

Bringing Back Jim Crow

Exclusive: Many U.S. historians have soft spots for Thomas Jefferson, despite his gross hypocrisy on slavery, and for the Confederates and their supposed gallantry in their fight to preserve slavery. But apologizing for historical racists only invites more racism, warns Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As the United States edges toward a second Jim Crow era with right-wing whites seeking to “take our country back” via Supreme Court rulings and voter suppression against black and brown Americans there is an urgent need to reexamine U.S. history and remove the pro-racist distortions that have been implanted by white supremacists for more than two centuries.

If past indeed is prologue, then the United States must finally begin to get the facts straight and strip away the fawning mythology surrounding Thomas Jefferson and some of America’s other Founding slaveholders or risk reliving some of the vilest chapters of U.S. history.

I’m sure my experience with how U.S. history was taught was not unique. Though I grew up in Massachusetts, the home of the Civil War’s first African-American regiment, there was no escaping the racist viewpoints embedded in the history schoolbooks. They taught a national narrative of a past that was easy to celebrate but far from the truth.

Subtly and not so subtly, those history texts and many other popular historical accounts minimized the evils of slavery; apologized for the hypocrisy of Thomas Jefferson and other unrepentant slaveholders who spoke eloquently of “liberty”; viewed the Confederacy through the romantic haze of Southern chivalry and courage; treated Northern demands for black civil rights during Reconstruction as unreasonable if not crazy; disparaged President Ulysses S. Grant’s administration as corrupt for financial scandals rather than as heroic for defending freedom for African-Americans; and generally downplayed the suffering of blacks, Native Americans and other minorities in the later decades of the Nineteenth Century and the early Twentieth.

However, to evaluate today’s historic push from the Right to roll back voting rights for black, Hispanic and low-income people requires Americans understanding the real history. For many, that will require unlearning many pleasing myths and confronting some unpleasant realities.

Only then can Americans recognize the fork in the road that they now face, with

one direction leading toward a multicultural democracy reflecting the best principles of the Republic and the other, a U-turn back toward the nation's shameful days of racial repression and bigotry.

This demythologizing will not be easy for many Americans. It will force them to reexamine some of their favorite historical figures, the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, George Mason and James Madison. Though all were slaveholders, they have been made icons on the "libertarian Right," which never seems to be troubled by the contradiction between liberty and slavery.

Racial Code Words

The historical reassessment would also put into a different and far more negative light the claims about the value of "limited government," another favorite libertarian slogan and one that has served as code words, much like "states' rights," for the defense of slavery and segregation.

Even the phrase "Jeffersonian democracy" often used to suggest the highest ideal of popular government will have to be rethought, as just one more euphemism for a system based on the interests of slave-owning plantation owners, the real base for Jefferson's political movement.

Ironically, this reevaluation was provoked by the Right as it sought to cloak itself in the garb of the Revolutionary War era and to sell gullible Tea Partiers on a gross misreading of the Founding Era's history and the U.S. Constitution.

The Right sought to strengthen its claim to the Revolution's aura by sending "scholars" back in time to cherry-pick some quotes which were then disseminated by the Right's imposing propaganda machinery. The result was a "history" that served the current political needs of right-wing Republicans and libertarians, but wasn't real.

Yet, having spent millions of dollars on this historical propaganda and billions on its right-wing echo chamber, the Right insisted that it was speaking for the nation's First Principles. The Right's version of history held that the Framers of the Constitution intended to strictly "limit" the federal government and to create "sovereign" states.

According to this right-wing "scholarship," these principles were violated by activist presidents, including Franklin Roosevelt (with his Depression-era New Deal), Lyndon Johnson (with his civil rights laws and Great Society), and Barack Obama (with the Affordable Care Act and new Wall Street regulations).

Some prominent rightists, such as Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, even

pretend to intuit the Framers' "original" intent while striking strike down modern federal laws that deviate from the supposed Founding ideals. Some rightists argue to this day that Social Security and Medicare are "unconstitutional" (along with, of course, Obamacare).

For years now, the Right claimed to speak for the Framers with little challenge from the American Left, which generally views the authors of the Constitution with disdain for their aristocratic elitism and their compromises on slavery. Many mainstream historians also shied away from this debate presumably fearing that it might put tenure and reputations in jeopardy.

'Know Your History'

So, in this vacuum, an increasingly assertive Right began calling on Americans to "know your history." But an honest examination of that history reveals the Right's version to be thoroughly dishonest.

For instance, the Constitution's key Framers, including George Washington and James Madison, were determined to expand the power of the central government out of frustration with the states' rights-oriented Articles of Confederation. That was the document that made the states "sovereign" and "independent," language that was eliminated by the Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty to "We the People of the United States" and made federal law "supreme."

Rather than seeking to constrain the power of the central government as today's Right would have you believe the Constitution gave Congress indefinite and elastic powers to "promote the general Welfare." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Right's Made-up 'Constitution.'](#)"]

This transformation was well understood at the time. That is why the Constitution faced such fierce resistance from the so-called Anti-Federalists who recognized how much the Constitution would centralize government power. In the South, this opposition to ratification centered on the fears of slaveholders that inevitably the North would come to dominate the federal government and would outlaw the institution of slavery.

After the Constitution won ratification in 1788, the fight of the Southern slaveholders shifted to a political battle aimed at reinterpreting the Constitution as they wished it to be, not as it was written.

Thomas Jefferson, who returned from France in 1789, led this fight and eventually recruited his Virginia neighbor (and fellow slaveholder) Madison from the ranks of Washington's Federalists to the Jeffersonian movement, known as the Democratic-Republican Party. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Right's Dubious Claim to Madison.](#)"]

The Route to Civil War

Through bare-knuckled politics and sometimes below-the-belt propaganda, Jefferson's movement gained the upper hand during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century.

The so-called Virginia Dynasty 24 years of unbroken presidential rule by Virginians Jefferson, Madison and James Monroe oversaw the expansion of slavery to new states and territories to the west and concocted the unconstitutional notion of state "nullification" of federal law, setting the nation on course for the Civil War.

The Jeffersonian critique of the federal government's constitutional powers, of course, was not consistent. There was even hypocrisy within his hypocrisy.

While seeking to protect the institution of slavery from possible federal encroachment by repudiating the Federalist view of the Constitution's "elastic" powers Jefferson and Madison embraced the same concept when it suited their needs, Jefferson when he negotiated purchase of the Louisiana territories from France and Madison when he formed the Second Bank of the United States in order to strengthen the nation's credit and fund the U.S. military after it failed to protect the capital from British attack in 1814.

Over the next several decades, the battle against the Constitution's broad federal powers became the subtext for the South's growing defensiveness over the institution of slavery and the continuing fear that the North would ultimately grow powerful enough to force its abolition, a threat that became acute with Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860.

The secession of the 11 Confederate states became the ultimate expression of Jefferson's earlier political efforts to circumscribe the intent of the Constitution. In that sense, the Civil War and Lincoln's abolition of slavery represented the defeat of Thomas Jefferson as much as Confederate President Jefferson Davis. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Rethinking Thomas Jefferson](#)."]]

Enduring Legacies

However, the legacies of Thomas Jefferson and Jefferson Davis could not be so easily eradicated. After Robert E. Lee's surrender and Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, Southern white aristocrats were determined to reestablish their political clout and to prevent blacks from achieving full civil rights as citizens, including the right for black men to vote.

The struggle over Reconstruction is another chapter of U.S. history that has been badly taught in American schools. Even in my history books in

Massachusetts, the story was told in a sympathetic way toward the Southern whites whose rights were supposedly trampled on by a combination of ignorant blacks and Northern "carpetbaggers." President Andrew Johnson emerged as a victim unfairly impeached by Radical Republicans and saved from removal by one brave vote in the Senate.

By contrast, President Ulysses S. Grant was presented as largely a failure whose administration was defined by shameful corruption scandals. Getting short-shrift was Grant's role in enforcing civil rights for blacks as guaranteed in the Fourteenth Amendment and helping to enact the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting and gave Congress specific authority to enforce that right as required.

In support of a Radical Republican plan to restructure the South by purging its legacy of white supremacy, Grant stationed the U.S. Army in the South to combat the Ku Klux Klan and other white racist paramilitaries that were terrorizing blacks with acts of murder, rape and violent intimidation. Defiant ex-Confederates were determined to deny blacks full citizenship by any means necessary.

Jim Crow I

Despite the pro-civil rights efforts of President Grant and the Radical Republicans in Congress, the Democratic Party, which traced its lineage back to Jefferson, reclaimed political control in the South.

New state laws were passed restricting the rights of blacks and reasserting the notion of "states' rights." Then, as part of the settlement of the disputed election of 1876, which was awarded to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, Reconstruction was formally brought to an end.

The cruel era of Jim Crow had begun. Generations of African-Americans in the South and parts of the North would face brutality, lynching, segregation and second-class citizenship. Various tricks were employed to keep blacks from voting and to maintain white power.

In effect, the white racists never accepted that blacks and other non-whites deserved American citizenship, a position shared by Thomas Jefferson and his Virginian political allies. Again, the reassertion of Jefferson's interpretation of "states' rights" was at the center of Jim Crow.

It would not be until the 1950s and 1960s that a new civil rights movement would finally challenge white supremacy across the South. Then, the Republicans, many of whom had remained true to the heritage of Lincoln and Grant, were at the forefront of the struggle along with liberal Democrats who recognized the

justice of the civil rights cause.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren and President Dwight Eisenhower both Republicans played key roles in asserting federal authority in defense of Southern blacks, but Democratic leaders, including Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, pushed forward the most important civil rights legislation, including prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodations and in voting.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally gave teeth to the promise contained in Grant's Fifteenth Amendment. Recalcitrant Southern states and some districts in the North were required to submit electoral changes for pre-approval by the federal government, which could reject the revisions if they were regarded as discriminatory. Finally, the United States began to make real progress toward racial equality.

Modernizing Racism

However, the old racist legacy of Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson Davis and the Ku Klux Klan remained a potent political force. The white backlash against black civil rights snapped forward with Southern whites abandoning the Democratic Party in droves, lured by crypto-racist appeals from Republicans such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

Meanwhile, "states' rights" advocates began rebranding their neo-Confederate hostility toward blacks as hostility toward the federal government. Some adopted the guise of race-neutral "libertarianism."

This political realignment redefined from racial prejudice to an appeal for "small government" helped power conservative Republicans into the White House and eventually into control of Congress. That, in turn, produced a right-wing Supreme Court majority inculcated with the bogus Constitutional history that right-wing think tanks, like the right-wing Federalist Society, had made popular.

In another part of this repackaging of white racism into a "small government" philosophy, more and more right-wing groups abandoned the Confederate "Stars and Bars" battle flag in favor of Revolutionary War-era imagery, like the Tea Party's yellow banner of a coiled speaking snake warning "Don't Tread on Me," with the elected U.S. government standing in for the tyrannical British monarchy.

However, racism was never far beneath the surface as became apparent after the election of the first African-American president, Barack Obama, who personified the nation's demographic changes in which non-whites would soon become the

majority.

The old racist bigotry about “inferior” blacks being unqualified to be citizens reemerged in conspiracy theories about Obama being born in Kenya and thus supposedly disqualified to be President.

The Neo-Confederate Court

The Supreme Court’s right-wing majority also lent a hand on behalf of Republican political power and the need to suppress the votes of pro-Democratic constituencies, including blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and the poor.

With the *Citizens United* ruling in 2010, the five right-wing justices John Roberts, Anthony Kennedy, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito opened the floodgates to unlimited campaign spending by right-wing billionaires like the Koch Brothers.

Then, in June 2013, the same five justices gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act (which had been reauthorized in 2006) by removing the requirement that states and districts with a history of racial bias in voting needed to get pre-approval for electoral changes.

Despite the Fifteenth Amendment’s empowerment of Congress to enforce voting rights, the five justices decided that “states’ rights” trumped that clear-cut Constitutional authority. The heart of the Act was removed unless Congress devised a new formula, something that today’s right-wing Republicans will make sure won’t happen.

The winking and nodding between the rightists on the U.S. Supreme Court and those in Congress and in the states was reminiscent of the trickery that racist officials in the Jim Crow era devised to keep African-Americans from the polls.

Jim Crow II

Much as the *Citizens United* ruling brought a flood of secret money into the coffers of mostly Republican candidates, the Court’s voting rights ruling unleashed a rush of Southern states imposing new restrictions on voting, aimed at disqualifying or discouraging blacks and other minorities from casting ballots.

As the New York Times reported on July 6, “State officials across the South are aggressively moving ahead with new laws requiring voters to show photo identification at the polls after the Supreme Court decision striking down a portion of the Voting Rights Act.”

“The Republicans who control state legislatures throughout the region say such

laws are needed to prevent voter fraud. But such fraud is extremely rare, and Democrats are concerned that the proposed changes will make it harder for many poor voters and members of minorities, who tend to vote Democratic, to cast their ballots in states that once discriminated against black voters with poll taxes and literacy tests.

“Within hours [of the Supreme Court ruling], Texas officials said that they would begin enforcing a strict photo identification requirement for voters, which had been blocked by a federal court on the ground that it would disproportionately affect black and Hispanic voters.

“In Mississippi and Alabama, which had passed their own voter identification laws but had not received federal approval for them, state officials said that they were moving to begin enforcing the laws.

“The next flash point over voting laws will most likely be in North Carolina, where several voting bills had languished there this year as the Republicans who control the Legislature awaited the Supreme Court ruling on the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which had covered many counties in the state.

“After the ruling, some Republican lawmakers said that they would move to pass a bill requiring voters to present photo identification at the polls. And some Republicans there are considering cutting back on the number of early voting days in the state, which were especially popular among Democrats and black voters during the 2012 presidential election.

“The Republicans who control the state government in Texas passed what some called the strictest photo identification law in the country in 2011. A three-judge panel in Washington blocked the Texas law last year on the ground that it ‘imposes strict, unforgiving burdens on the poor, and racial minorities in Texas are disproportionately likely to live in poverty.’”

Immediately after the Court’s ruling, Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who has famously mused about the possibility of secession, declared that “Texas may now implement the will of the people without being subject to outdated and unnecessary oversight and the overreach of federal power.”

Luther Strange, Alabama’s state attorney general, hailed the Supreme Court for recognizing “that Alabama and other covered jurisdictions could not be treated unequally based on things that happened decades ago.”

But the reality is that Republican and Tea Party efforts to suppress the votes of pro-Democratic minority groups are not distant events recorded in grainy black-and-white news clips, but rather are now spreading beyond the South and the traditionally racist jurisdictions. Discriminatory voter ID laws have been

approved by Republican-controlled legislatures in Northern states, such as Ohio and Pennsylvania, too.

War on Democracy

Indeed, today's Republican Party appears determined to battle democracy whenever it means the GOP losing power. After the 2010 census, Republican-controlled state governments aggressively gerrymandered congressional districts to ensure a continued GOP majority in the House even though Republican candidates lost nationwide in 2012 by a collective one million ballots.

Since Election 2012, the Republicans have used this minority-majority status in the House to block President Obama's domestic agenda, including an immigration reform bill with a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who happen to be predominantly brown-skinned.

Meanwhile, the Republican minority in the Senate has deployed the filibuster at historically unprecedented rates to frustrate legislation and block President Obama's executive and judicial appointments.

In addition, the Right has used its well-financed media infrastructure to hype alleged "scandals" to further undermine public confidence in Obama and federal governance, much as the conservative newspapers of the 1870s used scandals to define and discredit President Grant and his efforts to enforce civil rights for Southern blacks.

Stepping back and taking a broad look at this right-wing campaign, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the goal is nothing short of a second Jim Crow era, in which white-dominated "anti-government" movements will seek to maintain their political clout through a combination of voting disenfranchisement, Republican obstructionism, right-wing rulings by the Supreme Court, and a well-financed propaganda machine.

Playing a crucial role in this sequel to one of America's ugliest chapters is the Right's bogus history of the United States, a distortion of reality that makes slavery, secession, segregation and racism look like a quaint, understandable, even slightly charming part of the nation's past.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Parsing the Lies of Statecraft

In the many grays of statecraft, there are many gradations in lying. Some lies have grave consequences, including war and loss of life, while artful wording sometimes can cool down a crisis and save lives. The differences are not insignificant, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Lying is generally taken to be a bad thing, especially when the term “lie” is applied explicitly to shortcomings in truthfulness, which comprise more than outright lies, but there are always exceptions. We all know this from our personal lives. “White lies” often are accepted as a way to preserve the innocence of a child, harmony in a relationship, or social lubricity.

Similar things can be said about politics and diplomacy. A couple of years ago John Mearsheimer wrote a useful short book titled *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics*. Mearsheimer’s focus was not so much the sort of self-serving and unreservedly condemnable mendacity in which political leaders sometimes indulge. Rather, it was the variety of lies that can serve legitimate purposes on behalf of a nation’s interests, even though those sorts of lies, as Mearsheimer explains, also have their downsides.

Unfortunately much public discourse that touches on anything in which there was something less than total truthfulness fails to make the sorts of careful distinctions that Mearsheimer does. Truth and falsity get treated in an oversimplified, one-size-fits-all way that raises dander needlessly about worthwhile statecraft while diluting the outrage that is more appropriately directed at truly damaging deceit.

One of the most common situations in international affairs in which less than complete truthfulness is a legitimate part of upholding the national interest involves not necessarily the telling of lies but rather simply not mentioning certain activities. The activities may be well-established instruments of statecraft but are not carried out in public and cause problems only when details about them become public. Such activities include, among many other things, the clandestine collection of information about foreign governments and their doings, an endeavor that has sometimes been referred to as the world’s second oldest profession.

A current example of misguided discourse about such things is much of what has

been said about secrets purloined by the leaker-cum-defector Edward Snowden. The details he and his collaborators revealed about information-gathering activities of the United States overseas have to do with what is part of a long-established means of informing and supporting U.S. foreign policy, is essentially identical to what most of the same foreign countries do to inform and support their own policies, is no surprise to the leaders of those countries, and is what U.S. citizens habitually expect their government to do more of, or to do more aggressively, whenever there is a publicized "failure" of the government to know of something going on abroad.

All of this is business as usual to the foreign governments as long as it is not publicized. It is only when publicity occurs that the leaders of those governments feel obligated to say they are shocked, shocked that such activities are going on and to make threats about slowing down trade talks or whatever. In short, there was no damage at all from the activities themselves. The damage has all come from the leaks.

Another subject of misdirected raised dander concerns what Mearsheimer calls "liberal lies," although that term may imply something narrower than what he is referring to. Basically this involves openly identifying, as the basis for one's policy decisions, motives and reasons that are so noble and pure they cannot be a target of international opposition and criticism. It also involves speaking publicly as if these are one's *only* motivations, while leaving unstated other, less internationally noble, factors that may have influenced the decision.

So one might speak publicly about democracy and human rights as motivators but say nothing about how management of a relationship with an authoritarian government was also a big part of the decision-making. Call this a lie if you wish, but it is a time-honored and very understandable way of pursuing one's own national interests, and of making public as well as private diplomacy serve those interests.

It is thus inappropriate to do what *Washington Post* fact-checker Glenn Kessler, who usually performs a useful service in exposing baloney, and is an equal-opportunity baloney-exposer, did in recently taking aim at a statement President Obama made about considerations that have shaped U.S. policy toward Egypt.

The President remarked during his African trip that U.S. decisions about assistance are based on whether the Egyptian regime is observing democracy and the rule of law. Kessler details how, given the Egyptian record over the last several years and the history of U.S. aid, these clearly are not the only considerations that have guided U.S. policy. His column is essentially a critique of U.S. policy toward Egypt, although like many other critiques, it

doesn't offer an alternative to what the current or past U.S. administrations have done, or show why any alternative would be better. And all of this isn't really "fact-checking."

Of course U.S. policy toward Egypt has been based on much more than just the extent to which whoever is in power in Egypt at the moment is respecting democracy and the rule of law. It also necessarily, and quite understandably from the standpoint of U.S. interests, has been based on such objectives as maintaining productive relations with the Egyptian military, which affects such things as U.S. access rights. But I would not expect the President to talk about such things at a news conference in Tanzania. In fact, we should consider it an inept performance if he did talk about such things.

(Moreover, to apply Kessler's usual nit-picking standards, the President did not assert that democracy and the rule of law were the only criteria in making U.S. aid decisions, and in that sense he did not tell a lie.)

As Mearsheimer's discussion indicates, any assessment of the pros and cons of even outright lies is apt to be complicated. Let me suggest a standard, however, for distinguishing those instances of untruthfulness that are worthy of our outrage from those that are not. Did the lie, or other shortcoming in truthfulness, distort public debate by leading people to believe what was false, and did this make an identifiable difference in the debate or the policy?

To take the subject of Kessler's column, have statements by the President or his administration led the public (at either home or abroad) to believe that U.S. policy toward Egypt has been governed solely by considerations of democracy and the rule of law? Has any such mistaken belief corrupted the public debate about policy toward Egypt? It would be implausible to answer yes to either question.

A contrasting example that also involves motivations for policies of the Obama administration toward North Africa concerns the military intervention in Libya. Administration statements fostered the belief that the purpose of the intervention was not regime change but instead to save innocent Libyans from a bloodbath. That mistaken belief took hold in some quarters, overseas as well as at home. The Russians certainly seem to believe they were misled. Understanding that is important in understanding the posture of Russia to later proposed interventions.

The most damaging example of this type concerns the untruthfulness associated with the launching of the Iraq War. Notwithstanding much of the subsequent talk about alleged lies by the Bush administration, the most flagrant lying was not contained within the substance of the administration's case for war but rather concerned explanations of the motivation and basis for launching the war.

When the White House spokesman said in 2007, “The President made the decision to remove Saddam Hussein for a number of reasons, mainly the National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq and Saddam Hussein’s own actions, and only after a thorough and lengthy assessment of all available information as well as Congressional authorization,” that was a bald-faced lie.

With no policy process at all leading to the decision to launch the war, there was nothing even remotely close to a “thorough and lengthy assessment,” and the referenced intelligence estimate did not even exist until well after the President had made his decision and even after the campaign to sell that decision to the public had moved into high gear. The resulting damage, on top of the damage of the war itself, has been that a continuing mistaken belief that bad intelligence about weapons drove the war has corrupted public discourse about how to prevent similar blunders in the future.

There is plenty of destructive untruthfulness out there. The damage can occur not just through direct lies but also through less direct techniques for imparting a mistaken belief. Let’s save our outrage for the genuinely damaging cases and not waste our energy on the diplomatic equivalent of white lies.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)

Obama Bows to Nuke Status Quo

President Obama has spoken brave words about breaking with the Cold War legacy of mutual assured destruction from nuclear weapons. But he has failed to challenge the national security state in implementing the change he espoused, as Lawrence S. Wittner says.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Nearly a quarter century after the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the U.S. government is still getting ready for nuclear war.

This fact was underscored on June 19, 2013, when the Pentagon, on behalf of President Barack Obama, released a report to Congress outlining what it called the U.S. government’s “Nuclear Employment Strategy.” Although the report indicated some minor alterations in U.S. policy, it exhibited far more

continuity than change.

In 2010, the administration's Nuclear Posture Review declared that it would work toward making deterrence of nuclear attack the "sole purpose" of U.S. nuclear weapons. The 2013 report, however, without any explanation, reported that "we cannot adopt such a policy today." Thus, as in the past, the U.S. government considers itself free to initiate a nuclear attack on other nations.

In addition, the 2013 "Nuclear Employment Strategy" continued U.S. government reliance on a "nuclear triad" of ground-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, and bomber-launched nuclear weapons. Although the need for one or more legs of this "triad" has been debated since the early 1990s, the 2013 report concluded that "retaining all three triad legs will best maintain strategic stability."

The 2013 "Nuclear Employment Strategy" also retained another controversial aspect of U.S. nuclear policy: counterforce strategy. Designed to employ U.S. nuclear weapons to destroy an enemy nation's nuclear weapons, delivery systems, and associated installations, counterforce is potentially very destabilizing, for it provides an incentive to nations caught up in a crisis to knock out the opponent's nuclear weapons before they can be used.

And this, in turn, means that nations are more likely to initiate nuclear war and to desire large numbers of nuclear weapons to avoid having their weapons totally destroyed by a preemptive attack. Consequently, as Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists has noted, the report's emphasis on counterforce "undercuts efforts to reduce the role and numbers of nuclear weapons."

Furthermore, despite a growing desire among Western nations to have the U.S. government remove an estimated 200 nuclear-armed B61 gravity bombs – weapons dating back to the 1960s – deployed in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey, the Pentagon report made no proposal along these lines. These Cold War relics, too, remain untouchable.

One shift in emphasis indicated in the "Nuclear Employment Strategy" is a presidential directive to Pentagon officials to "reduce the role of 'launch under attack.'" Currently, it is U.S. policy to fire nuclear weapons at an opponent on short notice if there are signs that a nuclear strike is under way against the United States or its allies. But this reduction in the likelihood of sliding into a full-scale nuclear war would be more reassuring if the President's directive did not also command the Pentagon to retain a launch-under-attack capability, in case the President decided to use it.

But what about Obama's lofty rhetoric of April 2009, in Prague, where he stated that the U.S. government was committed to building a nuclear-weapons-free world? Also, didn't he renew that approach in his Berlin speech of June 19, 2013, only hours before the issuance of the Pentagon's "Nuclear Employment Strategy," when he called for nuclear disarmament negotiations with the Russians?

Yes, the rhetoric of 2009 was very inspiring, landing Obama a Nobel Peace Prize and raising hopes around the world that the nuclear menace was on the verge of extinction. But fairly little came of it, with the modest exception of the New START Treaty with Russia.

The Berlin speech, too, was substantially over-rated. Although many media reports implied that Obama had proposed decreasing the Russian and American nuclear arsenals by a third, the reality was that the President suggested his readiness to support a reduction of "up to" a third of *deployed* Russian and American *strategic* nuclear weapons.

Under the New START Treaty, the limit to the number of these kinds of weapons in each nation is 1,550. Thus, in reality, Obama announced that he favored an agreement for each nation to eliminate 1 to 517 of them. From the standpoint of nuclear disarmers, that reduction would certainly be welcome – if, in the face of Republican resistance, it is ever consummated. But, it should be noted that, at present, the U.S. government possesses approximately 7,700 nuclear weapons.

Another indication that the Obama administration is in no hurry to fulfill its promises about building a nuclear weapons-free world is found in its fiscal 2014 budget proposal to Congress. Here, amid sharp cuts for a broad variety of programs, there is a proposed nine percent increase in federal funding for the Energy Department's U.S. nuclear weapons activities, including upgrading nuclear warheads (like the B61 gravity bomb, slated for a \$10 billion makeover) and modernizing nuclear weapons production facilities.

This administration unwillingness to discard the immensely dangerous, outdated nuclear policies of the past flies in the face of public support for abolishing nuclear weapons, whether expressed in public opinion polls or in the resolutions of mainstream bodies like the National Council of Churches and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. But, unless there is a substantial public mobilization to end the American government's reliance on nuclear war, it seems likely that U.S. officials will continue to prepare for it.

Lawrence Wittner (<http://lawrencswittner.com>), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany. His latest book is *What's Going On at UAardvark?* (Solidarity Press), a satirical novel about campus life.
