

A Cold War Bias Toward Russia

President Obama and the mainstream U.S. press are blaming Russian President Putin for the breakdown in bilateral relations, but this simplistic view ignores the many U.S. government actions over the past two decades that have offended Moscow, as ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman describes.

By Melvin A. Goodman

In canceling his summit meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin next month, President Barack Obama charged that the Russians have “slipped back into cold war thinking and a cold war mentality.” The mainstream media have picked up this theme and universally condemned recent Russian policies and pronouncements. Yet, there has been no discussion of U.S. missteps in dealing with Russia over the past two decades, particularly the actions of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

The mishandling of America’s “Russian problem” began with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. President George H.W. Bush had an excellent opportunity to “anchor” Russia to the Western security architecture, as George Kennan recommended in his containment doctrine of the 1940s, but instead Bush held President Boris Yeltsin’s Russia at arm’s length.

Bush and his national security adviser, General Brent Scowcroft, believed that it was premature to buy into any notion of a “strategic partnership” with a Russia that “maintained imperial impulses.” The Bush administration ignored the withdrawal of Russian forces from East Germany, Central Europe and the Baltics, and falsely accused Russia of encouraging an “ethnic explosion” in the Crimea. A major opportunity was lost to build on the arms control agreements of the 1970s and 1980s, and to exploit the opportunity for conflict resolution in the Third World.

President Bill Clinton left no legacy in foreign policy or national security policy, but managed to worsen Russian-American relations by expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in order to gain support from large East European immigrant populations in such key states as Michigan, Ohio and Illinois for the 1996 election.

Secretary of State James Baker had previously told his Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze, that the United States would not “leapfrog” over East Germany if Moscow withdrew its armed forces, but the introduction of the former East European states of the Warsaw Pact into NATO marked a repudiation of an important security commitment and a slap in the face to the Yeltsin government.

The most significant damage to the Russian-American relationship occurred during the administration of George W. Bush, whose international policies created the worst of all strategic worlds. In December 2001, President Bush announced U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which had been the cornerstone of strategic deterrence and the arms control regime for 30 years. To make matters worse, Bush withdrew from the ABM Treaty in order to deploy a national missile defense that doesn't work as well as a regional missile defense in East Europe, another perceived threat to Moscow.

Bush took NATO expansion to a new level by introducing former republics of the Soviet Union to the erstwhile anti-Russian alliance, including the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Bush's expansion of NATO, abrogation of the ABM Treaty, and deployment of national missile defense not only angered Russia (and China), but created diplomatic problems among key West European members of NATO that opposed all of these policies and had a radically different perception of the threat environment from that of the United States. These policies also forged a better relationship between Russia and China, which was not in the best interests of the United States.

Finally, the Obama administration promised a "reset" in relations with Russia, but did very little to institutionalize bilateral relations. On his visit to Poland in 2011, President Obama announced additional cooperative measures on regional missile defense in East Europe as well as a step to base U.S. fighter jets in Poland, clearly a "leapfrog" measure if there ever was one.

The United States also gratuitously sends naval warships into the Black Sea as part of annual joint military exercises with Ukraine, which is offensive to Russia. The USS *Monterey* is particularly objectionable to Russia because its capabilities represent the first part of a plan to create a European missile shield.

Finally, the Obama administration has not worked to end the Jackson-Vanik Bill that restricts trade with Russia, and it took two decades to gain Russian membership in the World Trade Organization.

President Obama's occasional boasts about the "indispensable" nation, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's pronouncements that the United States was "stronger than anyone, with more nuclear weapons than are needed many times over" did not help. Meanwhile, the West European members of NATO are far more open to conciliatory gestures toward Russia than the United States has been.

Certainly President Putin has contributed to the current deadlock in the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship, with his own streak of anti-Americanism and a ban on the adoption of Russian orphans by Americans. But both American and

Russian leaders have contributed to the downward spiral, and there is no indication that the Obama administration has a sophisticated national security team in place to reverse current trends.

Matters of mutual interest where there is mutual agreement such as strategic disarmament, stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and dealing with international terrorism remain on the back burner. Once again, Americans and Russians alike are being held hostage by the ineptitude of their leaders.

Melvin A. Goodman, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of the recently published *National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism* (City Lights Publishers) and the forthcoming *The Path to Dissent: The Story of a CIA Whistleblower* (City Lights Publisher). Goodman is a former CIA analyst and a professor of international relations at the National War College. [This article originally appeared at Counterpunch and is republished with the author's permission.]

How US Hubris Baited Afghan Trap

From the Archive: Even today more than two decades after the Soviet Union disappeared the Washington press corps views U.S.-Russian disputes through a one-way Cold War lens, with Moscow always at fault. But the reality is more complicated, as Robert Parry explained about Afghanistan in 2012.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on May 3, 2012)

President Barack Obama's decision to extend the U.S.-Afghan strategic relationship through 2024 was driven, in part, by one of Official Washington's most cherished myths that the United States abruptly abandoned Afghanistan in 1989 and must not make that mistake again.

This myth is repeated by policymakers and pundits alike. For instance, after Obama's decision, MSNBC's Chris Matthews asked if his guests had seen the movie, "Charlie Wilson's War." He apparently viewed the Tom Hanks film as a documentary when it was really a fictional account, both on the innocence of the Afghan mujahedeen and the callowness of Congress in supposedly pulling the plug once the Soviet Army withdrew.

But Matthews is far from alone in believing this mythology. The New York Times'

lead editorial the next day criticized Obama for not explaining how he would prevent Afghanistan from imploding after the scheduled U.S. troop withdrawal in 2014, though the Times added that the plan's "longer-term commitment [of aid] sends an important message to Afghans that Washington will not abandon them as it did after the Soviets were driven out."

The abandonment myth also has been cited by senior Obama administration officials, including Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, as a way to explain the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s and al-Qaeda's use of Afghanistan for plotting the 9/11 attacks on the United States in 2001.

In late 2009, Defense Secretary Gates reprised the phony conventional wisdom, telling reporters: "We will not repeat the mistakes of 1989, when we abandoned the country only to see it descend into civil war and into Taliban hands."

Yet, Gates knew the real history since he was deputy national security adviser in 1989 when the key decisions were made to continue covert U.S. aid, not cut it off. Still, the fictional version from the movie, "Charlie Wilson's War," apparently proved too tempting to Gates as an excuse for an open-ended occupation of Afghanistan.

In the movie, Tom Hanks played the late Rep. Charlie Wilson, D-Texas, who was a key figure in financing the mujahedeen war against the Soviets in the 1980s. In one scene after the Soviet withdrawal on Feb. 15, 1989 Hanks begs a congressional committee for additional money but gets turned down.

The truth, however, is that the end game in Afghanistan surrounding the Soviet departure was messed up not because the United States cut the mujahedeen off but because Washington pressed for a clear-cut victory, rebuffing peaceful options.

And we know that Gates knows this reality because he recounted it in his 1996 memoir, *From the Shadows*.

The Real History

Here's what that history actually shows: In 1988, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev promised to remove Soviet troops from Afghanistan and sought a negotiated settlement. He hoped for a unity government that would include elements of Najibullah's Soviet-backed regime in Kabul and the CIA-backed Islamic fundamentalist rebels.

Gates, who was then deputy CIA director, opposed Gorbachev's plan, disbelieving that the Soviets would really depart and insisting that if they did the CIA's mujahedeen could quickly defeat Najibullah's army.

Inside the Reagan administration, Gates's judgment was opposed by State Department analysts who foresaw a drawn-out struggle. Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead and the department's intelligence chief Morton Abramowitz warned that Najibullah's army might hold on longer than the CIA expected.

But Gates prevailed in the policy debates, pushing the CIA's faith in its mujahedeen clients and expecting a rapid Najibullah collapse if the Soviets left. In the memoir, Gates recalled briefing Secretary of State George Shultz and his senior aides on the CIA's predictions prior to Shultz flying to Moscow in February 1988.

"I told them that most [CIA] analysts did not believe Najibullah's government could last without active Soviet military support," wrote Gates.

After the Soviets did withdraw in February 1989 proving Gates wrong on that point some U.S. officials felt Washington's geostrategic aims had been achieved and a move toward peace was in order. There also was mounting concern about the Afghan mujahedeen, especially their tendencies toward brutality, heroin trafficking and fundamentalist religious policies.

However, the new administration of George H.W. Bush with Gates moving from the CIA to the White House as deputy national security adviser rebuffed Gorbachev and chose to continue U.S. covert support for the mujahedeen, aid which was being funneled primarily through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the ISI.

Back in Afghanistan, Najibullah's regime defied the CIA's expectation of a rapid collapse, using Soviet weapons and advisers to beat back a mujahedeen offensive in 1990. As Najibullah hung on, the war, the violence and the disorder continued.

Gates finally recognized that his CIA analysis had been wrong. In his memoir, he wrote: "As it turned out, Whitehead and Abramowitz were right" in their warning that Najibullah's regime might not fall quickly. Gates's memoir also acknowledged that the U.S. government did *not* abandon Afghanistan immediately after the Soviet departure.

"Najibullah would remain in power for another three years [after the Soviet pull-out], as the United States and the USSR continued to aid their respective sides," Gates wrote. Indeed, Moscow's and Washington's supplies continued to flow until several months after the Soviet Union collapsed in summer 1991, according to Gates.

"On Dec. 11, 1991, both Moscow and Washington cut off all assistance, and Najibullah's government fell four months later," Gates wrote. "He had outlasted

both Gorbachev and the Soviet Union itself.” In other words, Gates confirmed that covert U.S. military support to the Afghan rebels continued for almost three years after the Soviet Army left Afghanistan.

Criles’s Account

And other U.S. assistance may have continued even longer, according to George Criles’s 2003 book, *Charlie Wilson’s War*, upon which the movie was loosely based. In the book, Crile described how Wilson kept the funding spigot open for the Afghan rebels not only after the Soviet departure in 1989 but even after the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.

In the later years of the conflict, there was also much wider knowledge about the brutality and corruption of the mujahedeen, Crile noted, though few in Washington dared speak about the dark side of these supposed “freedom-fighters.”

Crile wrote: “Throughout the war, Wilson had always told his colleagues that Afghanistan was the one morally unambiguous cause that the United States had supported since World War II and never once had any member of Congress stood up to protest or question the vast expenditures.

“But with the departure of the Soviets, the war was anything but morally unambiguous. By 1990, the Afghan freedom fighters had suddenly and frighteningly gone back to form, reemerging as nothing more than feuding warlords obsessed with settling generations-old scores.

“The difference was that they were now armed with hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of weapons and explosives of every conceivable type. The justification for the huge CIA operation had been to halt Soviet aggression, not to take sides in a tribal war certainly not to transform the killing capacity of those warriors.”

Crile reported that at the end of that year, Wilson traveled to Moscow and listened to appeals for a settlement of the long-running conflict from Andre Koserov, a future Russian foreign minister. Koserov told Wilson that Moscow and Washington had a common interest in preventing the emergence of radical Islamic control of Afghanistan.

Upon returning to Washington, however, Wilson’s openness to Moscow’s overtures brought a stern rebuke from his hard-line friends in the CIA who wanted to see a clear-cut victory of the CIA-backed mujahedeen over the Soviet clients in Kabul.

“It was sad to see how quickly Wilson’s effort at statesmanship collapsed,” Crile reported. “He found that it wasn’t easy to stop what he had started.”

So, Wilson flipped back to the side of his old allies in the CIA and the Saudi royal family, which was matching the CIA's huge contributions dollar for dollar.

"In the second year after the Soviet withdrawal, Wilson delivered another \$250 million for the CIA to keep its Afghan program intact," Crile wrote. "With Saudi matching funds, the mujahedeen would receive another half billion dollars to wage war. The expectation was that they would join forces for a final push to throw out the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime, restore order, and begin the process of rebuilding."

Afghan Slaughters

However, Najibullah's forces continued to hold out and the mujahedeen broke down into internal bickering. They also showed their level of respect for human rights by slaughtering enemy prisoners.

Eventually, the mujahedeen did capture the strategic city of Khost, but turned it into a ghost town as civilians fled or faced the mujahedeen's fundamentalist fury. Western aid workers found themselves "following the liberators in a desperate attempt to persuade them not to murder and pillage," Crile wrote.

U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley began to wonder who were the worse bad guys, the Soviet-backed communists or the U.S.-supported mujahedeen.

"It was the leaders of the Afghan puppet government who were saying all the right things, even paying lip service to democratic change," Crile reported. "The mujahideen, on the other hand, were committing unspeakable atrocities and couldn't even put aside their bickering and murderous thoughts long enough to capture Kabul."

In 1991, as the Soviet Union careened toward its final crackup, George H.W. Bush's administration had so many doubts about the nature of its erstwhile Afghan allies that it made no new request for money, and the Senate Intelligence Committee approved nothing for Afghanistan, Crile wrote.

"But no one could just turn off Charlie Wilson's war like that," Crile noted. "For Charlie Wilson, there was something fundamentally wrong with his war ending then and there. He didn't like the idea of the United States going out with a whimper."

Wilson made an impassioned appeal to the House Intelligence Committee and carried the day. The committee first considered a \$100 million annual appropriation, but Wilson got them to boost it to \$200 million, which with the Saudi matching funds totaled \$400 million, Crile reported.

“And so, as the mujahideen were poised for their thirteenth year of war, instead of being cut off, it turned out to be a banner year,” Crile wrote. “They found themselves with not only a \$400 million budget but also with a cornucopia of new weaponry sources that opened up when the United States decided to send the Iraqi weapons captured during the Gulf War to the mujahideen.”

But even then the Afghan rebels needed an external event to prevail on the battlefield, the stunning disintegration of the Soviet Union in the latter half of 1991. Only then did Moscow cut off its aid to Najibullah. His government finally fell in 1992. But its collapse didn't stop the war or the mujahideen infighting.

The capital of Kabul came under the control of a relatively moderate rebel force led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, an Islamist but not a fanatic. However, Massoud, a Tajik, was not favored by Pakistan's ISI, which backed more extreme Pashtun elements of the mujahideen.

Rival Afghan warlords battled with each other for another four years destroying much of Kabul. Finally, a disgusted Washington began to turn away. Crile reported that the Cross Border Humanitarian Aid Program, which was the only sustained U.S. program aimed at rebuilding Afghanistan, was cut off at the end of 1993, almost five years after the Soviets left.

Rise of the Taliban

While chaos continued to reign across Afghanistan, the ISI readied its own army of Islamic extremists drawn from Pashtun refugee camps inside Pakistan. This group, known as the Taliban, entered Afghanistan with the promise of restoring order.

The Taliban seized the capital of Kabul in September 1996, driving Massoud into a northward retreat. The ousted communist leader Najibullah, who had stayed in Kabul, sought shelter in the United Nations compound, but was captured. The Taliban tortured, castrated and killed him, his mutilated body hung from a light pole.

The triumphant Taliban imposed harsh Islamic law on Afghanistan. Their rule was especially cruel to women who had made gains toward equal rights under the communists, but were forced by the Taliban to live under highly restrictive rules, to cover themselves when in public, and to forgo schooling.

The Taliban also granted refuge to Saudi exile Osama bin Laden, who had fought with the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets in the 1980s. Bin Laden then used Afghanistan as the base of operations for his terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, setting the stage for the next Afghan War in 2001.

So, the real history is quite different and much more complex than the Hollywood version that Official Washington has embraced as its short-hand understanding of what happened after the Soviet Army withdrew in 1989.

One lesson that could come from the actual history is the futility of trying to impose a Western or military solution on Afghanistan and the value of negotiations even when dealing with unsavory foes.

If Gates had indeed been the “wise man” that he is now purported to be, he would have urged Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush to work with Soviet President Gorbachev on a compromise that might have involved a power-sharing arrangement, rather than to insist on total victory for the CIA-backed mujahedeen.

One also might conclude that it was not the mythical “abandonment” of Afghanistan in February 1989 that wrought the devastation of the past two decades, but rather the triumphalism of Gates and other war hawks who insisted on rubbing Moscow’s nose in its Afghan defeat rather than cooperating on a negotiated settlement.

That hubris set the stage for the 9/11 attacks, the subsequent Afghan War, America’s disastrous detour into Iraq and what now looks to be an even costlier commitment to Afghanistan, making the remote country a money pit that could drain the U.S. Treasury for another dozen years.

At minimum, Official Washington might want to get the history straight.

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](#).

Scoring Points Over a Terror Threat

Though it’s summer, Official Washington’s factionalism never takes a vacation. The neocons are in workaholic mode, claiming the precautionary closure of some U.S. embassies proves al-Qaeda remains a major threat, despite the fact that no terror attack has actually happened, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar observes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Lots of people have been extracting and propounding lots of conclusions about terrorism and counterterrorism from the warnings and closures of diplomatic missions the past few days. That's probably inevitable; the story commands attention. It's not every day, or even every year, that several U.S. embassies get closed like this, perhaps for as much as a week.

But the factual basis for most of the extracting and propounding is exceedingly thin. All that those of us outside the government have to go on are a few backgrounded or leaked morsels, as well as cautiously worded official statements and the public comments of members of Congress who have been briefed on the matter. The episode is another instance, which has been seen repeatedly before, of over-interpretation of terrorist incidents or other scattered data points having to do with international terrorism.

Let us review some of the principal ways in which commentary stimulated by this latest episode has gone way beyond the publicly available evidence.

The topic addressed most often in the commentary is the overall magnitude of the threat from international terrorism, or more specifically from whatever goes under the label al-Qaeda. One hears comments such as, "Didn't the President say just a couple of months ago that al-Qaeda is washed up? Then why are we seeing such a big deal threat now?"

Actually, President Barack Obama did not say anything like that, although he did make a very sensible speech explaining why we need to get away from a boundless "war on terror." Regardless of what he or anyone else has offered in the way of an overall appraisal of the continuing threat from al-Qaeda or international terrorism generally, the news of the past few days provides barely any basis for appraising the appraisals.

What we are seeing this week is a response to information that evidently was at least somewhat stronger than the stuff that government counterterrorist analysts routinely see every week, with respect to the likelihood and imminence of a planned terrorist attack. It is a tactical response to tactical information. This is very different from the strategic question of the overall threat that al-Qaeda or anyone else is posing these days.

Plans for individual attacks come and go, but that does not mean that a correct strategic assessment of the threat gyrates up and down as they do. Nor does it gyrate up and down as intelligence services happen to succeed or not succeed in collecting information about individual terrorist plots. We simply do not have any significant new basis for saying that terrorism ought to rank higher among

national security concerns this week than it should have last week, last month, or last year.

A related topic concerns the relationship between the core and the periphery in the radical Sunni conglomeration called al-Qaeda. Reportedly a key piece of information underlying the embassy closures was a message from Ayman al-Zawahiri to the head of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula "ordering" an attack. But what may look like an order, and what the person issuing it would prefer to sound like an order, may actually be more of an exhortation.

In the current case there is good reason to believe it was more of an exhortation. What has been publicly revealed about the material captured at Abbottabad, Pakistan, in the raid that killed Osama bin Laden demonstrated that during at least the last couple of years of bin Laden's life he was doing much exhorting but commanded little and thus wasn't in a position to order many people to do anything.

Zawahiri is unlikely to have established command relationships that bin Laden did not have. The events of this week are not grounds for revising the judgment that the core al-Qaeda group is a shadow of its former self and that most of the initiative in the movement for terrorist operations is coming from associated groups on the periphery.

In the wake of controversy over NSA collection programs, another reaction we hear to the story this week is that if such terrorist communications are still being collected then there must not have been much damage from Edward Snowden's revelations. Saying that makes about as much sense as saying that the fact you did not get lung cancer this month means the advice you got last month to stop smoking was unsound. That something does not destroy everything does not mean it does not damage anything.

In any event, no one in officialdom has given any indication that the particular NSA programs that are the subject of controversy had anything to do with information collected about the current threat.

Other commentary has focused on the theme that closing the embassies was an overreaction. Maybe it was, and indeed much of the story of America's reaction to terrorism, especially during the past 12 years, has been one of overreaction. But how can any of us not privy to the classified information, and therefore not in a position to compare an evaluated threat against the costs of the response, make that sort of judgment about the particular case at hand at the moment?

A related observation we have heard, from those skeptical about the seriousness of this week's reported threat, is that the threat is being hyped and the

embassies being closed as a way of obtaining political cover, whether it is NSA trying to prove its usefulness, the Obama administration not wanting to have another Benghazi, or even congressional Republicans supporting the administration's response because they know that to do otherwise would look inconsistent with their continuing to harp about Benghazi.

Aspects of this observation may be true, too, in the sense that the domestic political context always has much to do with the responses and policies. But just as paranoids can have real enemies, this observation about politically inspired posturing doesn't say anything one way or another about the extent of whatever actual threat exists beyond U.S. borders.

This gets to a current running underneath all of these comments and observations, which is that they say at least as much about our own psychology, expectations and politics as they do about anything that terrorists are doing in the Middle East or elsewhere. What is to be considered a serious threat, or what should be termed an overreaction, is a function not only of terrorists' operations but of our own relative priorities and weighing of values, costs and risks.

And if there is defensive political posturing going on, it can be traced chiefly to the zero tolerance standard that the American public has applied to terrorist attacks.

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.)

Would Jesus Drop the Nagasaki Bomb?

The second and hopefully last nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, on Aug. 9, 1945. Among the bitter ironies of that day, the U.S. plane was flown by an all-Christian crew that picked for its target the landmark of a Christian church that had survived Japanese persecution, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Sixty-eight years ago, at 11:02 a.m., Aug. 9, 1945, an all-Christian bomber crew dropped a plutonium bomb, on Nagasaki, Japan. That bomb was the second and last atomic weapon that had as its target a civilian city. Somewhat ironically,

Nagasaki was the most Christian city in Japan and "ground zero" was the largest cathedral in the Far East.

These Christian airmen did their job efficiently, and they accomplished the mission with military pride. There was no way that the crew could not have known that what they were participating in met the definition of an international war crime (according to the Nuremberg Principles that were very soon to be used to justify the execution of many German Nazis).

It had been only three days since the Aug. 6 bomb, a uranium bomb, had decimated Hiroshima. The Nagasaki bomb was dropped amidst considerable chaos and confusion in Tokyo, where the fascist military government had been searching for months for a way to honorably end the war.

The only obstacle to surrender had been the Roosevelt/Truman administration's insistence on unconditional surrender, which meant that the Emperor Hirohito, whom the Japanese regarded as a deity, would be removed from his figurehead position in Japan an intolerable demand for the Japanese and one that kept Japan from surrendering months earlier.

The Russian army had declared war against Japan on Aug. 8, hoping to regain territories lost to Japan in the disastrous Russo-Japanese war 40 years earlier, and Stalin's army was advancing across Manchuria. Russia's entry into the war represented a powerful incentive for Japan to end the war quickly and they much preferred surrendering to the U.S. rather than to the Soviet Union.

A quick end to the war was important to the U.S. as well. It did not want to divide any of the spoils of war with its erstwhile Soviet allies.

The Target Committee in Washington, D.C. had made a list of relatively undamaged Japanese cities that were to be excluded from the conventional fire-bombing (using napalm) campaigns that had burned to the ground 60-plus major Japanese cities during the first half of 1945. That list of protected cities included, at one time or another Hiroshima, Niigata, Kokura, Kyoto and Nagasaki. These relatively undamaged cities were off-limits from incendiary terror bombings but were to be preserved as possible targets for the new "gimmick" weapons of mass destruction.

Scientific curiosity was a motivation in choosing the targeted cities. The military and the scientists needed to know what would happen to intact buildings and their living inhabitants when atomic weapons were exploded overhead. Ironically, prior to Aug. 6 and 9, the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki considered themselves lucky for not having been bombed as much as other cities. Little did they know.

Early in the morning of Aug. 9, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress, which had been christened Bock's Car, took off from Tinian Island in the South Pacific, with the prayers and blessings of its Lutheran and Catholic chaplains. It headed for Kokura, the primary target. Bock's Car's plutonium bomb was in the bomb bay, code-named "Fat Man," after Winston Churchill.

The only field test (blasphemously code-named "Trinity") of a nuclear weapon had occurred just three weeks earlier (July 16, 1945) at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The molten lava rock that resulted from the heat of that blast (twice the temperature of the sun) can still be found at the site today. It is called trinitite.

Japan's War Council

The reality of what had happened at Hiroshima was only slowly becoming apparent to the fascist military leaders in Tokyo. It took two to three days after Hiroshima was incinerated before Japan's Supreme War Council was able to even partially comprehend what had happened there, to make rational decisions and to discuss again the possibility of surrender.

But it was already too late, because by the time the War Council was meeting that morning in Tokyo, Bock's Car and the rest of the armada of B-29s was already approaching Japan – under radio silence. The dropping of the second bomb had initially been planned for Aug. 11, but bad weather had been forecast and the mission was moved up to Aug. 9.

With instructions to drop the bomb only on visual sighting, Bock's Car arrived at the primary target, but Kokura was clouded over. So after futilely circling over the city three times, there was no break in the clouds, and, running seriously low on fuel in the process, the plane headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki.

Nagasaki is famous in the history of Japanese Christianity. Not only was it the site of the largest catholic church in the Far East, St. Mary's Cathedral (completed in 1917), but it also had the largest concentration of baptized Christians in all of Japan. It was the megachurch of its time, with 12,000 baptized members.

Nagasaki was the location where the legendary Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, established a mission church in 1549. The Christian community survived and prospered for several generations.

However, soon after Xavier's planting of the church in Japan, it became obvious to the Japanese rulers that Portuguese and Spanish commercial interests were exploiting Japan, and it didn't take too long for all Europeans to be expelled

from the country as well as their foreign religion. All aspects of Christianity, including the new Japanese converts, became the target of brutal persecutions.

By 1600, being a Christian was a capital crime in Japan. The Japanese Christians who refused to recant of their new religion suffered torture and even crucifixions similar to the Roman persecutions in the first three centuries of Christianity. After the reign of terror was over, it appeared to all observers that Japanese Christianity was extinct.

However, 250 years later, in the 1850s, after the coercive gunboat diplomacy of Commodore Perry forced open an offshore island for American trade purposes, it was discovered that there were thousands of baptized Christians in Nagasaki, living their faith in a catacomb existence, completely unknown to the government – which immediately started another purge.

But because of international pressure, the persecutions were soon stopped, and Nagasaki Christianity came up from the underground. And by 1917, with no help from the government, the growing Japanese Christian community had built the massive Urakami Cathedral, in the Urakami River district of Nagasaki.

Now it turned out, in the mystery of good and evil, that the massive cathedral was one of two Nagasaki landmarks that the Bock's Car bombardier had been briefed on, and looking through his bomb site 31,000 feet overhead, he identified the cathedral through a break in the clouds and ordered the drop.

At 11:02 a.m., during morning mass, Nagasaki Christianity was boiled, evaporated and carbonized in a scorching, satanic, radioactive fireball that exploded 500 meters above the cathedral. As it turned out, "ground zero" for "Fat Man" was the surviving center of Japanese Christianity which had survived two centuries of persecution.

Nagasaki Christian Death Count

Since the Cathedral was the epicenter of the blast, most Nagasaki Christians did not survive. Six thousand of them died instantly, including all who were at confession that morning. Of the 12,000 church members, 8,500 died as a direct result of the bomb.

Three orders of nuns and a Christian girl's school disappeared into black smoke or chunks of charred remains. Tens of thousands of innocent Shinto and Buddhist Japanese also died instantly and hundreds of thousands were mortally wounded, some of whose progeny are still in the process of slowly dying from the trans-generational malignancies and immune deficiencies caused by the deadly plutonium.

What the Japanese Imperial government could not do in over 200 years of persecution, destroy Japanese Christianity, American Christians did in nine seconds. Even today those who are members of Christian churches in Japan represent a fraction of 1 percent of the population, and the average attendance at Christian worship services is 30. Surely the decimation of Nagasaki at the end of the war crippled what at one time was a thriving church.

The hidden history of Nagasaki Christianity and its devastation on Aug. 9, 1945, should stimulate discussion and perhaps repentance among those who profess to be followers of the nonviolent Jesus and who stay silent about or support American militarism.

Father George Zabelka, the Catholic chaplain for the 509th Composite Group (the 1,500-man Army Air Force group whose only mission was to drop the atomic bombs on their mainly civilian targets) was one of the few Christian leaders who came to recognize the contradictions between what his modern church had taught him about war and what the early church taught about violence, i.e., that violence was forbidden to those who wished to follow Jesus.

Several decades after he was discharged from the military chaplaincy, Father Zabelka finally concluded that both he and his church had made serious theological errors in religiously legitimating the organized mass slaughter that is modern air war. He came to see that the enemies of his nation were not, according to New Testament ethics, the enemies of God, but rather they were actually fellow children of a merciful God that are to be loved and not killed.

Father Zabelka's conversion away from the standardized violence-tolerant Constantinian Christianity turned his ministry around 180 degrees. His new understanding of the truth of gospel nonviolence inspired him to devote the remaining decades of his life to speaking out against violence in all its forms, especially the violence of militarism and war. On the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki, he went to the city to tearfully ask for forgiveness for his part in the crime.

Likewise, the Lutheran chaplain, William Downey (formerly of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota), in his counseling of soldiers who had become troubled by their participation in making murder for the state, later denounced all killing, whether by a single bullet or by weapons of mass destruction.

A Religion That Has Blessed War

In Daniel Hallock's important book, *Hell, Healing and Resistance*, the author talks about a 1997 Buddhist retreat led by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh

that attempted to deal with the hellish post-war existence of combat-traumatized Vietnam War veterans.

Hallock wrote, "Clearly, Buddhism offers something that cannot be found in institutional Christianity. But then why should veterans (*who largely have abandoned the faiths of their childhoods*) embrace a religion that has blessed the wars that ruined their souls? It is no wonder they turn to a gentle Buddhist monk to hear what are, in large part, the truths of Christ."

As a cradle Christian who tried hard to follow the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount, I was stung by Hallock's comment, but it was the wake-up sting of a sad and sobering truth that made me try and, so far, apparently fail to raise the consciousness of professed Christians to the truth of gospel nonviolence by being part of an effort called Every Church A Peace Church.

Another motivating factor for me in alerting readers to this important censored-out history is that, as a physician who has dealt with many psychologically traumatized patients (including traumatized combat veterans), I know for certain that violence, in its myriad forms, can irretrievably bruise the human body, mind and spirit

I have learned that psychological, physical, sexual and spiritual trauma, neglect, isolation, brain-altering psychotropic drugs and brain malnutrition can cause neurological damage that can mimic any number of so-called mental illnesses. These traumas are deadly and even contagious. I have seen violence and the resultant traumatic illnesses spread through families even involving the third and fourth generations following the initial victims and perpetrators, just like the progeny of the atomic bomb victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the hibakusha.

The cycle of contagious illnesses will continue until the military and domestic violence that fuels America's current mental ill health epidemics is stopped. One of the most difficult "mental illnesses" to treat is combat-induced posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In its most virulent form combat-induced PTSD may be incurable because it likely represents significant neurological/brain damage.

PTSD is also a serious spiritual problem for any church that fails to teach its young people about the gruesome realities of the satanic war zones that threaten their souls. Years ago I read a Veteran's Administration study that showed that, whereas most Vietnam War-era recruits came from churches where they actively practiced their faith, if they came home with PTSD, the percentage returning to the faith community approached zero. Daniel Hallock's premise above holds.

Therefore the church is inadvertently promoting anti-Christic homicidal violence (which contradicts gospel themes) by not teaching what Jesus taught about violence and how he lived his life. Therefore, refraining from warning their young members about combat-induced PTSD is directly undermining the “retention” portion of recruitment and retention campaigns that many churches embrace.

Hopefully this essay will promote honest discussions (at least among the followers of Jesus) about the ethics of patriotically making murder for the state. The church, of course, should reject the seemingly persuasive arguments that come from the perspective of national security agencies, the military-industrial complex or from the perspective of pre-Christian eye-for-an-eye retaliation thinking that Jesus pointedly rejected.

Rather it should be obvious that, for such discussions, the church needs to adopt the perspective of the Sermon on the Mount, the core ethical teachings of Jesus (found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 and Luke 6).

What can be done to prevent the next Nagasaki?

The next Nagasaki can be prevented if Christian church leadership will courageously heed Jesus’s call to reject violence in all its forms by learning and practicing active nonviolence, according to the strategies of Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and by refusing to cooperate with their government’s legal right to conscript their church’s sons and daughters into the military and teach them, by coercive methods and psychological rape, the art of homicide that will surely poison their souls.

Gary G. Kohls, MD, is a founding member of Every Church A Peace Church (www.ecapc.org) and is a member of a local non-denominational affiliate of ECAPC, the Community of the Third Way.
