

Israeli Rabbis Warn Kerry of God's Wrath

Exclusive: Secretary of State John Kerry's negotiations to resolve the generations-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict may look like a quixotic pilgrimage into endless frustrations to many. But it is causing worries among nationalists on Israel's Right, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

Five right-wing Israeli rabbis say U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry deserves the destructive fate that has met past enemies of the Jewish people because of his efforts to reach a peace agreement that would establish a Palestinian state on the West Bank.

In [an open letter](#) to Kerry, these nationalist rabbis likened Kerry to Haman, the Persian vizier and the villain in the Book of Esther who "contrived a vicious plot" against the Jews but ended up along with his sons hanged "on the very same gallows he had prepared for Mordechai, the Jew." Haman was then impaled on a sharpened pole for good measure.

The letter said Kerry's "incessant efforts to expropriate integral parts of our Holy Land and hand them over to [Palestinian leader Mahmoud] Abbas's terrorist gang amount to a declaration of war against the Creator and Ruler of the universe."

The group of rabbis from the Committee to Save the Land and People of Israel warned Kerry that if he persists in his "destructive path," he will earn "everlasting disgrace in Jewish history for bringing calamity upon the Jewish people like Nebuchadnezer and Titus who destroyed, respectively, the first and second great Temples and the entire Holy City of Jerusalem, and who, by Heavenly punishment, brought eventual disaster upon themselves."

Israeli religious nationalists consider the West Bank to be land that God gave to the Israelites in perpetuity, territory called by many Israeli leaders by the Biblical names Judea and Samaria. But international law grants the land to the Palestinians and considers Jewish settlements on the land to be illegal.

The rabbis' letter condemned Kerry for seeking to establish a Palestinian state on the West Bank, despite the expectation that Kerry will propose some land concessions to Israel so several hundred thousand Jewish settlers can remain in their homes. But any compromise is unacceptable to the five rabbis, according to their letter.

"For G-d awarded the entire Land of Israel to our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob, in order that they bequeath it, as an everlasting inheritance, to their descendants, the Jewish people, until the end of all time," the letter read. "By the power of our Holy Torah, we admonish you to cease immediately all efforts to achieve these disastrous agreements, in order to avoid severe Heavenly punishment for everyone involved."

The signers of the letter were Gedalya Axelrod, emeritus head of Haifa Rabbinic Court; Yisrael Ariel, chairman of the Temple Institute; Ben Tziyon Grossman, a rabbi in Migdal Haemek; Shalom Dov Wolpo, dean of the Institute for Complete Code of Maimonides; and Yigal Pizam, head of the Yeshiva of Kiryat Shmuel.

Rabbis Shalom Dov Wolpo and Yisrael Ariel were associated with the ultra-nationalist political activities of the late Meir Kahane who founded the militant Jewish Defense League and Kach, an Israeli political party that was denounced by the Israeli government as racist.

Though the five rabbis are considered to be on the fringe of Israeli politics, their condemnation of Kerry reflects a growing resistance within more mainstream Israeli circles to Kerry's persistence in seeking a resolution to the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Kerry is expected soon to unveil his proposed framework for a possible settlement.

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.

Obama Ignores Key Afghan Warning

From the Archive: As the 12-year Afghan War grinds to what many Americans see as failure, ex-Defense Secretary Robert Gates and other hawks won't admit their counterinsurgency "surge" in 2009 was a waste of lives and money or that U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry was right when he warned President Obama, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote in 2010.

By Ray McGovern (Originally published Jan. 27, 2010)

Nothing highlights President Barack Obama's abject surrender to Gen. David

Petraeus on the “way forward” in Afghanistan more than two cables U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry sent to Washington on Nov. 6 and 9, 2009, the texts of which were released by the *New York Times*.

No longer is it possible to suggest that Obama was totally deprived of good counsel on Afghanistan; Eikenberry got it largely right. Sadly, the inevitable conclusion is that, although Obama is not as dumb as his predecessor, he is no less willing to sacrifice thousands of lives for political gain.

Ambassador Eikenberry, a retired Army Lt. General who served three years in Afghanistan over the course of two separate tours of duty, was responsible during 2002-2003 for rebuilding Afghan security forces. He then served 18 months (2005-2007) as commander of all U.S. forces stationed in the country.

In the cable he sent to Washington on Nov. 6, 2009, Eikenberry explains why, “I cannot support [the Defense Department’s] recommendation for an immediate Presidential decision to deploy another 40,000 here.” His reasons include:

–Afghan President Hamid Karzai is not “an adequate strategic partner.” His government has “little to no political will or capacity to carry out basic tasks of governance. It strains credulity to expect Karzai to change fundamentally this late in his life and in our relationship.”

–Karzai and many of his advisers “are only too happy to see us invest further. They assume we covet their territory for a never ending ‘war on terror’ and for military bases to use against surrounding powers.”

[Comment: I wonder where Karzai ever got that idea about military bases, perhaps because the United States is building them? I’ll bet Karzai also assumes continuing U.S. interest in the projected oil/natural gas pipeline from the extraordinarily rich deposits in the Caspian Sea area and Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to the Arabian Sea, bypassing both Russia and the Strait of Hormuz.
]

–“The proposed troop increase will bring vastly increased costs and an indefinite, large-scale U.S. military role.”

–“We overestimate the ability of Afghan security forces to take over by 2013 and underestimate how long it will take to restore or establish civilian government.”

–“More troops won’t end the insurgency as long as Pakistan sanctuaries remain and Pakistan views its strategic interests as best served by a weak neighbor.”

–“There is also the deeper concern about dependency. Rather than reducing Afghan

dependence, sending more troops, therefore, is likely to deepen it, at least in the short term. That would further delay our goal of shifting the combat burden to the Afghans.”

Straight Talk

Eikenberry is even more direct in his cable of Nov. 9, 2009, taking strong issue with “a proposed counterinsurgency strategy that relies on a large, all-or-nothing increase in U.S. troops,” and warning of the risk that “we will become more deeply engaged here with no way to extricate ourselves.”

Condemning Gen. Stanley McChrystal’s recommendations with faint praise, Ambassador Eikenberry describes them as “logical and compelling within his [McChrystal’s] narrow mandate to define the needs for a military counterinsurgency campaign within Afghanistan.”

“Unaddressed variables,” says Eikenberry, “include Pakistan sanctuaries, weak Afghan leadership and governance, NATO civilian-military integration, and our national will to bear the human and fiscal costs over many years.”

The ambassador complains that the troop increase proposal “sets aside” these variables, even though “each has the potential to block us from achieving our strategic goals, regardless of the number of additional troops we may send.”

Eikenberry also notes that it is hardly a safe assumption that Karzai and his new team will ever be “committed to lead the counterinsurgency mission we are defining for them.” The ambassador notes that Karzai “explicitly rejected” McChrystal’s counterinsurgency proposal when first briefed on it in detail.

Eikenberry does not stop there. Rather, he bluntly warns, in vain, it turned out, against a premature decision regarding a troop increase, arguing “there is no option but to widen the scope of our analysis and to consider alternatives beyond a strictly military counterinsurgency effort within Afghanistan.”

He adds, “We have not yet conducted a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of all our strategic options. Nor have we brought all the real-world variables to bear in testing the proposed counterinsurgency plan. “This strategic re-examination could either include or lead to high-level U.S. talks with the Afghans, the Pakistanis, the Saudis and other important regional players, including possibly Iran.”

Extraordinary. Here is the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan bemoaning the fact that, as the President approaches his decision on a large troop increase, there has still been no comprehensive analysis of the wider issues that remain “unaddressed” in McChrystal’s proposal.

NIEs, Anyone?

Taking an objective look at a complex national security problem is exactly the job for which President Harry Truman created the CIA, giving its director the task of drafting what became known as National Intelligence Estimates, which include the participation of all agencies of the intelligence community.

That no estimate has been prepared on Afghanistan/Pakistan and the “unaddressed variables” is an indictment of Obama and his deference to the military. The President and other misguided Democrats are hell bent on preventing the bemedaled Petraeus from painting them soft on terrorism. Letting Petraeus run the policy, while avoiding any critical intelligence analysis, is Obama’s safe, and cowardly, way out.

During my tenure at CIA (from the administration of John Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush), I cannot think of an occasion on which a President chose to forgo a National Intelligence Estimate before making a key decision on foreign policy.

However, in early 2002, President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney set a new kind of precedent when they ordered CIA Director George Tenet NOT to prepare an NIE on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, out of fear that an honest estimate would make it immensely more difficult to attack Iraq.

That did not change until September 2002, when Sen. Bob Graham, then-chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, warned the White House that, absent an NIE, he would do all he could to prevent a vote on war with Iraq. That’s when a totally dishonest NIE was woven out of whole cloth (or, in the words of subsequent Intelligence Committee chair, Sen. Jay Rockefeller, fashioned from “created” intelligence) to hype a threat from non-existent Iraqi WMD.

After that debacle, new leadership was given to the NIE process in the person of Tom Fingar, who had run the intelligence unit at the State Department. It was Fingar who insisted on a bottom-up review of intelligence on Iran’s nuclear plans, which resulted in an NIE that helped prevent Bush and Cheney from attacking Iran, or encouraging Israel to do so.

That NIE, issued in November 2007, assessed “with high confidence” that Iran had stopped working on the nuclear weapons part of its nuclear program in late 2003, contradicting claims of Bush and Cheney. Of equal importance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other senior military had no appetite to take on Iran (or to acquiesce in Israel’s doing so) and insisted that the key judgments of that NIE be made public.

This time, on Afghanistan, it’s different. Army Generals Petraeus and McChrystal

apparently persuaded the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen, that they know what they're doing and didn't need any intelligence analysts reaching a different conclusion.

What's the Rush?

From his vantage point in Kabul, Eikenberry seems impervious to Dick Cheney's charges that President Obama is "dithering." The first two (of three) subheadings in Eikenberry's second cable are: "We Have Time" and "Why We Must Take the Time." He finishes with an appeal to "widen the scope of our analysis."

Eikenberry is all but demanding a National Intelligence Estimate, but stops short so as to not to cross the President or to further antagonize Petraeus and McChrystal. Instead of requesting an NIE, Ambassador Eikenberry suggests that the White House appoint "a panel of civilian and military experts to examine the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy and the full range of options."

The list of issues he says this panel "should examine" reads like what the intelligence community calls the "terms of reference" for an NIE. (As a CIA analyst and manager I contributed to many NIEs and chaired a few myself.)

When the White House gave Eikenberry short shrift, he should have resigned, rather than support the misbegotten strategy Obama chose. [Eikenberry was replaced as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan in July 2011.]

Part of Obama's motivation in not ordering the customary NIE was to avoid any chance that its conclusions might leak, according to a source with good access. Unless CIA estimators are back to the Bush/Cheney days of cooking estimates to order, such a leak would certainly have made it more difficult for the President to render unflinching support to Petraeus and McChrystal.

Pity Obama. It is hard to believe he could be so naive to the ways of Washington and so dismissive of the possibility that there could still be patriots among senior officials dismayed at his remarkable retreat from the "transparency" he promised.

The *New York Times* reports, "An American official provided a copy of the cables to *The Times* after a reporter requested them." Well, good for that patriotic truth-teller. And good, as well, for the *New York Times* for publishing them.

I am permitting myself to hope that still more truth-tellers will emerge from the woodwork, and even that *The Times* might begin to play the kind of key role it did 40 years ago, once it finally grasped that Vietnam was a fool's errand.

NODIS

It may be that one needs to have worked at senior levels on the “inside” to understand the twinge that I felt after downloading the NODIS cables made available by *The Times*.

As the cover sheet indicates, “NODIS” means no dissemination beyond the named “addressee and, if not expressly precluded, by those officials under *his* authority whom *he* considers to have a clear-cut ‘need to know.’” (Emphasis added. It is not entirely clear, but I assume that exceptions can now be made for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other senior officials of her gender.)

In my day we had to go to the CIA Director’s office, sign for, and read NODIS cables right there. No doubt there are similar controls today. So, in this case the whistleblower took considerable risk in taking it upon him/herself to make “transparency” real, not just Obaman rhetoric.

The irony? If, as I have been told, the President put the kibosh on preparation of an NIE for fear it would leak, we now have an even more instructive kind of leak. Thanks to *The Times* and its courageous source, we now know not only that President Obama elected to forgo an honest NIE, but that he did so in the face of very strong urging from Ambassador Eikenberry that Obama “widen the scope” of analysis before he simply kowtowed to the Army brass.

I imagine that in years to come, Eikenberry will proudly show his cables to his grandchildren. Or maybe he won’t, out of fear that one of them might ask why he didn’t have the guts to quit and let the rest of the country know what he thought of this latest March of Folly.

[Over time, President Obama changed his high command in Afghanistan. Gen. McChrystal was ousted in June 2010 after it was revealed that he and his staff were disparaging the President’s inner circle at the White House; Secretary of Defense Robert Gates retired in July 2011 and wrote a memoir castigating Obama for allegedly showing insufficient enthusiasm for the Afghan mission; and Gen. Petraeus, who replaced McChrystal in Afghanistan in 2010, was named CIA director in September 2011 but resigned in a sex scandal in November 2012.]

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He came to Washington over 50 years ago and worked as a CIA analyst under seven Presidents. He now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Shameful History of Jeff Davis Highway

Journalist Robert Parry has become embroiled in a local controversy in Arlington, Virginia, over his suggestion that the name of Confederate President Jefferson Davis be removed from roads in the county in recognition of the evils of slavery and segregation, an idea that has riled up some longtime Virginians.

By Robert Parry

My proposal to strip the name of arch-racist Jefferson Davis off roadways in Arlington County has prompted attacks against me in the local newspaper (the Sun-Gazette) for allegedly seeking to deny history, but nothing could be further from the truth. My point was to encourage a clearer understanding of the actual history, the harsh reality that was African-American slavery, not the hazy romanticism that has surrounded some of the fond white memories of the *ante bellum* South.

My letter to the County Board, which sparked this controversy, suggested that the County make a greater effort to honor the site of Freedman's Village, a camp established in South Arlington in 1863 as a refuge for African-Americans as they fled north to escape the horrors of slavery. Though life in Freedman's Village was hard and it was phased out by the end of the Nineteenth Century the camp offered a beacon of liberty and hope to hundreds of these Americans who had been subjected to one of the great crimes of history.

Rather than honor Jefferson Davis, who was hailed as the "champion of a slave society" when he was chosen to lead the Confederacy in 1861, it seemed to me far more appropriate to name these Arlington roads in honor of Freedman's Village (or for other historic events in Arlington, possibly the "Pentagon 9/11 Memorial Highway"). Besides the inconvenient truth that Jefferson Davis was a white supremacist and a slaveholder, the man had no connection to Arlington County. He was born in Kentucky and owned a plantation in Mississippi.

Plus, there's the troubling reason why his name was attached to some southern sections of Route 1 in the 1920s. It was because the Daughters of the Confederacy were outraged that there were plans for a Lincoln Highway in the North (honoring Abraham Lincoln). At the height of the Jim Crow era, when whites in the South were enforcing racial segregation by lynching blacks, these apologists for white supremacy were making a political statement by attaching the name of the Confederate president to these roads, including those in Arlington County that passed near predominately black neighborhoods.

Then, in 1964, as Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement succeeded in gaining passage of a landmark civil rights law, the Virginia legislature

added Jefferson Davis's name to a section of Route 110 that passes by the Pentagon. In other words, during the last century, the naming of these roads after Jefferson Davis represented a protest by white supremacists who were expressing their resentments over the end of slavery and the demise of segregation.

Thus, to leave Jefferson Davis's name on these roads is an affront to African-Americans and, indeed, all Americans who are ashamed of this vile part of our history. Making people honor Jefferson Davis by having to say his name as part of addresses along these roadways is not much different from making people wave the Confederate battle flag; both are symbols of racial oppression.

As we have seen around the world, people frequently pull down the statues of dictators or remove their names from cities and public facilities. For instance, Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd after Josef Stalin's crimes were exposed; Saddam Hussein's statue was toppled in Baghdad in 2003 with the help of U.S. soldiers. These and countless similar actions were not a repudiation of history; they were a recognition of history. They were attempts to remove misplaced honors for people who had inflicted evil on innocent people.

Slavery in the United States and the Western Hemisphere was just such an evil, arguably one of the greatest crimes of human history. Over several centuries, more than 12 million people were stolen from their homes in Africa; many died in the passage across the Atlantic; the survivors were sold like animals and forced to work under brutal conditions; both adults and children were whipped to terrorize them into working harder; runaways or troublemakers were lynched; countless women were raped; children were sold from their parents. It was barbaric.

Jefferson Davis was not just a practitioner of slavery; he was a political leader who sought to perpetuate the slavery of African-Americans *forever*. To those people who are not outraged that Arlington County continues to honor such a person and what he stood for indeed people who are outraged that I am outraged my only question to them is: Do you not believe that slavery and segregation were wrong?

In one of the letters protesting my proposal, the writer declared, "I am very proud of my Commonwealth's history, but not of the current times, as I'm sure many others are." So, what about this "history" is my critic "very proud of" and what about "current times" is so objectionable?

In my 37 years living in Virginia, I have always been struck by the curious victimhood of many Southern whites. Because of the Civil War, which some still call "the War of Northern Aggression," and the Civil Rights Movement, which

finally ended segregation, they have been nursing grievances, seeing themselves as the real victims here. Not the African-Americans who were held in the unspeakable conditions of bondage until slavery was finally ended in the 1860s and who then suffered the cruelties of segregation for another century. No, the whites who lorded over them were the real “victims.”

I have a German friend who praises the U.S. Army for helping to liberate Germany from the Nazis despite the devastation that was inflicted on his country. Like my friend, modern Germans have accepted their collective national responsibility for the rise of Adolf Hitler and for the Holocaust. Similarly, whites in the American South need to rethink their grievances toward the Union Army, which liberated not only African-Americans but the entire region from the evils of slavery, a vile economic and cultural system that Jefferson Davis and the Confederates fought a war to protect.

Changing the name of Jefferson Davis Highway would be one small step toward finally confronting the real history, that shameful chapter of our American history.

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