

Iran-Israel: Who's Threatening Whom?

The U.S. press readily accepts the narrative that non-nuclear Iran is threatening to wipe out nuclear-armed Israel, though Israel repeatedly vows to attack Iran if it even approaches a nuclear-weapons "capability." The latest furor is over some harsh Iranian rhetoric, notes Nima Shirazi at [WideAsleepinAmerica](#).

By Nima Shirazi

The rhetoric used in [recent speeches](#) by top Iranian officials has garnered much attention in the mainstream U.S. media. In addition to the outrage expressed over the statement that the Israeli governmental system and guiding Zionist ideology is an "[insult to humanity](#)," comments that the "Zionist regime" is a "[cancerous tumor](#)" have also met fierce condemnation.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has compiled a [list](#) of recent reported statements made by Iranian officials. National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor [told](#) the press that the United States government "strongly condemn[s] the latest series of offensive and reprehensible comments by senior Iranian officials that are aimed at Israel," adding, "The entire international community should condemn this hateful and divisive rhetoric."

Rabbi David Wolpe took to the pages of *The Los Angeles Times* to specifically [condemn](#) the cancer analogy. Wolpe incidentally did so by presenting a litany of outrageous statements of his own. He writes that the "state of Israel" is 3,000 years old, thus absurdly conflating an [ancient Biblical minority community](#) with a modern, settler-colonial nation-state. He insists Israel is [not expansionist](#), a [claim that doesn't stand up](#) to even the most cursory [awareness of basic facts](#), [the historical record](#) and current [aggressive Israeli policy](#).

Wolpe also states that the cancer analogy "leads inevitably, inexorably, to the prospect of genocide," which he obviously follows up by invoking the Holocaust and asserting that "Iran eagerly pursues nuclear weapons," thereby ignoring the consistent conclusions of U.S. intelligence and IAEA inspections.

He concludes by suggesting that, were Israel not to maintain such a destructive military capability, segregationist occupation infrastructure, [rampant legal discrimination](#), and a [two-tiered justice system](#), the result would be the "wholesale slaughter" of Jewish Israelis, presumably by vengeful Arab hordes.

Such a characterization recalls the ludicrous [fears](#) that beset the vast majority of [white South Africans](#) just years before Apartheid ended, many of whom were

consumed by “physical dread” at the prospect of equality and their loss of racial dominance and superiority and foresaw a future full of “violence, total collapse, expulsion and flight.”

Even in 1987, as Apartheid was becoming increasingly untenable, about 75 percent of white South Africans feared that their “physical safety...would be threatened” as a result of “black rule.” Nearly 73 percent, including over 85 percent of Afrikaners, believed “white women would be molested by blacks.”

Incidentally, as recently pointed out in *Ha'aretz*, in 1987, “Israel was the only Western nation that upheld diplomatic ties with South Africa” and was one of the last countries to join the international boycott campaign.

Southern whites in the antebellum United States nurtured the same irrational apprehension, fearful that the violent and successful 1791 slave rebellion in Haiti would be replicated across the Gulf of Mexico, especially in states like South Carolina where slaves outnumbered whites two to one. Following emancipation, and in reaction to the Civil Rights Act of 1866, Southern states enacted “black codes” restricting the voting, land ownership, and speech of former slaves.

Whites feared that their loss of racial dominance and an enslaved labor force would not only ruin the Southern economy, but also that the newly freed black population would seek revenge on their masters and rape white women; this led to numerous race riots and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan that same year.

In April 1868, Alabama newspaper editor Ryland Randolph praised the Klan for opposing what he called the “galling despotism” of the federal government over the Southern states, which he “deemed a *fungus growth of military tyranny*” with the goal of “degrad[ing] the white man by the establishment of negro supremacy.”

Forrest G. Wood writes in *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction*: “Although white men certainly feared for their jobs and income, they were more alarmed by the threat to their physical safety that the ‘savage African’ presented...”

“Pointing to the absence of an advanced (by Western standards) African civilization, extremists described the Negroes as primitive, barbaric, and cruel. ... Freedom, the white supremacist now asserted, would stimulate the black man’s worst passions, leading him to crimes of arson, murder, and rape.”

Newspapers often deliberately published grossly exaggerated or wholly fictitious stories of criminal acts and violence committed by blacks, stoking even more fear in the racist white population. For these white supremacists, rape was “the most frightful crime which negroes commit against white people” and the

accusation of sexual assault (or even consensual interracial relationships) was a surefire way to spark a lynch mob.

Just this past Spring, Israel's Interior Minister Eli Yishai said that many Israeli women have been raped by African migrants and refugees, "but do not complain out of fear of being stigmatized as having contracted AIDS," insisting that "most of the African infiltrators are criminals." At an anti-African rally, Tel Aviv resident Carmela Rosner held a sign that read: "They rape girls and elderly women, murder, steal, stab, burglarize. We're afraid to leave home."

Yishai said that Africans, "along with the Palestinians, will bring a quick end to the Zionist dream," while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that the growing population of African immigrants "threatens our existence as a Jewish and democratic state," as well as "the social fabric of society, our national security and our national identity."

Palestinians in Israel along with their actual and potential offspring are regularly referred to as a "demographic threat" and a "demographic bomb," a racist construction that exposes the discriminatory and supremacist nature of Zionism itself. Due to such incitement against minority communities, pogroms, race riots, and violence against non-Jews have become commonplace.

The Israeli Education Ministry is currently attempting to overturn a district court ruling that "migrant children ... be fully integrated in the municipal school system and not be taught in a separate school." The state appeal in favor of segregation claims that the education of Israeli children will suffer if done alongside the children of African immigrants.

Meanwhile, extremist Jewish groups continue to try to "rescue" Jewish Israeli girls who date Palestinian men and threaten Palestinians with violence if they flirt with Jews.

In 2008, a Jewish Israeli woman filed a police report after discovering that a man she had just had consensual sex with was Palestinian and not Jewish, as she had assumed. After spending two years under house arrest, an Israeli court convicted the man of "rape by deception" and sentenced him to 18 months in prison. A former senior Justice Ministry official was quoted as saying, "In the context of Israeli society, you can see that some women would feel very strongly that they had been violated by someone who says he is Jewish but is not."

This is to be expected, as *The Palestine Center's* Yousef Munayyer explains: "An ideology that seeks to build a society around a certain type of people defined by ethnicity or religion is inevitably going to feature racism, supremacy and oppression, especially when the vast majority of native inhabitants where such

an ideology is implemented are unwelcomed.”

Unsurprisingly, commentators who routinely denounce cancer analogies when they come from Iranian officials blatantly avoid addressing the use of the identical rhetoric by Israelis themselves when referring to the growing presence of non-Jewish communities within areas controlled by Israel.

When IDF chief Moshe Ya’alon referred to Palestinian babies as “**cancerous manifestations**” and Likud Knesset member Miri Regev called African migrants and refugees “**a cancer in our body**,” the commentators were silent.

While calling the government and founding ideology of a state a “cancerous tumor” is certainly not a nice thing to say and supporters of that state’s policies have every reason to take offense at such a description, it is quite obviously a political statement. Iranian rhetoric attacks a *political entity*, namely the “Zionist *regime*“, which systematically discriminates against and oppresses people based solely on their ancestry and religious affiliation.

In contrast, Ya’alon and Regev’s statements employ the cancer analogy to defend the concept of ethnic-religious exclusivity and have everything to do with *people*, whether Palestinian or African, who somehow – *just by being born* – threaten the continued dominance of a deliberately demographically engineered and maintained state.

To be sure, regardless of its intended target, this kind of rhetoric is purposefully harsh and often gratuitous. Yet, like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s “insult to humanity” line, the cancer analogy is neither new nor original. While Iranian officials have been employing it since 2000, it has long been wielded for the express purpose of condemning a political system or ideology one vehemently opposes.

In the 1820s, former President John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson that “**slavery is a cancer to be isolated.**” On Oct. 16, 1854, in an stridently abolitionist speech in Peoria, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln likened the Constitution’s vague references to slavery to a “**cancer**,” hidden away, which an “afflicted man ... dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death; with the promise, nevertheless, that the cutting may begin at the end of a given time.”

A *New York Times* article from September 8, 1863, quoted then-Tennessee Governor Andrew Johnson as telling a Nashville crowd in late August, “**Slavery is a cancer on our society**, and the scalpel of the statesman should be used not simply to pare away the exterior and leave the roots to propagate the disease anew, but to remove it altogether.” Johnson endorsed the “**total eradication**” of slavery from Tennessee.

In the final chapter of the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867), entitled "The Modern Theory of Colonization," Karl Marx excoriated British politician Edward Gibbon Wakefield for his efforts "to heal the **anti-capitalistic cancer of the colonies.**"

The 1968 platform of Bermuda's first political party, the Progressive Labor Party, proclaimed, "No government can be either responsible or democratic while under the rule of another country, " adding, "**Colonialism is a cancer.**"

A Feb. 23, 1962, article in *Time Magazine* profiled U.S. General Paul Donal Harkins, the commander of a newly created U.S. Military Assistance Command in South Vietnam, which is described as "the first step in a more broadly based anti-Communist campaign." Harkins is quoted early in the piece as defining his mission as "doing all we can to support the South Vietnamese efforts to **eradicate the cancer of Communism.**"

In early June 1983, just a few months after Ronald Reagan delivered his "Evil Empire" speech in which he declared his belief that "Communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written," Illinois Rep. Henry Hyde told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that, because "**Communism is a cancer,**" Congress should support covert action and assistance to Nicaraguan Contras and other anti-Sandinista forces in Latin America in an effort to "fight for freedom."

Hamas reportedly used "**Communism is a cancer inside the nation's body** and we will cut it out" as a political slogan in opposition to Fatah soon after its establishment in the late 1980s.

Perhaps most applicable, however, are the comments made by South African Reverend Allan Boesak who, in 1983, formed the United Democratic Front, a legal umbrella organization for hundreds of anti-Apartheid groups. In his opening address to the UDF, Boesak stated:

"Apartheid is a cancer on the body politic of the world. A scourge on our society and on all human kind. Apartheid exists only because of economic greed and political oppression maintained by both systemic and physical violence and a false sense of racial superiority. So many have been forced into exile. So many have been thrown into jail. Too many of our children have been shot down mercilessly on the streets of our nation."

In the same speech, Boesak called Apartheid "a thoroughly evil system" that "can never be modernized or modified, **it must be totally eradicated**" and, in 1985, denounced the white South Africans who continued to support Apartheid as the "spiritual children of Adolf Hitler."

In 1988, Jim Murray echoed Boesak in the *Los Angeles Times*, writing that **“apartheid is a cancer on the world body politic – to say nothing of its soul. You combat it the best way you can.”**

Just as many others, including numerous Israelis, have described the state of Israel as practicing Apartheid, Boesak himself has endorsed such a comparison, and has gone even further.

In a November 2011 interview, Boesak reaffirmed his statement that the oppression of and discrimination against Palestinians by Israel is “in its practical manifestation even worse than South African apartheid,” adding, “It is worse, not in the sense that apartheid was not an absolutely terrifying system in South Africa, but in the ways in which the Israelis have taken the apartheid system and perfected it, so to speak; sharpened it.”

He cited the physical barriers, travel and employment restrictions, and the “two separate justice systems” for Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank as examples of why “in many ways the Israeli system is worse.” He offered his wholehearted support for the Palestinian civil society call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions to impel Israel to comply with international law.

When asked whether Palestinians could ever be expected to recognize Israel as a “Jewish State,” Boesak replied:

“They can’t. There is no such thing as a specifically Jewish state. You can’t proclaim a Jewish state over the heads and the bodies and the memories of the people who are the ancient people who live there. That is Palestinian land we are talking about. Most of the Jews who are there come from Europe and elsewhere and have no claim on that land and we mustn’t allow it to happen to the Palestinians what happened to my ancestors who were the original people in this land (South Africa) but now there are hardly enough of them to be counted in the census. That is Palestinian land and that should be the point of departure in every political discussion.”

Similarly, official Iranian state policy maintains that the international community must “allow the Palestinian nation to decide its own future, to have the right to self-determination for itself” and that in “the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and the fundamental principles enshrined in it. Jewish Palestinians, Muslim Palestinians and Christian Palestinians [must] determine their own fate themselves through a free referendum. Whatever they choose as a nation, everybody should accept and respect.”

Hysteria over Iranian phraseology (rhetoric with a long political history) relies solely on the presumption – repeated *ad nauseum* by politicians and the

press – that the nation’s leadership has threatened to attack Israel militarily and *wipe it off the map*. But Iran has never made such threats. Quite the contrary.

Speaking to Wolf Blitzer in April 2006, Iran’s representative to the IAEA, Ali Ashgar Soltanieh, directly addressed claims that Iran seeks the physical destruction of Israel (whatever that means).

Blitzer asked, “Should there be a state of Israel?,” to which Soltanieh replied, “If Israel is a synonym and will give the indication of Zionist mentality, no. But if you are going to conclude that we have said the people there have to be removed or they have to be massacred, this is a fabricated, unfortunate selective approach to what the mentality and policy of Islamic Republic of Iran is.”

In a June 2006 letter to *The Washington Post*, a spokesman for the Iranian Mission to the United Nations wrote, “Iran’s position is very clear: We have not threatened to use force nor have we used force against any country or government in the past 250 years. We’ve never done that in the past, and we’ll never do it in the future,” adding, “We wonder whether Israel or the United States can make the same statement.”

The letter also noted that, the same month, Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared that “We have no problem with the world. We are not a threat whatsoever to the world, and the world knows it. We will never start a war. We have no intention of going to war with any state.”

In October 2006, President Ahmadinejad stated, “Nuclear weapons have no place in Iran’s defense doctrine and Iran is not a threat to any country. ... We are not a threat to anybody; even our solution to the Zionist regime is a referendum.”

The following year, Ahmadinejad was asked by the *Associated Press* whether Iran “would ever make a first strike against Israel.” He replied, “Iran will not attack any country,” and insisted Iran has “always maintained a defensive policy, not an offensive one” and has no interest in territorial expansion, something Israel could never seriously claim.

In a 2008 *CNN* interview with Larry King, Ahmadinejad stated bluntly that “we don’t have a problem with the Jewish people,” and added, with specific reference to Israel, “We are opposed to the idea that the people who live there should be thrown into the sea or be burnt.”

The same year, at a news conference during the D8 Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Ahmadinejad told reporters that because he believes the Zionist enterprise of ethnic cleansing and colonization is “inherently doomed” to failure, “there is

no need for Iranians to take action” to hasten the inevitable political outcome in Palestine. He also assured the press, “You should not be concerned about a new war.”

He also made his position clear in an *NPR* interview, saying, “Let me create an analogy here, where exactly is the Soviet Union today? It did disappear, but exactly how? It was through the vote of its own people. So therefore in Palestine too we must allow the people, the Palestinians, to determine their own future.”

During an October 2011 interview, Ahmadinejad told *Al Jazeera* that Iran “will never enter any war against the U.S. or against any other country. This is our policy. ... We have never attacked anybody. Why should we do that? Why should we start a war?”

This past July, Mohammad Khazaei, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations said, “We will react if there is any provocative act from the other side. We will not initiate any provocative steps.”

Official assessments by both Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, Director of Defense Intelligence Agency, have affirmed that “Iran is unlikely to initiate or intentionally provoke a conflict or launch a preemptive attack.”

The alarmism that inevitably follows boilerplate speeches by Iranian officials serves an agenda of decontextualized demonization that paints the Islamic Republic as a genocidal, eliminationist aggressor and Israel as a victim, just one spinning centrifuge away from eradication. In fact, it is Israel that consistently threatens Iran with an illegal military assault, not the other way around.

But it is not a military attack that actually threatens the future of Israel, it is exactly the kind of struggle undertaken by those like Allen Boesak, who courageously stood against an unjust system of ethnocentrism and supremacy and prevailed.

Were Israel to finally respect international law, put an end to decades of racism, occupation and Apartheid, and begin to consider each and every human being as equal and worthy of the same human rights and dignity, freedom of movement and opportunity, it would no longer be subject to the harsh analogies that have for so long been directed at the most oppressive and inhumane ideologies the world has ever known.

Nima Shirazi is a political commentator from New York City. Visit his website at www.wideasleepinamerica.com . Follow him on Twitter [@WideAsleepNima](https://twitter.com/WideAsleepNima)

Recalling a Young American's Sacrifice

From the Archive: An Israeli court has ruled that Rachel Corrie “put herself in danger” and thus Israel bears no blame for the 23-year-old American being crushed by an Israeli bulldozer as it leveled Palestinian homes in Gaza in 2003. Last March, the ninth anniversary of her death, her parents recalled her sacrifice.

By Cindy and Craig Corrie (Originally published March 16, 2012)

It has been nine years since our daughter Rachel was crushed to death under an Israeli-driven, U.S.-funded-and-built Caterpillar D9 bulldozer in Gaza.

In March 2003, the news was full of talk of war with Iraq a preemptive war to protect the West, particularly the U.S. and Israel, from the weapons of mass destruction then alleged to have been amassed by Saddam Hussein.

When Rachel traveled to Gaza that year, the world was not watching. According to Human Rights Watch, from September 2000 until September 2004, 1,600 Palestinian homes in the city of Rafah were destroyed by the Israeli military as it occupied the Gaza Strip. One-tenth of the population lost their homes.

Rachel chose to be in Gaza when the ground attack against Iraq broke out. She feared an escalation of the violence and a tightening of the isolation against people there, as the world looked to the northeast and watched for the expected carnage in Iraq.

In 2003, Rachel wrote: “I went to a rally a few days ago in Khan Younis in solidarity with the people of Iraq. Many analogies were made about the continuing suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation and the upcoming occupation of Iraq by the United States not the war itself but the certain aftermath of the war.

“If people aren't already thinking about the consequences of this war for the people of the entire region then I hope they will start.”

Now, in 2012, we listen to similar news calls for bombing Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons. The preemptive war has already begun with the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists.

Our government tells us sanctions against Iran will pressure their government to abandon any program to develop these weapons, but experience tells us sanctions

only increase the defensiveness of repressive regimes and tighten their control over their populations.

The news from our politicians is discouraging and even frightening, but in the meeting places and streets in our communities, we are making the kind of change that Rachel envisioned.

It is happening in Olympia, Washington, with continuing support for the Olympia Food Co-op's boycott of Israeli products until the rights of Palestinians are addressed.

Throughout Puget Sound, we have successfully challenged efforts by the Israeli government to use members of the Israeli gay community to distract from the continuing oppression of Palestinian people.

Churches in our region are conversing about divestment from corporations like Caterpillar Inc. for their refusal to address their continuing participation in human rights abuses and the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

In 2002, Rachel wrote, "I think it's important for people who oppose war and repression to speak about who we are as a community in addition to speaking about war and racism and injustice. We are not outside. I think it's important that human rights and resistance to oppression be included in the way we define ourselves as a community."

As the threat of war with Iran, the disintegration of the situation in Afghanistan, and the bombing of Gaza continue, the work we are all doing in our hometowns at the grassroots level is powerful and critical.

Today, as we remember Rachel's stand nine years ago, we encourage our friends across the country and world to strengthen your own communities, educate, educate, educate, support each other in taking action, and walk with peace, love, and forgiveness in your hearts as you work for change.

Selling War as 'Smart Power'

The latest selling point for American warfare is "smart power" humanitarianism, dispatching the U.S. military to eliminate foreign leaders designated by pundits as evildoers taking lives and resisting freedom. Ex-FBI agent Coleen Rowley warns against this latest con.

By Coleen Rowley

In recent years, it has become evident that use of deadly force by a U.S.-dominated NATO is not only outside the parameters of international and constitutional law, but also in some cases outside basic legal principles that have stood the test of time for decades and even centuries. One explanation for why American civil society has not pushed back is the “better rhetoric” now being used to sell war.

What is this better rhetoric for the same U.S.-NATO war agenda, what was once blurted out by a U.S. officer in Vietnam as “it became necessary to destroy the town to save it”? Today’s proponents of “Smart Power” make their compelling case for more (endless) war by successfully urging us to “recast the fight against terror and nuclear proliferation from a dark, draining struggle into a *hopeful, progressive cause* aimed at securing an international system of liberal societies and defeating challenges to it.”

This message comes from seemingly reasonable men and women as they rotate through the revolving doors of official appointments, jobs at foreign-policy think tanks, and directorships of “human rights” organizations.

David Swanson, author of *War Is a Lie*, speaking at the 10th annual Peacestock gathering, sponsored by Veterans for Peace in Hager City, Wisconsin, this summer, commented on this new “progressive-led” war propaganda: “That wars must be marketed as humanitarian is a sign of progress. That we fall for it is a sign of embarrassing weakness. The war propagandist is the world’s second oldest profession, and the humanitarian lie is not entirely new. But it works in concert with other common war lies.”

Lies about war, in humanitarian disguise, were clearly evident in Chicago last March. Peace activist Ann Wright (a former Foreign Service State Department official and retired U.S. Army colonel); Ann Galloway, a member of Women Against Military Madness, and myself were among the thousands of antiwar activists who were in Chicago for the protest of NATO wars. There we noticed, in billboards and announcements, the new campaign of Amnesty International-USA: “Human Rights for Women and Girls in Afghanistan NATO: Keep the Progress Going.”

Unwilling to let this go unchallenged, we packed into a taxi along with a few other antiwar activists, to head to the Chicago hotel where AI-USA’s “Shadow Summit” was being held, a conference billed as a feminist cause regarding the supposed improved status of women and children under US-NATO occupation. The summit featured former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and other U.S. State Department officials and Council on Foreign Relations figures.

We weren’t allowed to carry in our “NATO bombs are not humanitarian,” “NATO Kills Girls,” and anti-drone bombing posters that we had with us for the protest

march later that day, but we did witness enough of the event to prompt Ann Wright and me to issue a warning about the exploitation of women's rights as a cover for war: "Amnesty's Shilling for US Wars."

The United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) later issued a Statement on NATO Claim of "Progress" for Women and Girls in Afghanistan, as well as a Statement Condemning Amnesty International USA's Campaigns in Support of U.S./NATO Wars. UNAC condemned Amnesty's pro-war stance and propaganda efforts supporting continued occupation in Afghanistan and intervention in Syria, and asked for Amnesty to reaffirm its commitment to human rights, not war, and remove those responsible for their current pro-war policies and campaigns.

A "Tool" of U.S. "Smart Power

Suzanne Nossel, the current executive director of Amnesty-USA, previously worked at different times as a State Department official for Richard Holbrooke and Hillary Clinton and is personally credited with having coined the term "Smart Power," which Clinton announced as the defining feature of current U.S. foreign policy. "Smart" indeed, certainly better-sounding, to project a contrast with the formerly unabashed Bush-Cheney reliance on "Hard Power."

"Smart power" employs "Soft Power:" diplomatic, economic, and cultural pressures, which can be combined with military force, to "work our will" upon foreign nations, as described by Nossel:

"To advance from a nuanced dissent to a compelling vision, progressive policymakers should turn to the great mainstay of twentieth-century U.S. foreign policy: liberal internationalism, which posits that a global system of stable liberal democracies would be less prone to war

"Washington, the theory goes, should thus offer assertive leadership, diplomatic, economic, **and not least, military** [writer's emphasis], to advance a broad array of goals: self-determination, human rights, free trade, the rule of law, economic development, and the quarantine and elimination of dictators and weapons of mass destruction (WMD)."

Even more relevant to the issue of human rights and peace and justice organizations being co-opted, however, Nossel also described Smart Power, in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, March/April 2004, as "knowing that the United States' own hand is not always its best tool: U.S. interests are furthered by enlisting others on behalf of U.S. goals."

The question that emerges is, how could otherwise highly effective human rights organizations, respected for their good work largely *because of their independence from* powerful, self-interested governments, so easily fall into

being used as tools of what Nossel once referred to as U.S. "Superpowerdom"? When Amnesty-USA invited Madeleine Albright and other State Department officials to speak at its NATO women's forum, it was not the first time it had reached out to the architect of harsh economic sanctions, such as the Clinton administration's sanctions against Iraq that were blamed for killing a half million Iraqi children.

Shortly after becoming executive director of AI-USA in January 2012, Suzanne Nossel moderated a panel at Wellesley College, during which she goaded fellow panelist Madeleine Albright to favor even more U.S. intervention:

"Now as the head of Amnesty International-USA, one point of great frustration and consternation for human rights organizations and civil society organizations over the last eight or nine months has been the failure of the UN Security Council to address, in any way, the deaths of now five thousand civilians in Syria at the hands of President Assad and his military.

"Last spring the Security Council managed to forge a majority for forceful action in Libya and it was initially very controversial, [causing] many misgivings among key Security Council members. But Gaddafi fell, there's been a transition there and I think one would have thought those misgivings would have died down. And yet we've seen just a continued impasse over Syria and a real, almost return to cold war days and paralysis in the Security Council.

"How do you explain that and what do you think is the missing ingredient to break that logjam and get the Security Council to live up to its responsibilities on Syria?"

Even the savvy Madeleine Albright seemed genuinely taken aback by the Amnesty director's push for a US-NATO Libya-like intervention in Syria. Albright and the other speaker responded skeptically as to what could be achieved through bombing or military force. What shouldn't have been surprising, however, was Nossel's minimalizing the thousands of NATO bombing sorties on Libya by calling them a "forceful action," and her urging a potential UN Security Council authorization to do the same to Syria, referring to this as "living up to its responsibilities."

She was already on record, in her prior think tank capacity, lamenting that failure in Iraq might mean Americans would lose their "*willingness to use military force* [writer's emphasis], Iraq as a failed state is likely to herald an era of deep reservations among the U.S. public regarding the use of force, a kind of post-Vietnam, post-Mogadishu hangover."

Little Skepticism

Sadly, Amnesty is far from being the only human rights or peace and justice organization being misled in varying degrees by the U.S. State Department's newly minted "Responsibility to Protect (R2P)" doctrine, otherwise known as "humanitarian intervention", and its newly created "Atrocity Prevention Board," chaired by Samantha Power, one of the main architects of U.S.-NATO's bombing of Libya.

Human Rights Watch, Physicians for Human Rights, the Peace Alliance, Citizens for Global Solutions, Think Progress, and AVAAZ are just some of the groups that seem to have swallowed that particular Kool-Aid.

This is not entirely new, as neo-con war hawks years ago co-opted the various big "liberal" think tanks: Brookings; the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Carnegie Endowment for Peace; etc. NATO war hawks also hijacked the Nobel Peace Prize decades ago.⁸

Jean Bricmont noted in his book, *Humanitarian Imperialism: Using Human Rights to Sell War*: "Since the end of the Cold War, the idea of human rights has been made into a justification for intervention by the world's leading economic and military powers, above all, the United States, in countries that are vulnerable to their attacks. The criteria for such intervention have become more arbitrary and self-serving, and their form more destructive, from Yugoslavia to Afghanistan to Iraq.

"Until the U.S. invasion of Iraq, [a] large part of the left was often complicit in this ideology of intervention, discovering new 'Hitlers' as the need arose, and denouncing antiwar arguments as appeasement on the model of Munich in 1938."

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In connection with his "groundbreaking critique of the troubling symbiosis between Washington and the human rights movement": *Ideal Illusions: How the U.S. Government Co-opted Human Rights* author James Peck stated: "The war in Libya today, and calls for intervening in Syria tomorrow, epitomize a tragic development in the human rights and humanitarian ethos: War and various other kinds of overt and covert intervention are being *re-legitimized* through Washington's human rights rhetoric.

"Libya tells us everything we should not be seeking to do in Syria and why humanitarian war is a monstrous illusion. The widespread support in the human rights community for all kinds of interference from 'democratization,' to 'nation-building' to promoting the 'rule of law' now risks blending into rationales for war itself.

"This is suggestive of nothing so much as a profound failure of the human rights

community to expose how and why the U.S. government has fashioned human rights for over four decades into a potent ideological weapon for purposes having little to do with the rights of others, and everything to do with furthering Washington's strategic objectives and global reach."

Veering (or Steering) to War

Jus ad bellum (the right to go to war) is concerned with Just War theory, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Treaty (outlawing war), the Nuremberg Principles (crimes against peace), and even, to some extent, the "Powell Doctrine" (evaluating reasons to go to war), but its main proposition has been forgotten or ignored, especially since 9/11.

Many Americans appear to have forgotten that, at a bare minimum, wars of aggression are the supreme crime because they give rise to blatant violations of the Geneva Convention and other international *jus in bello* crimes (committed while conducting war) such as spawning further wars, ethnic genocide, torture, human rights abuses, killing of prisoners, and targeting civilian populations.

U.S. violations of both types of international law of war, as well as violations of its own Constitution have, paradoxically, served to further erode whatever legitimate, pre-existing "Soft Power" it once possessed. America's "moral authority," its legitimate ability to educate, its leadership by example in pushing other countries to adhere to international law was quickly sacrificed by the deceitful means it used to launch the bombing of Iraq and Libya, as well as its institutionalizing an endless, ever-expansive "global war on terrorism."

If war is a lie generally, if institutional wars have historically been instigated, ratcheted up, waged, and later falsely ennobled through pretext and propaganda, if "Smart Power," "Responsibility to Protect" and "humanitarian intervention" serve as little but better rhetoric and therefore an effective guise to sell military force to American citizens as a "last resort," after having checked off diplomatic efforts (set up to fail) and harsh economic sanctions that starve civilians and kill children, doesn't it make sense for human rights and peace and justice groups to *renounce instead of embrace* attempts of powerful governments to use them as "tools" of such policies?

What would truly be smart and could reduce atrocities in the world would be for "nongovernmental" groups and organizations professing human rights and peace as their cause to regain their independence by disentangling themselves from U.S.-NATO governments' national interest agendas and reliance on military force. Once that's accomplished, it might be easier for civil society to reverse direction away from the use of war and might-makes-right to what is actually smarter: the power of ethical and legal norms.

Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI agent and former chief division counsel in Minneapolis. She's now a dedicated peace and justice activist and board member of the Women Against Military Madness. An earlier version of this article appeared in the August/September WAMM's newsletter.)

For more about Suzanne Nossel: Her other significant concerns were U.S. military morale; and that America's image as a "superpower" would be tarnished: "The combined impact of Iraq's emergence as a failed state on America's image, military, credibility influence in the Middle East, and on our battles against terrorism and WMD will be profound. In both bilateral and multilateral relations, most countries' dealings with the U.S. are predicated on the idea that we are capable of accomplishing whatever we set out to do. That notion is so well understood that we rarely have to prove it.

The prevalence of this belief has made it immeasurably easier to rally others behind our causes, thwart opposition and work our will. While failure in Iraq won't change that overnight, it will open a question about what superpowerdom means in an era of terrorism and insurgency." "Top 10 List: Consequences of Iraq Becoming a Failed State" by Suzanne Nossel

http://www.democracyarsenal.org/2005/08/top_10_list_10.html

Joe Emersberger in "Debating Amnesty About Syria and Double Standards" notes in his recent correspondence with Amnesty-USA: "Before being hired by Amnesty, Nossel supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq and even three years after the illegal invasion of Iraq led to hundreds of thousands of deaths, advised the U.S. government that the 'military option cannot be off the table' in dealing with another 'menacing state' namely Iran."

<http://zine.monthlyreview.org/2012/emersberger060712.html>

Philip Weiss writes: "Former State Department official Suzanne Nossel triangulates Hillary, Madeleine, Samantha, Susan Rice, and the Atrocity Prevention Board. See her 2007 blog on negotiations with Iran as a tactical necessity (the Dennis Ross view) i.e., we must go through the motions because we have to prove them futile before we do what needs to be done. It is strange and unfortunate that such a person now leads Amnesty International USA."

<http://mondoweiss.net/2012/06/amnesty-intl-collapsenew-head-is-former-state-dept-official-who-rationalized-iran-sanctions-gaza-onslaught.html>
