did have a gun to their heads, of course, but in the melee, the mainstream media – and their easily brain-washable consumers of propaganda – ignored a vital historical point. And that is this: the war could have ended as early as the spring of 1945 without the August atomic bombings, and therefore there could have averted the three-month bloody battle of Okinawa that resulted in the deaths of thousands of American Marines with tens of thousands of Japanese military casualties and uncounted thousands of Okinawan civilian casualties.

In addition, if the efforts had succeeded at ending the war via early Japanese efforts for an armistice, there would have been no need for the atomic bombs nor for an American land invasion – the basis of the subsequent propaganda campaign that retroactively justified the use of the bombs.

President Harry Truman was fully aware of Japan’s search for ways to honorably surrender months before the fateful order to incinerate, without warning, the defenseless women, children and elderly people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who had not been given a choice by their militarist, fascist government about going to war..

That top-secret intelligence data, de-classified in the 1980s, showed that the contingency plans for a two-stage US invasion of the mainland (the first one no sooner than Nov. 1, 1945, and the second one in the spring of 1946) would have been unnecessary.

Japan was working on peace negotiations through its Moscow ambassador as early as April of 1945 when the battle of Okinawa was just starting. Harry Hopkins, President Truman’s close adviser, was aware of Japan’s desire for an armistice. He cabled the president from Moscow, saying: “Japan is doomed and the Japanese know it. Peace feelers are being put out by certain elements in Japan.”

Truman’s team knew of these and other developments because the U.S. had broken the Japanese code years earlier, and U.S. intelligence was intercepting all of Japan’s military and diplomatic messages. On July 13, 1945, Foreign Minister Togo said: “Unconditional surrender (giving up all sovereignty, thereby deposing Hirohito, the Emperor god) is the only obstacle to peace.”

What Did Truman Know?

Since Truman and his advisers knew about these efforts, the war could have ended through diplomacy, first with a cease-fire and then a negotiated peace, by

simply conceding a post-war figurehead position for the emperor Hirohito who was regarded as a deity in Japan.

That reasonable concession was – seemingly illogically – refused by the U.S. in demands for “unconditional surrender,” which was initially put forward at the 1943 Casablanca Conference between U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and reiterated at the Potsdam Conference (July 1945) between Truman, Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin.

When General MacArthur heard about the demand for unconditional surrender, he was appalled. He recommended dropping that demand to facilitate the process of ending the war peacefully. William Manchester, in his biography of MacArthur, *American Caesar*, wrote: “Had the General’s advice been followed, the resort to atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki might have been unnecessary.”

Even Secretary of War Henry Stimson said: “the true question was not whether surrender could have been achieved without the use of the bomb but whether a different diplomatic and military course would have led to an earlier surrender. A large segment of the Japanese cabinet was ready in the spring of 1945 to accept substantially the same terms as those finally agreed on.”

In other words, Stimson felt that the U.S. prolonged the war, including the battle for Okinawa, and could have made using the bombs unnecessary if it had engaged in honest negotiations.

Shortly after WWII, military analyst Hanson Baldwin wrote: “The Japanese, in a military sense, were in a hopeless strategic situation by the time the Potsdam Declaration (insisting on Japan’s unconditional surrender) was made.”

Admiral William Leahy, top military aide to President Truman, said in his war memoirs, *I Was There*: “It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons. My own feeling is that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.”

And General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a personal visit to President Truman a couple of weeks before the bombings, urged him not to use the atomic bombs. Eisenhower said: “It wasn’t necessary to hit them with that awful thing . . . to use the atomic bomb, to kill and terrorize civilians, without even attempting [negotiations], was a double crime.”

Yet, after the bombings of Aug. 6 and 9, the “unconditional” surrender terms were quietly dropped. The emperor was allowed to remain in place as spiritual

head of Japan, the very condition that made the Japanese leadership refuse to accept the humiliating “unconditional surrender” terms.

So the two essential questions that need answering (to figure out what was going on behind the scenes) are these: 1) Why did the U.S. refuse to accept Japan’s only concession concerning their surrender (Japan’s ability to retain their emperor) and 2) with the end of the war in the Pacific already a certainty, why were the bombs still used?

The Decision

Scholars have determined that there were a number of factors that contributed to Truman’s decision to use the bombs.

–The U.S had made a huge investment in time, mind and money (a massive \$2 billion in 1940 dollars) to produce three bombs, and there was no inclination – and no guts – to stop the momentum.

–The U.S. military and political leadership not to mention most war-weary Americans – had a tremendous appetite for revenge because of the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Of course, mercy isn’t a consideration for any wartime military force, and that includes the U.S. military. The only factor to be considered was ending the war by any means necessary, no matter what methods are used.

So, in the elation of the end-of-war moment, the public asked no questions and no explanations were demanded by the relieved citizens who quite willingly accepted the propaganda that justified the hideous end.

National security typically allows indeed, demands stealing, cheating and lying about what really happens at the ground zeroes of history. The absurd old saying that “all’s fair in love and war” applies most emphatically to war.

–The fissionable material in Hiroshima’s bomb was uranium and Nagasaki’s was plutonium. Scientific curiosity about the differences between the two weapons was a significant factor that pushed the project to its completion.

The Manhattan Project scientists and the U.S. Army director of the project, General Leslie Groves, wanted answers to a multitude of questions raised by the project, including “what would happen if an entire city was leveled by a single nuclear bomb?” The decision to use both bombs had been made well in advance of August 1945. Harry Truman did not specifically order the bombing of Nagasaki.

The three-day interval between the two bombs was unconscionably short. Japan’s communications and transportation capabilities were in shambles, and no one,

either the U.S. military or the Japanese high command, fully understood what had happened at Hiroshima, particularly the short-term or long-term after effects of the radiation. The Manhattan Project was so top secret that even MacArthur had been kept out of the loop until a few days before Hiroshima was reduced to ashes.

–The Russians had proclaimed their intent to enter the war with Japan 90 days after V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945), which would have been Aug. 8, two days after Hiroshima was bombed. Indeed, America's Russian allies did declare war on Japan on Aug. 8 and were advancing eastward across Manchuria, eager to reclaim territories lost to Japan in the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War.

The U.S. didn't want Japan surrendering to Russia (soon to be the only other superpower and a future enemy) so the first nuclear threat "messages" of the Cold War were "sent," loud and clear.

Russia indeed received far less of the spoils of war than they had hoped for, and the two superpowers were instantly and deeply mired in the arms-race stalemate that eventually resulted in their mutual moral (and fiscal) bankruptcies that occurred a generation or two later.

The Reality

An estimated 80,000 innocent, defenseless civilians, plus 20,000 essentially weaponless young Japanese conscripts died instantly in the Hiroshima bombing. Hundreds of thousands more suffered slow deaths from agonizing burns, radiation sickness, leukemia and virtually untreatable infections for the rest of their shortened lives; and generations of the survivor's progeny were doomed to suffer horrific radiation-induced illnesses, cancers and premature deaths that are still on-going at this very hour.

Another sobering reality that has been covered up is the fact that 12 American Navy pilots, their existence well known to U.S. command, were instantly incinerated in the Hiroshima jail on Aug. 6, 1945.

The 75,000 victims who died in the huge fireball at Nagasaki on Aug. 9 were virtually all civilians, except for the inhabitants of an Allied POW camp near Nagasaki's ground zero. They were instantly liquefied, carbonized and/or vaporized by an experimental weapon of mass destruction that was executed by obedient, unaware scientists and soldiers, and blessed by Christian military chaplains who were just doing their duty.

The War Department knew of the existence of the Nagasaki POWs and, when reminded of that fact before the B-29 fleet embarked on the mission, simply replied: "Targets previously assigned for Centerboard (code name for the Kokura/Nagasaki

mission) remain unchanged.”

To obscure some of these unpleasant truths, the official War Department/National Security State-approved version of the end of the war in the Pacific contained a new batch of myths that took their places among the long lists of myths by which nations make war. And such half-truth versions are still standard operating procedure that are continuously fed to us by the corporate, military, political and media opinion leaders that are the war-makers and war profiteers of the world.

The well-honed propaganda of the war machine manufactures glory out of inglorious gruesomeness, as we have witnessed in the censored reportage of the U.S. military invasions and occupations of sovereign nations like North Korea, Iran, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the Philippines, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Colombia, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc, etc. And this list doesn't even start to uncover the uncountable Pentagon/CIA covert operations and assassination plots in the rest of the known world.

But somehow most of us Americans still hang on to a shaky “my country right or wrong” patriotism, desperately wanting to believe the cunningly-orchestrated myths that say that the war-profiteering 1 percent, the exploitive ruling elite and the “chicken hawk” politicians, military leaders and media talking heads that are in their employ, only work for peace, justice, equality, liberty and spreading democracy.

While it is true that the U.S. military has faced down the occasional despot (usually the ones who won't cooperate with the “interests” of the 1 percent), we remain blind to the fact that America has historically supported right-wing fascist dictatorships that make the world unsafe for democracy all the while ensuring easy access for vulture capitalists, high finance, multinational corporations and other exploiters to be able to do their dirty work.

The justification of the atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are symbolic of the brain-washing that goes on in all “total wars,” which always result in mass human slaughter known as “collateral damage” and “friendly fire.”

It might already be too late to rescue and resuscitate a more humanitarian, peace-loving America. It might be too late to effectively confront the corporate hijacking of liberal democracy in America. It might be too late to successfully bring down the arrogant and greedy ruling elites who are selfishly exploiting the resources of the world and dragging the planet and its creatures down the road to destruction.

But there is always hope. Rather than being silent about the wars that ruthless warmongers are provoking all over the planet (with the very willing pushes by the Pentagon, the weapons industry and their conservative lapdogs in Congress), people of conscience need to ramp up their resistance and teach the truth of history, in spite of the painful lessons that will be revealed.

We need to start owning up to the uncountable war crimes that have been hidden from history, including the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And then we need to go to the streets, publicly protesting and courageously refusing to cooperate with those who are transforming America into a criminal rogue nation that will eventually be targeted for its downfall by the billions of suffering victims outside our borders, just as happened to Nazi Germany and Fascist Japan.

Doing what is right for the whole of humanity for a change, rather than just doing what is profitable or advantageous for our over-privileged, over-consumptive and unsustainable American way of life, would be real honor, real patriotism and an essential start toward real peace.

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