

The Fragile Process for Engaging Iran

The diplomatic fracas over inviting and disinviting Iran to the Syrian peace talks only makes sense if you factor in President Obama's fragile consensus for engaging Iran over its nuclear program while influential neocons keep pressing for confrontation. That mix has made for a messy process on Syria, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The handling of the issue of Iranian participation in the next round of multilateral discussions on the civil war in Syria has been something of an embarrassment, certainly for the United States, the United Nations, and the conglomeration known as the Syrian opposition.

The United States has seemed to be more interested in words rather than in substance in the demands it has been placing on Iran. It finally got its way by strong-arming U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon into withdrawing an invitation he had already extended (while the Iranians simultaneously said they are not interested in participating on the basis of the terms being demanded of them).

If this whole episode foreshadows how the conference that this is supposed to be all about is apt to go, the odds of success now appear even longer than they did before.

The U.S. opposition to Iranian participation defies a basic principle of how inclusiveness is related to prospects for success in such multinational endeavors. Or as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who has been made to sound like one of the more reasonable people in this affair, put it, "Negotiations involve sitting at the table not just with those you like, but with those whose participation the solution depends on."

If we suspect someone we don't like of causing later trouble, the chance of such trouble-making does not lessen by keeping that someone outside the collective diplomatic tent rather than inside it; the opposite is more likely to be true.

The conference is not going to operate according to some voting system in which each possibly contrary vote we can exclude makes it more likely we will get our way. Positive results will require something more like a consensus. If Iran, or anyone else, were to stand in the way of consensus an appropriate response would be at that point to call them to account publicly.

An air of unreality surrounds what has supposedly been the central substantive issue involved: getting "mutual consent" among all involved, including the

current Syrian regime, on installation of a new transitional government for Syria. The principal factor that makes that seem unreal is that the Assad regime has not been losing the war lately. That makes the necessary squaring-the-circle trick of getting this regime to negotiate its own demise all the harder to accomplish, if it wasn't already impossibly hard.

Another factor is the question, which has been increasingly acknowledged of late, of whether the regime's demise would be all that desirable anyway, given the nature of the fractious and extremist-infested opposition.

The episode has exhibited the general tendency, which appears on other issues as well, to worst-case what Iran might be up to. Why would the Iranians be more likely to get in the way of negotiating the Syrian regime out of existence than the Syrian regime itself would be?

A useful bit of background to remember is that the odd-couple alliance between Iran and Syria began as a response to both being rivals of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, which is no longer a factor. Yes, there are some other commonalities, such as economic ties and the relationships of each with Lebanese Hezbollah, but if Assad were on shaky enough ground to make an Assad-less transitional government a reality, his regime would be as much of a liability as an asset to Tehran.

It is hardly surprising that Iran would balk at the sort of conditions being imposed on it to participate in Geneva II. The Iranians are being called on to declare full allegiance to the outcome of an earlier conference from which they were pointedly excluded. Who else would be willing to do that? And if Iran's assistance to one side in the Syrian civil war is some kind of disqualifier, it is hard to explain why similar conditions are not applied to those who have stoked the war by supplying lethal assistance to the other side.

We are seeing another instance of the urge to isolate and ostracize Iran at every opportunity. Perhaps the Obama administration's going along with that urge is related to the need to keep on track the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program.

Part of the strategy of bolstering domestic support for those negotiations and to fend off accusations that the administration is being too accommodating toward Tehran is to show toughness toward it on other fronts. That may be a wise approach, given that there is a better opportunity to advance U.S. interests substantially with an Iranian nuclear deal than there appears to be in any management of the Syrian civil war. But in the meantime the resulting diplomacy is not pretty.

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.)

Big-Power Foot-Dragging on Nukes

Most recent talk about nukes has focused on Iran, which doesn't have one – and is accepting new constraints to show it won't build one. But there's been a long-delayed debate on a 44-year-old commitment by existing nuclear states to get rid of theirs, as Lawrence S. Wittner reports.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

It's heartening to see that an agreement has been reached to ensure that Iran honors its commitment, made when it signed the 1970 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to forgo developing nuclear weapons.

But what about the other key part of the NPT, [Article VI](#), which commits nuclear-armed nations to “cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament,” as well as to “a treaty on general and complete disarmament”? Here we find that, 44 years after the NPT went into force, the United States and other nuclear powers continue to pursue their nuclear weapons buildups, with no end in sight.

On Jan. 8, U.S. Defense Secretary [Chuck Hagel](#) announced what Reuters termed “ambitious plans to upgrade [U.S.] nuclear weapons systems by modernizing weapons and building new submarines, missiles and bombers to deliver them.” The Pentagon intends to build a dozen new ballistic missile submarines, a new fleet of long-range nuclear bombers, and new intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated in late December that implementing the plans would cost \$355 billion over the next decade, while an analysis by the independent Center for Nonproliferation Studies reported that this upgrade of U.S. nuclear forces would cost [\\$1 trillion](#) over the next 30 years. If the higher estimate proves correct, the submarines alone would cost over \$29 billion each.

Of course, the United States already has a massive nuclear weapons capability – approximately [7,700 nuclear weapons](#), with more than enough explosive power to destroy the world. Together with Russia, it possesses about 95 percent of the more than 17,000 nuclear weapons that comprise the global nuclear arsenal.

Nor is the United States the only nation with grand nuclear ambitions. Although China currently has “only” about 250 nuclear weapons, including 75 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), it recently flight-tested a hypersonic nuclear missile delivery vehicle capable of penetrating any existing defense system. The weapon, dubbed the Wu-14 by U.S. officials, was detected flying at ten times the speed of sound during a test flight over China during early January 2014. According to Chinese scientists, their government had put an “enormous investment” into the project, with more than a hundred teams from leading research institutes and universities working on it.

Professor Wang Yuhui, a researcher on hypersonic flight control at Nanjing University, stated that “many more tests will be carried out” to solve the remaining technical problems. “It’s just the beginning.” Ni Lexiong, a Shanghai-based naval expert, commented approvingly that “missiles will play a dominant role in warfare, and China has a very clear idea of what is important.”

Other nations are engaged in this arms race, as well. Russia, the other dominant nuclear power, seems determined to keep pace with the United States through modernization of its nuclear forces. The development of new, updated Russian ICBMs is proceeding rapidly, while new nuclear submarines are already being produced. Also, the Russian government has started work on a new strategic bomber, known as the PAK DA, which reportedly will become operational in 2025.

Both Russia and India are known to be working on their own versions of a hypersonic nuclear missile carrier. But, thus far, these two nuclear nations lag behind the United States and China in its development. Israel is also proceeding with modernization of its nuclear weapons, and apparently played the key role in scuttling the proposed U.N. conference on a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East in 2012.

This nuclear weapons buildup certainly contradicts the official rhetoric. On April 5, 2009, in his first major foreign policy address, President Barack Obama proclaimed “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” That fall, the UN Security Council – including Russia, China, Britain, France and the United States, all of them nuclear powers – unanimously passed Resolution 1887, which reiterated the point that the NPT required the “disarmament of countries currently possessing nuclear weapons.” But rhetoric, it seems, is one thing and action quite another.

Thus, although the Iranian government’s willingness to forgo the development of nuclear weapons is cause for encouragement, the failure of the nuclear nations to fulfill their own NPT obligations is appalling. Given these nations’ enhanced preparations for nuclear war – a war that would be nothing short of catastrophic – their evasion of responsibility should be condemned by everyone

seeking a safer, saner world.

Lawrence Wittner (<http://lawrenceswittner.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.

The Mistaken Guns of Last August

Exclusive: After hundreds of Syrians died from Sarin gas last summer, Secretary of State Kerry insisted the U.S. had solid intelligence on the locations of the Syrian government's launch sites used in the attack, thus justifying a U.S. military retaliation which was only narrowly averted. Now, those U.S. government's claims have collapsed, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Secretary of State John Kerry misled the American people last summer when he assured them that the U.S. government knew for a fact that the Syrian government was responsible for the Aug. 21 Sarin gas attack outside Damascus, an incident that killed several hundred people and nearly prompted a U.S. military assault.

A new report by two American weapons specialists, entitled "[Possible Implications of Faulty US Technical Intelligence in the Damascus Nerve Agent Attack](#)," makes clear that the case presented by Kerry and the Obama administration was scientifically impossible because the range of the key rocket carrying Sarin was less than a third of what the U.S. government was claiming.

The two rocket specialists Richard Lloyd, a former United Nations weapons inspector who is now associated with Tesla Laboratories, and Theodore A. Postol, professor of science, technology and national security policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology concluded that the rocket's limited range meant that it couldn't have come from Syrian government-controlled areas as delineated by a map released by the Obama administration last August.

Yet, in a State Department [speech](#) on Aug. 30, Kerry declared – with what can now be called false confidence – that the U.S. government knew that the attack was launched by the Syrian government from its territory. He also implied inaccurately that the U.S. intelligence community was in accord with these claims, and he dissembled when he asserted that the Obama administration had declassified evidence to let the public make up its own mind. No such evidence was ever released.

With the U.S. military poised to bombard Syrian government targets, Kerry declared, "Our intelligence community has carefully reviewed and re-reviewed information regarding this attack and I will tell you it has done so more than mindful of the Iraq experience. We will not repeat that moment. Accordingly, we have taken unprecedented steps to declassify and make facts available to people who can judge for themselves."

However, while Kerry made reference to alleged phone intercepts and other alleged evidence of Syrian government guilt, none of it was ever released for independent analysis. Instead, the U.S. government put out a map showing where rockets carrying nerve gas supposedly had landed in parts of Damascus controlled by the rebels and contending that the launch sites had been in government-controlled areas.

"We know where the rockets were launched from and at what time," Kerry said. "We know where they landed and when. We know rockets came only from regime-controlled areas and went only to opposition-controlled or contested neighborhoods."

Kerry also hyped the emotional case for war by presenting claims about casualty totals that now appear to have been wildly exaggerated and based on more dubious intelligence.

"The United States government now knows that at least 1,429 Syrians were killed in this attack, including at least 426 children," Kerry said, citing a number that the Wall Street Journal later reported was derived from applying facial recognition software to videos of bodies posted on YouTube by the Syrian opposition and then subtracting bodies in bloody shrouds. This bizarre methodology produced the number 1,429, which was about four times higher than numbers provided by doctors on the scene.

But Kerry pitched the story to the American people as lacking any doubt regarding the guilt of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. "This is what Assad did to his own people," Kerry declared. Then, in what was clearly a call to war, Kerry added, "So now that we know what we know, the question we must all be asking is: What will we do?"

Though President Barack Obama avoided some of the specific falsehoods contained in Kerry's Aug. 30 speech, he pronounced the same conclusion about the attack coming from a government-controlled area and mocked skeptics of his administration's case as essentially irrational.

"The evidence is overwhelming that the Assad regime used such weapons on August 21st," Obama said during his Sept. 24, 2013 [speech](#) to the UN General Assembly.

“These rockets were fired from a regime-controlled neighborhood, and landed in opposition neighborhoods. It’s an insult to human reason – and to the legitimacy of this institution – to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack.”

The Crucial Maps

It was this proclaimed certainty from Kerry and the White House that persuaded some Americans, especially those in Official Washington, that the Assad regime was responsible for the Sarin gas attack. Other possibilities, such as an intentional provocation by radical Islamist rebels or a tragic accident, were shunted outside the borders of respectable debate.

The conventional wisdom was solidified in September when Human Rights Watch, which had been advocating for U.S. military intervention in Syria, and the New York Times produced another map supposedly tracing the flight paths of two rockets recovered by UN inspectors back to alleged launch sites, 9.5 kilometers away at a Syrian military base.

But holes in that analysis quickly appeared – at least at a few Internet sites – since only one of the rockets was found to contain Sarin and the other rocket not only was clean of chemical weapons but also clipped a building in its descent making any precise calculation of its point of origin impossible.

The HRW/NYT “vector analysis” ultimately collapsed when independent analyses were performed on the one recovered rocket that did carry Sarin and had landed east of Damascus in the Zamalka neighborhood. Munitions experts calculated that its range was probably about two kilometers, not even a third of the distance needed to have originated at the Syrian military base northwest of Damascus.

In the latest analysis dated Jan. 14, rocket specialists Lloyd and Postol concluded that the rocket also could not have come from anywhere in what the Obama administration’s original map had delineated as regime-controlled areas. The scientists noted that an independent UN assessment reached the same conclusion on the missile’s range.

“This indicates that these munitions could not possibly have been fired at east Ghouta (the suburb that includes Zamalka) from the ‘heart,’ or from the eastern edge, of the Syrian government controlled area shown in the (U.S.) intelligence map published by the White House on August 30, 2013.”

Lloyd and Postol then noted the serious policy implications of their findings: “This mistaken intelligence could have led to an unjustified US military action based on false intelligence. Whatever the reasons for the egregious errors in the intelligence, the source of these errors needs to be explained. If the

source of these errors is not identified, the procedures that led to this intelligence failure will go uncorrected, and the chances of a future policy disaster will grow with certainty.”

Failed Checks and Balances

Yet, also troubling was how Official Washington, including the mainstream news media, again rushed to judgment on an issue of war or peace without responsibly and skeptically assessing the government’s evidence.

While Kerry and Obama in speeches on Syria both referenced the painful experience of the Iraq War launched in 2003 based on bogus intelligence about Iraqi WMD and Saddam Hussein’s ties to al-Qaeda the only lesson that Kerry and Obama seemed to have learned was to withhold as much of the supposed “evidence” as possible from the public.

Instead of actually declassifying evidence and making it available so people could judge for themselves, the administration released a “Government Assessment,” which contained not a shred of proof regarding the Syrian government’s guilt that could be independently reviewed by the public. Kerry also left the misleading impression that there was a consensus in the U.S. intelligence community regarding Syrian government guilt.

But I was told that a number of U.S. analysts held strong doubts about who was responsible, which was why the Obama administration didn’t release a National Intelligence Estimate, which would have listed various dissents. Rather, the White House put out what amounted to a “white paper” filled with assertions but lacking any actual evidence and concealing the degree of disagreement among U.S. intelligence analysts.

Now, it turns out that Kerry and Obama were simply wrong in their certitude about where the Sarin-laden rocket originated, since the missile lacked the range to fly from government-controlled areas to the impact site in Zamalka.

There is the other unsettling reality that a decade after the Iraq War when the New York Times and other major publications published false stories about Iraq’s WMD Official Washington’s institutional checks and balances again failed to expose the government lies and distortions on Syria in a timely fashion.

Indeed, a prominent non-governmental organization (Human Rights Watch) and a leading news outlet (the New York Times) compounded the Obama administration’s deceptions by extrapolating on the false information and thus solidifying a misguided conventional wisdom. Skepticism about the U.S. government’s claims regarding the Syrian Sarin attack was largely marginalized to Internet sites, such as WhoGhouta and our own Consortiumnews.com.

More than three months after nearly contributing to another U.S. military strike based on false intelligence, the New York Times grudgingly admitted its error albeit buried 18 paragraphs into an inside-the-paper story (compared to the front-page treatment of its high-profile allegation of the Syrian government's guilt).

The only positives from this Syria replay of the Iraq lies are that the conflict-weary American people were not stampeded into another rush to war; some in Congress did voice restraint rather than bombast, although some of the Republican criticism may have come from their knee-jerk partisan reaction to oppose whatever President Obama was proposing; and ultimately Obama did seek a diplomatic solution in which the Russian government brokered a deal in which Assad agreed to surrender his chemical weapons (while still denying responsibility for the Aug. 21 attack).

Yet, if Secretary Kerry and other war hawks in the Obama administration had had their way, the United States would have launched military attacks on another Mideast country based on what now appears to have been false intelligence, if not outright lies.

[For more details on this issue, see Consortiumnews.com's "NYT Replays Its Iraq Fiasco in Syria." For our early reporting on the Syrian chemical weapons attack, see: "A Dodgy Dossier on Syrian War"; "Murky Clues From UN's Syria Report"; "Obama Still Withholds Syria Evidence"; "How US Pressure Bends UN Agencies"; "Fixing Intel Around the Syria Policy."]

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.

The Battle over Dr. King's Message

Martin Luther King Day is a rare moment in American life when people reflect even if only briefly on the ideals that guided Dr. King's life and led to his death. Thus, the struggle over King's message can be intense, pitting a bland conventional view against a more radical call for profound change, as Brian J. Trautman writes.

By Brian J. Trautman

Most Americans know Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as one of the Twentieth Century's most revered voices for racial equality, the charismatic leader of the American Civil Rights movement, who gave the famous "*I Have A Dream*" speech at the Lincoln Memorial. Perhaps they even know a thing or two about his role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Birmingham Campaign.

This knowledge, by and large, derives from compulsory education and mainstream media. It is significantly less likely, however, that very many Americans know much at all, if anything, about King's radical and controversial activities related to the issues of poverty and militarism, particularly the latter.

King highlighted three primary forms of violence, oppression and injustice in American society and across the world: poverty, racism and militarism. He referred to these as the "triple evils," and considered them to be interrelated problems, existing in a vicious and intractable cycle, and standing as formidable barriers to achieving the Beloved Community, a brotherly society built upon and nurtured by love, nonviolence, peace and justice. King posited that when we resisted any one evil, we in turn weakened all evils, but that a measurable and lasting impact would require us to address all three.

King's work to educate about and eradicate poverty was among his greatest passions. In "*The Octopus of Poverty*," a statement appearing in *The Mennonite* in 1965, King observed, "There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it." Accordingly, "the time has come for an all-out world war against poverty."

He strongly believed "the rich nations," namely the United States, had a moral responsibility to care for its most vulnerable populations, noting that such "nations must use their vast resources of wealth to develop the underdeveloped, school the unschooled, and feed the unfed." King held, "ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation," and maintained that "no individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for 'the least of these.'"

In late 1967, King announced the Poor People's Campaign, an innovative effort designed to educate Americans on poverty issues and recruit both poor people and antipoverty activists for nonviolent social change. The priority of the project was to march on, and to occupy, if you will, Washington and to demand the Congress pass meaningful legislation to improve the social and economic status of the poor, through directed measures such as jobs, unemployment insurance, health care, decent homes, a fair minimum wage, and education.

Alas, Dr. King was assassinated only weeks before the actual march took place.

And while the march went ahead as planned in May of 1968, it is thought that the lack of substantive change to result was due in large part to King's absence. Still, a positive outcome of the initiative was a heightened public awareness of the nation's growing poor population.

Perhaps most controversial were King's positions on militarism and U.S. foreign policy. In *"Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?"* published in 1967, King said of war and its consequences: "A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war- 'This way of settling differences is not just.' This way of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped, psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love." He cautioned that "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

King's most pointed speech against militarism was *"Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,"* delivered at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, a year to the day before he was assassinated. While King's popularity among political allies and his inner circle was already beginning to wane because of his increasing public criticism of U.S. foreign policy and the growing war in Vietnam, the *Beyond Vietnam* speech was to become his most public dissent of the war to date, a war still largely unopposed by the majority.

To speak out in opposition to the war, he acknowledged, was personally necessitated, asserting, "because my conscience leaves me no other choice." With such a call to conscience, "a time comes when silence is betrayal." And in the present day, argued King, "that time has come for us in relation to Vietnam."

In the speech King calls the United States "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" and questions why money is being spent to wage war on foreign lands against foreign people while the war on poverty at home was being neglected, financially and otherwise. The major media of the time denounced the speech and King lost a great deal of support among his colleagues and the American people for it.

We owe it ourselves and our children and grandchildren, as well as our communities and nation to learn and teach about and take up King's efforts focused not only on ending racism but all three of the evils against which he untiringly stood. Only then will we find ourselves closer to achieving King's dream of the Beloved Community.

A small but important step toward this goal is to volunteer, as my family and I

do, with a charitable and progressive cause on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, a national day of service.

Brian J. Trautman writes for [PeaceVoice](#), is a military veteran, an instructor of peace studies at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and a peace activist. On Twitter @TrautBri.

MLK's Warning of America's Spiritual Death

At the dawn of the last year of his life, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. broke with many political allies by warning that the Vietnam War and the militarism that surrounded it were inflicting a "spiritual death" on America, an impassioned speech that cast King outside mainstream opinion circles which considered his advice naive if not irresponsible, as Gary G. Kohls recalls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Riverside Church speech was titled "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." It was delivered exactly one year before his April, 4, 1968 assassination in Memphis. In the speech, King declared, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

The people who heard that speech recognized it as one of the most powerful speeches ever given articulating the immorality of the Vietnam War and its destructive impact on social progress in the United States. In explaining his decision to follow his conscience and speak out against U.S. militarism, King said:

"I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such."

But King went farther, diagnosing the broader disease of militarism and violence that was endangering the soul of the United States. King said, "I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government."

Poisoning America's Soul

King knew very well that the disease of violence was killing off more than social progress in America. Violence was sickening the nation's soul as well. He added "If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read 'Vietnam'." King urged his fellow citizens to take up the causes of the world's oppressed, rather than taking the side of the oppressors. He said:

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

"We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world a world that borders on our doors.

"If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight."

King pointed to an alternate path into the future: "Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter but beautiful struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard?"

Signing His Own Death Warrant

By denouncing so forcefully the war crimes that the U.S. military was committing daily in the killing fields of Vietnam, some of King's followers understood that he had just signed his own death warrant. But King, being a person of conscience, was compelled to express his deep sense of moral outrage over the horrific maiming, suffering and dying of millions of innocent Vietnamese civilians in that unjust war that afflicted mostly unarmed women and children and that was going to leave behind lethal poisons in the soil, water and unborn babies that would last for generations.

He knew that non-combatants are always the major victims of modern warfare,

especially wars that indiscriminately used highly lethal weapons that rained down from the air, especially the U.S. Air Force's favorite weapon, napalm – the flaming, jellied gasoline that burned the flesh off of whatever part of the burning adult or child it splashed onto.

King also connected the racist acts (of American soldiers joyfully killing dispensable non-white “gooks” and “slants” – often shooting at “anything that moves”) on the battlefields of Southeast Asia to the oppression, impoverishment, imprisoning and lynching of dispensable, deprived non-white “niggers” in America.

King saw the connections between the violence of racism and the violence of poverty. He saw that the withholding of economic and educational opportunities came from the fear of “the other” and the perceived need to protect the white culture's wealth and privilege with violence if necessary.

King knew, too, that fortunes are made in every war, and the war in Vietnam was no exception. In his speeches, he talked about that unwelcome reality that the ruling class preferred not be discussed. That meant his well-attended Riverside Church speech threatened not only the powerful interests already arrayed against his civil rights struggle but also the interests of the war profiteers and the national security establishment.

War is Good Business

The longer the Vietnam War lasted, the more the weapons manufacturers thrived. With their huge profits, there was a strong incentive for these financial elites to continue the carnage. And therefore the Wall Street war profiteers financed, out of their ill-gotten gains, battalions of industry lobbyists and pro-military propagandists who descended upon Washington, DC, and the Pentagon to claim even more tax dollars for weapons research, development and manufacture.

With that funding secured, armies of desperate jobs-seekers were hired to work in thousands of weapons factories that were strategically placed in congressional districts almost everywhere, with weapons research grants likewise being awarded to virtually every university in the nation. Thus, weapons-manufacturing and R&D soon became vitally important for almost every legislator's home district economy as well as for the household budgets of millions of American voters who indirectly benefitted from the U.S. military's killing, maiming, displacement, starvation and suffering of non-white people in war zones.

King's anti-war stance was based on his Christianity and on the ethics and life of Jesus, but it was also based on his standing as a revered international peace

and justice icon. Those factors made him a dangerous threat to the military/industrial/congressional/security complex.

The powerful forces that were working hard to discredit King had already infiltrated the civil rights movement. Their efforts, cunningly led by the proto-fascist and racist J. Edgar Hoover and his obedient FBI, accelerated after the Riverside speech. The FBI ramped up the smear campaigns against King. Eventually he was "neutralized" with a bullet to the head. [The case for believing that King's murder was not simply the act of lone gunman James Earl Ray is laid out in many studies, including attorney William F. Pepper's *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King.*]

King's Prophetic Vision

Now, almost five decades after his anti-war speech (which was widely kept from the public), it is clear how prophetic King's observations were. America is indeed losing its soul. Violence, racism, militarism and economic oppression are still American epidemics.

Both upper- and middle-class investors of get-rich-quick schemes in America have succumbed to predatory lenders, cannibalistic corporate mergers and acquisitions, psychopathic multinational corporate schemers, corrupt crony capitalists, and the rapist/exploiters of the land and water by extractive industries all schemes that will eventually burst as part of predictable economic bubbles.

Those busted bubbles regularly wipe out investors (except for the large, deep-pocketed "insiders" who, usually being forewarned, will have sold their holdings just in time, before the publicly revealed "bust"), leaving the taxpayers to bail out the financial messes that were created by the so-called "invisible hand of the market" but are really caused by the cunning work of corporate gamblers.

King was trying to warn us not just about the oncoming epidemic of violence toward victims at home but also about the tens of millions of people around the world who were and are still being victimized by U.S. military misadventures. King was also warning us about the multinational corporate war profiteers whose interests are facilitated and protected by the U.S. military whether they are operating in Asia, Latin America, Africa or the Middle East.

The Pentagon budget averages well over \$700 billion per year, including wars that are often illegal and unconstitutional. That amounts to \$2 billion per day with no visible return on investment, except for the military contractors, the oil industries and Wall Street financiers.

Vast sums also are needed to address the physical and mental health costs needed

for the palliative care for the permanently maimed and psychologically-traumatized veterans. Hundreds of millions of dollars more are spent paying down the interest payments on past military debts.

All those potentially bankrupting costs represent money that will never be available for programs of social uplift like combatting racism, poverty and hunger, or paying for affordable housing/healthcare, universal education or meaningful job creation. Can anyone else hear a demonic laugh reverberating down Wall Street?

King was warning America about its oncoming spiritual death if it didn't convert itself away from military violence. But most observers of the U.S. see America still worshipping at the altars of the Gods of War and Greed. Our children may be doomed.

The vast majority of American Christian churches (whether fundamentalist, conservative, moderate or liberal, with very few exceptions) have failed King's vision, despite the lip service they sometimes give to King on MLK Day. Churches whose members were brought up on the Myth of American Exceptionalism (and the myth of being "God's chosen people") consistently refuse to take a stand against the satanic nature of war.

Past the Point of No Return?

If America is to avert future financial and military catastrophes, King's central warnings about the "triple evils" of militarism, racism and economic oppression must be heeded. That means a retreat from worldwide network of budget-busting military bases. And, if America wants to shed the justified label of "Rogue Nation," the covert killing operations of its secret black ops mercenary military units all around the world must be stopped, as should the infamous extrajudicial assassinations by America's unmanned drones.

If King's 47-year-old warning continues to be ignored, America's future is bleak. The future holds the dark seeds of economic chaos, hyperinflation, unendurable poverty, increasing racial/minority hostility, worsening malnutrition, armed rebellion, street fighting, and perhaps, ultimately, institution of a reactionary totalitarian/surveillance police state in order to control citizen protests and quell rebellions.

In 1967, many Americans considered King hopeful vision for a better future as irrational idealism. He was told that the task was too great, the obstacles were too imposing, and there was no will for even the churches to reverse their age-old, conservative pseudo-patriotism and society's institutional racism. I suspect that many of the churches that called King a communist and therefore

ignored him back then wish that they could turn back the clock and give King's (and Jesus's) path a try.

King finished his speech with these challenges: "War is not the answer. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight."

And he had these sobering words for the churches that are immersed in a polytheistic culture (the worship of multiple gods, including the gods of war and mammon) and thus are tempted to quietly ally themselves with those gods rather than the God of Love that King was devoted to:

"I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. I have looked at her beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlay of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over again I have found myself asking: 'What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?'"

Today, the task is even tougher, the obstacles much more imposing, but the path that King outlined remains. MLK Day should be a good time to start seriously reconsidering King's radical message.

Dr. Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician who writes about peace, justice, militarism, mental health and religious issues.

The Injustice of US Justice

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. saw the injustices in American society and sought to correct them. He succeeded in many ways as laws were changed to eradicate overt segregation, but other problems proved more intractable as witnessed in the criminal justice system, as Laura Finley notes.

By Laura Finley

Many commentators have referred to the U.S. as a throwaway society. Typically, they are referring to our excessive consumption of disposable products. We are a society in which the average family throws out a quarter of its food, and each

individual generates around 4.5 pounds of trash every day, all year long.

As bad and unsustainable as this is, even more bothersome is our penchant for throwing away people.

One in three black men in America will go to prison during his lifetime. This means families left fatherless. It means that when they are released, these men will likely not be able to vote, hold office, serve on a jury, or obtain many professional licensures. Consequently, job opportunities are severely limited and the chance for re-offending is maximized.

Although not nearly as staggering, one in six Latino men will also end up in the wasteland that is an American prison.

Critics might contend that these statistics reflect higher crime rates, but the primary thing they reflect is a system in which Blacks and Latinos are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, tried and convicted than their white counterparts. Indeed, a new study conducted by researchers from the University of South Carolina found that nearly half of all black men in the U.S had been arrested at least once before the age of 23, and about 30 percent had one arrest before their 18th birthday.

Sadly, studies have shown that while we are throwing these young men into the abyss of the corrections system, prison is actually the safest place to be a black man in America.

A study conducted in North Carolina in 2011 found that black men were half as likely to die in prison than they were out in society. This isn't the first time that researchers have found lower death rates among incarcerated marginalized groups, who often receive healthcare and square meals routinely for the first time in their lives when they are inside the big house.

Mahatma Gandhi once commented that you can measure the greatness of a nation by the way it treats its most vulnerable members. Given the statistics presented above, we are, so far, an epic fail.

Laura Finley, Ph.D., teaches in the Barry University Department of Sociology & Criminology and is syndicated by [PeaceVoice](#).

Thanking Our Recurring Donors

From Editor Robert Parry: In the gaps between our quarterly fund drives,

Consortiumnews.com is sustained mostly by our recurring donors who have agreed to make monthly donations, sometimes only a few dollars and sometimes a couple of hundred. I want to extend to these contributors our special thanks.

If any reader wishes to join them and support our independent journalism on such a recurring basis the process is simple. Just go to the [Donations page](#), input your credit data, and then select a recurring donation (monthly, quarterly, etc.) and the amount.

Obviously, we always welcome one-time donations and book purchases, too. A portion of each book sale goes to the coffers of our tax-exempt non-profit. Below are the various options:

First, you can make a donation to our tax-exempt non-profit by [credit card online](#) at the Web site or by [mailing a check](#) to Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. (For readers wanting to use PayPal, you can address contributions to our account, which is named after our e-mail address: "consortnew @ aol.com")

Second, you can buy one of my last four books through the [Consortiumnews' Web site](#) or my latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, through Amazon.com, either [in paper](#) or the [e-book version](#).

Third, for only \$34, you can get the trilogy that traces the history of the two Bush presidencies and their impact on the world. The three books *Secrecy & Privilege*, *Neck Deep* (co-authored with Sam and Nat Parry) and *America's Stolen Narrative* would normally cost more than \$70.

To get the books for less than half price, just go to Consortiumnews.com's "[Donate](#)" button and make a \$34 "donation" using Visa, Mastercard or Discover. We will read a "donation" of that amount as an order for the trilogy.

If your mailing address is the same as your credit card billing address, we will ship the books to that address. If your mailing address is different, just send us an e-mail at consortnew@aol.com and we will make the adjustment. For U.S. orders, we will pay for the shipping. (For non-U.S. orders, add \$25 to defray the extra cost.)

You can also take advantage of this special offer by mailing a check for \$34 to The Media Consortium; 2200 Wilson Blvd.; Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. Or you can use our Paypal account, "consortnew @ aol.com." Just make sure you include your mailing address in the message.

Fourth, for only \$74, you can get a full box (28 books) of either *Secrecy & Privilege* or *Neck Deep* or a box of half and half. To take advantage of this

full-box offer (a \$642 value), just follow the same rules as ordering the three-book set, except you must send us an e-mail specifying which book you want, or the half-and-half offer. (For the same price, you also can get a full box, 24 books, of the hard-cover version of *Neck Deep*.)

We also will pay for the postage for U.S. orders. (Because of the prohibitive costs of international mail, this full-box offer is only possible for the United States.) Some readers have used this offer for their own fundraisers.

Fifth, we can now accept donations of stock or other equities, which I'm told can offer a tax advantage to donors if the stock has appreciated in value since it was purchased. (Our 18-year-old journalism project is recognized by the IRS as a 501-c-3 non-profit, meaning that contributions may be tax-deductible.)

If this stock-donation option appeals to you, I suggest you discuss it with your broker and then contact me at consortnew@aol.com for specific instructions on how to transfer the stock. Or you can write to us at Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201.

Again, thanks for your support and for making our 18-plus years of honest journalism possible.

Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in December 2013 focused on the Saudi role in terrorism, the importance of national security "leakers," the collapsing case pinning an infamous Sarin attack on Syria, and the renewed war over "the war on Christmas."

["Contra-Cocaine Was a Real Conspiracy"](#) by Robert Parry, Dec. 2, 2013.

["US Shutting Down a Key News Source"](#) by Elizabeth Murray, Dec. 3, 2013.

["Saudi-Israeli Alliance Boosts Al-Qaeda"](#) by Robert Parry, Dec. 4, 2013.

["Warring Over the War Over Christmas"](#) by Nat Parry, Dec. 4, 2013.

["Real Journalism v. Big Brother"](#) by Norman Solomon, Dec. 5, 2013.

"Honoring Mandela, Not Reagan" by Robert Parry, Dec. 6, 2013.

"Does Christmas Obscure Jesus?" by Howard Bess, Dec. 8, 2013.

"Deceiving the US Public on Syria" by Robert Parry, Dec. 9, 2013.

"New Evidence of Contra-Cocaine Scandal" by Robert Parry, Dec. 9, 2013.

"Embracing Israel's Atrocities" by Lawrence Davidson, Dec. 10, 2013.

"Obama Urged to Fire DNI Clapper" by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Dec. 11, 2013.

"Racism Through Rose-Colored Glasses" by William Loren Katz, Dec. 12, 2013.

"Obama's Syria Strategy at Crossroads" by Robert Parry, Dec. 12, 2013.

"Fresh Doubts about Syria's Sarin Guilt" by Robert Parry, Dec. 13, 2013.

"What Mandela Did and Didn't Do" by Danny Schechter, Dec. 15, 2013.

"Latin America Finds Its Footing" by Andres Cala, Dec. 16, 2013.

"Judge Leon's Dirty Climb to the Bench" by Robert Parry, Dec. 17, 2013.

"If You Believe Government, You're Stupid" by Jon Schwarz, Dec. 18, 2013.

"WPost Slips Behind Amazon's Cloud" by Norman Solomon, Dec. 18, 2013.

"Unjust Aftermath: Post-Noriega Panama" by Jonathan Marshall, Dec. 19, 2013.

"How Boycotts Can Help Israel" by Paul R. Pillar, Dec. 20, 2013.

"The Moral Cancer of Gitmo" by John LaForge, Dec. 20, 2013.

"Lost in an Anthopocene Wonderland" by Phil Rockstroh, Dec. 20, 2013.

"NYT Replays Its Iraq Fiasco in Syria" by Robert Parry, Dec. 20, 2013.

"Truman's True Warning on the CIA" by Ray McGovern, Dec. 22, 2013.

"UN Investigator Undercuts NYT on Syria" by Robert Parry, Dec. 23, 2013.

"A History of False Fear" by Joe Lauria, Dec. 23, 2013.

"One Silent Night in the Trenches" by Gary G. Kohls, Dec. 24, 2013.

"Obama's Not-So-Terrible Year" by Robert Parry, Dec. 26, 2013.

"The Year of the Leaker" by Robert Parry, Dec. 27, 2013.

"Gen. 'No Probable Cause' Hayden" by Ray McGovern, Dec. 28, 2013.

"NYT Backs Off Its Syria-Sarin Analysis" by Robert Parry, Dec. 29, 2013.

"The Russian-Saudi Showdown at Sochi" by Robert Parry, Dec. 31, 2013.

To produce and publish these stories and many more costs money. And except for some book sales, we depend on the generous support of our readers.

So, please consider a tax-deductible donation either by credit card online or by mailing a check. (For readers wanting to use PayPal, you can address contributions to our account, which is named "consortnew@aol.com").

Who Can Use Nazi Comparisons?

Israeli lawmakers are debating a bill to criminalize the careless use of the word Nazi, but face a problem since Prime Minister Netanyahu is one of the worst abusers when denouncing Iran and comparing a deal on its nuclear program to Munich, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

This week the Israeli Knesset took the first step toward enactment of a bill that poses difficult questions for the legislators because it to some degree abridges free speech but does so for benign purposes.

The bill would criminalize derogatory use of the word *Nazi* or related terms as applied to people other than the real Nazis, or to use symbols related to the Holocaust for purposes other than educational ones. Penalties for violation would include fines and up to six months imprisonment.

One objective of the legislation is to place Israel on stronger ground when urging other countries to take action to curb the rise of neo-Nazi movements. But another important purpose is to check the widespread tendency, observed not just in Israel but also elsewhere, to use comparisons with Nazis so loosely and indiscriminately that the usage debases the historical currency.

The trivial use of Nazi-related comparisons and imagery threatens to trivialize the real thing. When comparisons with the Nazi regime keep getting applied to matters that come nowhere close to the horrors associated with that regime, this risks degrading understanding of how horrifying that regime was, as well as constituting an insult to its victims. Combating this tendency is a worthwhile objective.

The tension between this objective and the value of free speech is reflected in a thoughtful letter to the *New York Times* from Abraham Foxman, head of the Anti-Defamation League. Foxman says he has “conflicting emotions” about the action in the Knesset. On one hand, he writes, “if there is any country in the world that needs to make sure that the events of World War II and the Holocaust are not trivialized, it should be Israel.” But on the other hand, a civil libertarian ought to be troubled by the prospect that “language, even if it is an ugly epithet that cheapens the historical meaning of the Holocaust, can be punished by the law as a criminal act.”

While this letter is reasonable, coming from Foxman it invites further comment about the standards he uses in taking positions and whether he is consistent in doing so. Some of the most prominent positions he has taken on behalf of his organization have had very little to do with countering defamation.

There has been, for example, his opposition to construction of a mosque in Manhattan near the World Trade Center site, opposition that struck many as disguised bigotry. There also was his resistance to any formal condemnation of the century-old genocide against Armenians, resistance that continued as long as Turkey still had good relations with Israel.

That last example reflects what appears to be the overriding standard that Foxman does consistently apply, which is to support whatever is in line with the policies of the Israeli government and to oppose whatever is contrary to those policies. This is the respect in which Foxman’s positions stray farthest from anti-defamation. In fact, he seems to be just fine with defamation when the person being defamed is a critic of Israeli policies.

This is all pertinent to that bill before the Knesset, because one of the most prominent practitioners of invoking Nazi Germany comparisons is the current Israeli prime minister. Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly applies this comparison as part of his unrelenting effort to demonize Iran and kill any accommodation with it.

The comparison is as baseless as most other loose applications of the Nazi simile. There is no equivalent to Adolf Hitler in the Iranian leadership, Iran is not trying to conquer the rest of its region and has no ability to do so, and an agreement with the Iranian government to restrict its nuclear program has nothing in common with the carving up of a European country and handing part of it over to Hitler.

A member of the Knesset who opposes the bill did ask in this week’s debate whether passage of the bill would mean that Netanyahu would be jailed for comparing former Iranian president Mahmud Admedinejad to Hitler. Admedinejad is

now out of office, and perhaps as long as Netanyahu does not use the word *Nazi* or start drawing swastikas on pictures of current Iranian leaders he would not be subject to prosecution even if the bill becomes law.

But his repeated comparisons with the Munich agreement and events of the 1930s associated with Germany have the same purpose and cause the same damage, damage that the pending legislation is designed to reduce.

That leads to this question for Abraham Foxman: since you share, quite understandably and appropriately, a concern about how carelessly using Nazi Germany similes cheapens the historical meaning of World War II and the Holocaust, when are you going to start criticizing Benjamin Netanyahu for doing so?

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.)

How NSA Invites Totalitarianism

President Obama has unveiled some modest "reforms" of U.S. intelligence gathering, noting that just because NSA can vacuum up nearly all electronic data doesn't mean it should. But the bigger issue is the future and how these powers may be unleashed, says Dutch tech expert Arjen Kamphuis.

By Arjen Kamphuis

After more than six months of revelations about the global surveillance infrastructure built by the U.S. government and its "allies" (i.e. smaller countries that believe smiling-at-the-crocodile-in-the-hope-he-eats-you-last is a good long-term strategy), many people and politicians still tout the "I have nothing to hide" attitude toward the most over-armed, hyper-intrusive super-power in human history.

In a recent *New Yorker* article, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was quoted as saying: "My phone numbers, I assume, are collected like everybody else's, but so what? It does not bother me. By the Supreme Court decision in 1979, the data is not personal data. There's a Google Map that allows somebody to burgle my house, it's so clear and defined, and I can't do anything about it."

For an elected U.S. senator to state the above is quite astonishing. Apparently a 35-year-old court decision, Smith v. Maryland, from a technologically different era is considered unalterable scripture (by a lawmaker!) and the power of the Google Corporation is simply accepted as a law of nature. Like the speed of light or the boiling point of water. What did that influential Italian political thinker from the 1920s say about the merger of state and corporate power? Wasn't that the (political) F-word?

Europeans look on in dismay at how the world's once-leading democracy has utterly lost the plot and slides in accelerating fashion toward societal models that we tried in the 1930s and 1940s and found seriously wanting. We've seen this movie and know how it ends; with way too many people in scary uniforms and lots of barbed wire everywhere.

The Dutch Example

Those lessons are particularly instructive for us Dutch. Since the mid-1600s, Amsterdam was a refuge for ethnic and religious groups from all over Europe who fled various forms of repression and persecution. This freedom and societal diversity was one reason why the Dutch trading empire flourished with technological advances (such as wind-powered sawmills for fast boat-building) and economic (corporate and stock) innovations.

The tolerance and diversity helped the Netherlands develop into a conflict-avoiding nation of traders who got along with everyone so they could sell them stuff. We kept out of World War I and sold a lot of planes to Germany. Municipalities registered people's religion and ethnicity for a range of practical (and mostly benign) purposes such as allowing the local civil servants to operate in a culturally sensitive way.

The Dutch government kept this fantasy of remaining neutral going for a long time, right up to the early morning of May 10, 1940, when the German Wehrmacht rolled into the country and swept away our poor excuse for an army in barely four days. After the Dutch surrender, the vast majority of the German army was pulled out of the Netherlands and put to work in other places.

For the vast majority of Dutch people life went on pretty much as before. Resistance to the occupation was almost non-existent and many Dutch were happy to work for the government (the number of civil servants almost doubled during the occupation) or in industries that boomed because of orders from the German army.

It was not until 1942 that the enthusiastic data collection by the Dutch government turned into a human catastrophe. Over 100,000 people who thought they

“had nothing to hide” had provided accurate data on their Jewish identity and listed their addresses, enabling the most complete persecution of Jewish people in any country during World War II (with the exception of Poland where the Nazis had more time and fewer logistical challenges).

The other problem was the pro-authority attitude of most Dutch (even if that authority was a brutal military occupation by a foreign army). The famous Dutch “tolerance” often expressed itself as “I don’t care what you do as long as you don’t bother me.” That included shoving fellow citizens into cattle-cars on their way to death-camps.

There was no occupied country where Pastor Martin Niemöller’s famous poem “first they came for the Socialists” was more applicable than the Netherlands.

Troubling Comparisons

Though comparisons with the Nazi era are always problematic, aspects of that time and U.S. society today are eerily similar. The United States seems under the de facto control of a consortium of banksters and a military-industrial-security complex, all feeding off each other and feeding into a political/media system that controls the national agenda and marginalizes people who dissent.

This structure has made many citizens afraid of their own shadows and lacking the information to ask meaningful questions even if they so desired. There are two political parties, the minimum number to have at least the pretense of a democracy, but on issues relating to “national security” and the “surveillance state” the Republicans and Democrats offer little that is significantly different, except at the fringes of the two parties.

Sen. Feinstein’s blasphemous acceptance of the National Security Agency’s collection of electronic metadata on virtually everyone and President Barack Obama’s mild “reforms” of the NSA – announced on Friday – fit with what you can expect from many “security-conscious” Republicans, too.

Yet, the unpleasant reality is that the U.S. government has built a turnkey infrastructure for a level of totalitarian control that repressive leaders of past eras could only dream about. The NSA’s metadata lets the government chart a spider’s web of your associations with multiple “hops” to draw in the networks of other people whom you have never met. The scheme takes guilt-by-association to a whole new level.

The U.S. government also reserves to itself the right to kill anyone, anywhere who supposedly represents a “terrorist” threat to the United States and to do so on the say-so of some unaccountable and essentially anonymous intelligence officials. The blood lust even extends to whistleblowers like former NSA

contractor Edward Snowden.

A Political Excuse

The only missing element for a full-scale tyranny is a political excuse to flip the switch and turn this machine to full-power. Perhaps the excuse could come from another “terrorist attack” or from another financial meltdown as the government seeks to control social unrest. Or a thoroughly unscrupulous President might just rev it up to go after his enemies. But the point is the equipment is now in place and ready to go.

Many people still find it hard to accept that the U.S. government could take such a monstrous turn. But its modern history from Hiroshima through the Vietnam War to support for death-squad regimes in Latin America and the invasion of Iraq shows a callous disregard of human life and an acceptance of mass slaughter, even genocide, as a policy choice.

I realize that these concerns that I’ve raised violate what’s known as “Godwin’s Law,” i.e. the avoidance of comparing current events to the Nazis, but regrettably these comparisons are increasingly unavoidable. One could even revise Niemoller’s famous poem for the present:

“First they came for the Muslims in a dozen countries

but most of us did not share that faith so we said nothing

Then they came for union leaders and social activists

but we did not want to be labeled as lefties and so we said nothing

Then they came for the journalists

but we long stopped reading political news and so we said nothing

Then finally, when the government came for us

there was no one left to say anything”

Arjen Kamphuis is co-founder and Chief Technology Officer of Gendo. He studied Science and Policy at Utrecht University and worked for IBM and Twynstra Gudde as IT architect, trainer and IT strategy adviser. Since late 2001, Arjen has advised clients on the strategic impact of new technological developments. More than five years ago, he left his native Netherlands (an active participant in the war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq) for Germany, the one country that has learned deep lessons from trying out various forms of totalitarian regimes.
