

# Trump's Lies About a Nuke 'Gap'

**Exclusive:** One of Donald Trump's most dangerous lies is his claim about Russia surging ahead of the U.S. on nuclear weapons, a Cold War-style assertion of a nuke "gap" that goes unchallenged, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

"The country has never had a presidential candidate who lies the way that [Donald Trump] does," remarked New York Times editor David Leonhardt after Sunday's presidential debate. Yet his impressive list of 20 Trump lies is notably silent about one unchallenged whopper: that Russia is gaining military superiority over the United States.

Trump told debate watchers that Hillary Clinton "talks tough against Russia. But our nuclear program has fallen way behind, and they've gone wild with their nuclear program. Not good. Our government shouldn't have allowed that to happen. Russia is new in terms of nuclear. We are old. We're tired. We're exhausted in terms of nuclear. A very bad thing."

Hillary Clinton didn't rebut him. The moderators didn't rebut him. The Clinton campaign's fact checkers didn't rebut him. Nor did those of the mainstream media – perhaps because more than a few reporters and editors assume Trump is right.

In recent months, Trump has repeatedly peddled the same myth of Russian nuclear (and conventional military) superiority. It's a familiar and politically potent lie dating back to 1950s, when militarists warned of alleged bomber and missile "gaps" favoring the Soviet Union.

At a rally in Atlanta last June, Trump complained that "Putin has built up their military again and again and again. Their military is much stronger. He's doing nuclear, we're not doing anything. Our nuclear is old and tired and his nuclear is tippy-top from what I hear." (President Trump would presumably order the Pentagon to come up with some kind of nuclear Viagra to make our forces young, virile, and "tippy top" again.)

Speaking to supporters in Ashburn, Virginia, in August, the Republican candidate said, "Look at Russia, how they've built up their military . . . How they've built up their military and how we're so far behind. And our equipment is obsolete in many cases. . . We're falling way behind."

And in the first presidential debate in September, again unrebuted by Clinton, Trump reiterated that Russia's nuclear forces "have a much newer capability than we do. . . . We are not keeping up with other countries."

After that first debate, a brief Associated Press fact check did note that “Russia has indeed been expanding its military and increasing spending on weapons and equipment. But the U.S. still has far more advanced military aircraft, weapons and capabilities than Russia. In addition, the Pentagon plans to spend \$108 billion over the next five years to sustain and improve its nuclear force and is developing the next generation bomber.”

But the U.S. nuclear modernization program is much bigger even than AP indicated. As reported here, “the Obama administration plans to commit the nation to spending at least \$1trillion over the next three decades to improve our ability to fight a nuclear war.” The Pentagon’s blueprint calls for building 12 new nuclear-armed submarines, 100 long-range strategic bombers armed with a new class of bombs, at least 400 silo-based ballistic missiles, and 1,000 nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.

The United States currently has more deployed nuclear missiles and heavy bombers than Russia: 741 versus 521. The United States also has almost as large an inventory of nuclear weapons as Russia: 7,000 versus an estimated 7,300. The difference is meaningless: detonation of even a fraction of that total would annihilate not only both countries, but kill a large portion of the world’s population.

Washington can potentially also count on the United Kingdom and France for another 400 deployed nuclear warheads to make the rubble in Russia bounce higher in case of an all-out war.

The two countries’ nuclear arsenals are nearly matched by design – the result of many rounds of nuclear arms negotiations and treaties. By contrast, the U.S. military far outpaces Russia’s in most conventional categories.

### **US Spends Way More on Military**

Washington spends 12 times more on “defense” than Russia, whose military budget ranks behind China, Saudi Arabia, and the UK. According to the website Global Fire Power, the United States has more than twice the population of Russia, 80 percent more active military personnel, and 285 percent more military aircraft. The U.S. Navy also outpaces Russia in aircraft carriers 10 to 1. (Russia has more tanks and artillery.) And that’s before counting the contribution of all our NATO allies.

James Hasik, an analyst for the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, observes that “The good news . . . is that the Russian Army today is a small fraction of the size of the Red Army of the Cold War. Russia is also almost bereft of allies, as Belarus and that collection of frozen-conflict

oblasts don't really add much. Thus, NATO's ground forces actually outnumber the Russians several times over."

Another prominent military analyst, Kyle Mizokami, notes that Russia's military modernization plans have been severely crimped by falling oil prices and Western economic sanctions, sending Moscow's defense budget "into a tailspin."

"Russian forces are also, generally speaking, not as well trained as NATO forces," he adds. "Russian forces performed badly in Chechnya . . . In its 2008 war with Georgia, Russian ground forces moved painfully slowly. . . Most NATO countries could have done a better job."

Despite these facts, numerous Pentagon officers and armchair warriors today warn about NATO's deficiencies in facing the growing Russian threat. But look closely and they all relate to scenarios of Russian forces moving *en masse* next door into the small and weakly defended Baltic States. That's a far cry from what NATO feared when the alliance formed in 1949 to prevent a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Now that the Baltic States are part of NATO, Moscow would be risking World War III by invading them – for what purpose no one ever spells out.

Fear-mongering about Russia's military and the Baltics reflects a classic imperial mentality – that the United States must be capable of prevailing militarily anywhere on the globe, no matter how far removed from our real security interests.

It's time to recognize that relentless calls for greater military spending, constant agitation for a new Cold War, and the staging of provocative military exercises so close to Russia's borders are creating the real threats to U.S. security and well-being.

Donald Trump's lies about Russia's military superiority are feeding those threats. It's long overdue for his opponent and the news media to call him out.

**Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Obama Flinches at Renouncing Nuke First Strike," "Dangerous Denial of Global Warming," "How Arms Sales Distort US Foreign Policy," "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; and "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War."**

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# The Unmourned Plutonium Disposal Deal

**Exclusive:** An apparent casualty of the New Cold War was a U.S.-Russian agreement for eliminating weapons-grade plutonium but the deal's death is not being mourned by either side, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

Despite America's constant demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin, few world leaders have collaborated as effectively with Washington on matters of critical national security, including overflight rights to Afghanistan, disposal of Syria's chemical weapons stocks, and the agreement to prevent Iran from undertaking a nuclear weapons program.

Now he's done it again. In the guise of punishing the United States by suspending a nuclear disarmament agreement, Putin has generously relieved the Obama administration of a budgetary headache of Excedrin proportions.

On Monday, Putin issued a decree suspending a bilateral agreement for the disposal of each side's weapons-grade plutonium, complaining that Washington's economic sanctions and military buildup in Eastern Europe have "radically changed" relations between the world's two major nuclear powers.

"The Obama administration has done everything in its power to destroy the atmosphere of trust which could have encouraged cooperation," the Russian foreign ministry explained. "We want Washington to understand that you cannot, with one hand, introduce sanctions against us . . . and with the other hand continue selective cooperation in areas where it suits them."

An instant analysis by Stratfor, a private risk consulting firm, warned that "other nuclear disarmament cooperation deals between the United States and Russia are at risk of being undermined. The decision is likely an attempt to convey to Washington the price of cutting off dialogue on Syria and other issues."

There's some truth to that gloomy forecast. But Putin was well aware of Washington's own eagerness to find a way out of the agreement due to the spiraling cost of compliance. He thus succeeded in sending a message without risking serious additional damage to the already frayed U.S.-Russia relationship.

The Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement, signed in 2000, commits the United States and Russia to dispose of a total of 68 tons of weapons-grade plutonium, enough for 17,000 nuclear weapons, rendered surplus by the easing of

Cold War tensions.

Besides signaling other countries that the United States and Russia were serious about slashing their nuclear arsenals, the agreement aimed to get rid of the plutonium in a way that minimizes the risk of nuclear theft or diversion.

The two parties agreed to dispose of most of the plutonium by mixing it with uranium to create “mixed-oxide” (MOX) fuel for “burning” in commercial nuclear reactors. But that step required construction of special facilities to create the fuel.

In the United States, planning began for the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility in South Carolina. After years of research, development, and initial construction under the Bush and Obama administrations, however, the Department of Energy announced in 2013 that “This current plutonium disposition approach may be unaffordable, though, due to cost growth and fiscal pressure.”

Indeed, the total cost of the MOX program, including the plant and its operation, had soared from an estimated \$3.1 billion in 2002 to \$18 billion. This year, the Department of Energy reported that the MOX facility won’t be ready until – no joke – 2048.

Worse yet, commercial nuclear utilities don’t even want the fuel, whose use would raise a host of technical issues.

For its part, Russia agreed to dispose of most of its excess plutonium in special “fast-neutron” reactors optimized for the use of plutonium. Russia’s latest such plant was finally connected to the electric grid late last year, 31 years after the start of construction. Despite Russia’s pride in this technological achievement, construction cost billions of dollars and the reliability of the units has yet to be proven. One wonders if the Putin administration is also having second thoughts about the cost of compliance with the 2000 agreement.

### **Cheaper Disposal Options**

Both countries have potentially much cheaper disposal options, including encasing and then burying the plutonium in a pit, which the Department of Energy estimates could save taxpayers \$30 billion over several decades.

“The Obama administration actually approached Russian officials several years ago, seeking a potential modification to the agreement that would open a path to that approach,” notes Patrick Malone, a reporter for the Center for Public Integrity.

“The Russians’ announcement, as a result, is hardly a further blow to relations between the two countries. It means that Washington’s hands are arguably no longer tied by the agreement, allowing the next president to proceed with the burial option once the Energy Department solves a few remaining technical concerns.”

Or as noted arms control advocate Joe Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, put it in a [tweet](#), “There is a bright spot in the breakdown of the Russia plutonium deal: no need for the nuclear facility that’s costing US taxpayers billions.”

The only loser, ironically, stands to be the hawkish Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, who dropped his usual opposition to arms control to embrace the plutonium accord because the giant MOX facility would bring jobs to his state.

The downward spiral of U.S.-Russia relations is very real and very dangerous. But it’s nonetheless reassuring that President Putin found a way to express his displeasure with Washington that simultaneously signals to insiders his continued willingness to cooperate.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including [\*The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic\*](#) (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were [“Obama Flinches at Renouncing Nuke First Strike,”](#) [“Dangerous Denial of Global Warming,”](#) [“How Arms Sales Distort US Foreign Policy,”](#) [“The US Hand in the Syrian Mess”](#); and [“Hidden Origins of Syria’s Civil War.”](#)

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## Do We Really Want Nuclear War with Russia?

**Special Report:** The U.S. propaganda war against Russia is spinning out of control, rolling ever faster downhill with a dangerous momentum that threatens to drive the world into a nuclear showdown, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Through an endless barrage of ugly propaganda, the U.S. government and the mainstream American press have put the world on course for a potential nuclear showdown with Russia, an existential risk that has been undertaken cavalierly amid bizarre expressions of self-righteousness from Western institutions.

This extraordinarily dangerous moment reflects the insistence of the Establishment in Washington that it should continue to rule the world and that it will not broach the possibility of other nations asserting their own national interests even in their own neighborhoods.

Rather than adjust to a new multi-polar world, the powers-that-be in Washington have deployed a vast array of propaganda assets that are financed or otherwise encouraged to escalate an information war so aggressively that Russia is reading this onslaught of insults as the conditioning of the Western populations for a world war.

While that may not be the intention of President Obama, who in his recent United Nations address acknowledged the risks from imposing uni-polar order on the world, a powerful bureaucratic machinery is in place to advance U.S. propaganda goals. It is operating on a crazed auto-pilot hurtling toward destruction but beyond anyone's ability to turn it off.

This machinery consists not just of outlets and activists funded by U.S. tax dollars via the National Endowment for Democracy or the U.S. Agency for International Development or NATO's Strategic Communications Command, but like-minded "human rights" entities paid for by billionaire currency speculator George Soros or controlled by neoconservative ideologues who now run major U.S. newspapers, such as The Washington Post and The New York Times.

This propaganda apparatus now has so many specialized features that you get supposedly "progressive" and "anti-war" organizations promoting a major U.S. invasion of Syria under the guise of sweet-sounding policies like "no-fly zones" and "safe zones," the same euphemisms that were used as the gateway to bloody "regime change" wars in Iraq and Libya.

There exists what intelligence veterans call a Mighty Wurlitzer, an organ with so many keys and pedals that it's hard to know where all the sounds come from that make up the powerful harmony, all building to the same crescendo. But that crescendo may now be war with nuclear-armed Russia, which finds in all this demonizing the prelude to either a destabilization campaign aimed at "regime change" in Moscow or outright war.

Yet, the West can't seem to muster the sanity or the honesty to begin toning down or even showing skepticism toward the escalating charges aimed at Russia. We saw similar patterns in the run-up to war in Iraq in 2002-2003 and in justifying the ouster, torture and murder of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Western propaganda also has enveloped the conflict in Syria to such an extent that the American people don't understand that the U.S. government and its

regional “allies” have been supporting and arming jihadist groups fighting under the command of Al Qaeda and even the Islamic State. The propaganda has focused on demonizing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while downplaying or ignoring the real nature of the “moderate” opposition.

### **Taking Aim at Putin**

In many ways, the Western insistence on “regime change” in Syria ties in directly to the extraordinary escalation of that strategy to seek “regime change” in Russia. In August-September 2013, America’s neocons and liberal war hawks were salivating over the prospect of a U.S. military bombing campaign to devastate Assad’s army as punishment for his alleged role in a sarin gas attack outside Damascus.

Although the intelligence was weak regarding Assad’s “guilt” – and subsequent evidence has pointed to a likely provocation by radical jihadists using home-made sarin and a jerry-rigged rocket – Official Washington was rubbing its hands at the prospect of a retaliatory bombing operation that would punish Assad and advance the cause of “regime change.”

At the last minute, however, President Obama listened to the doubts from his intelligence advisers and rejected what he later called the Washington “playbook” of a military response to a complex problem. To the annoyance of Washington insiders, Obama then collaborated with President Putin in a diplomatic settlement in which Syria surrendered all its chemical weapons while still denying any role in the sarin attack. Obama was accused of weakness for not “enforcing his red line” against chemical weapons use.

The despair over Obama’s failure to bomb the Syrian government and open the path for a long-desired “regime change” in Damascus led to a search for other villains, the most obvious one being Putin, who then became the focus of neocon determination to make him share their pain and disappointment.

National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman took to the op-ed page of The Washington Post in late September 2013 to declare that Ukraine was now “the biggest prize” and represented an important interim step toward eventually toppling Putin in Russia.

Gershman, who is essentially a neocon paymaster dispensing \$100 million a year in U.S. taxpayers’ money to activists, journalists and various other operatives, wrote: “Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

Within weeks, U.S. neocons – including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain – were encouraging right-wing



Ukrainian nationalists to overthrow Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich, a coup accomplished on Feb. 22, 2014, touching off a civil war between Ukraine's west and east.

As part of that Western propaganda barrage, the Ukraine coup ousting the elected president was hailed as a victory for "democracy" and Yanukovich's supporters in the south and east who resisted this imposition of illegitimate authority in Kiev became the target of a U.S.-backed "Anti-Terrorism Operation" or ATO.

Led by The New York Times and The Washington Post, the Western media fell in line behind the preferred narrative that there was "no coup," that there were "no neo-Nazis" spearheading the non-coup (or maybe just a few), that the "Heavenly Hundred" who died in the putsch against Yanukovich had given their lives for Ukraine's "freedom" even though some of the "heavenly" inconveniently were neo-Nazi street fighters, part of a paramilitary force that had killed some 16 police officers.

### **Killing 'Terrorists'**

Given the West's pro-coup propaganda themes, it became necessary to justify the thousands of eastern Ukrainians slaughtered in the ATO as the killing of "terrorists" or Russian "stooges," getting what they deserved. The 96 percent vote in Crimea's referendum to reunify with Russia had to be a "sham" since the West's narrative held that the Ukrainian people were thrilled with the putsch, so the Crimeans must have voted that way at Russian gunpoint.

The explanation of Crimea's secession from Ukraine was that Russia "invaded" and "annexed" Crimea although there were no images of an invasion (no tanks crossing Crimea's borders, no amphibious landings, no paratroopers descending from the sky – because Russian troops were already in Crimea as part of a basing agreement and helped protect Crimea's inhabitants so they could hold their vote which did represent their desires).

Because the Western propaganda insisted that the new authorities in Kiev were wearing white hats, the Russians had to be fitted with black hats. Every bad thing that happened was automatically Putin's fault. So, when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, the West's propaganda machinery whirred into action, blaming Russia for supposedly giving the ethnic Russian rebels powerful Buk anti-aircraft missiles.

The propaganda momentum was so strong by then that there was no Western support for Russia's request for a United Nations investigation. Instead the inquiry was largely turned over to the torture-implicated Ukrainian intelligence service, the SBU, upon which the Dutch and Australians, the other two principal members,

became increasingly dependent (by their own admissions). Belgium and Malaysia played lesser roles.

The Joint Investigation Committee (JIT) considered no serious alternatives to the Russians and the rebels being responsible. For instance, when the JIT released its “report” on Sept. 28, 2016, there was no explanation offered for why Dutch intelligence (i.e. NATO intelligence) had concluded that the only missile systems in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, capable of shooting down MH-17 were controlled by the Ukrainian military. The JIT “report” was silent about where those Ukrainian Buk missile systems were at the time of the shoot-down.

It’s also a bit of a misnomer to describe the JIT’s findings as a “report” since they were really expressed in a series of videos featuring computer-generated graphics supposedly showing a Russian Buk crew driving around Ukraine, mixed in with a few photos from social media of a Buk convoy.

Key to the JIT’s findings were phone intercepts provided by the SBU and assembled to reinforce the impression of Russian guilt. The problem, however, was that except for one intercept in which someone said he’d like to have Buds, the word “Buk” is not mentioned; nor the word “missiles”; nor the word “aircraft”; nor any discussion about shooting down a plane. That was all supposition with an authoritative narrator filling in the gaps.

### **Ignoring Contrary Evidence**

The JIT also ignored evidence that contradicted its conclusions, such as other intercepts reporting that a Ukrainian convoy had penetrated close to the eastern city of Luhansk. The significance of that revelation is that it confirms a point that has been largely ignored, that the Ukrainian military could move almost at will across “rebel-controlled territory.” The notion that the Ukrainian civil war was like World War I with fixed trench lines was simply a fallacy.

The JIT also had to impose a bizarre route for the Russian Buk battery to follow on its way to the supposed firing location south of the remote eastern town of Snizhne. Because the “social media” photos show the Buk convoy heading east toward Russia, not west from Russia, the JIT had to map out a journey that ignored a simple, direct and discreet route from the Russian border to Snizhne in favor of a trip more than twice as long roaming around eastern Ukraine all the way to Donetsk before turning eastward past a number of heavily populated areas where the Buk convoy, supposedly on a highly secret mission, could be photographed.

The alleged firing location also conflicts with the alleged reason for the

Russians taking the extraordinary risk of introducing a Buk system – that it was needed to defend rebel soldiers then fighting mostly in the north against Ukrainian troops and aircraft. For that purpose, the positioning of a Buk battery far to the southeast makes little sense, nor does the decision for a Russian Buk crew to shoot down a commercial airliner flying at 33,000 feet.

JIT's account of the post-crash exfiltration of the Buk convoy back to Russia also is curious, since again the shortest, easiest and least populated route was ignored in favor of one that went far to the north past Luhansk, the alleged site of the supposed "getaway" video (although the supposed location of the "getaway" video was misplaced by Western media groups trying to pin the blame on Russia).

The confirmed parts of the Buk convoy's route, i.e., along highways east of Donetsk, would fit better with a scenario that, I'm told, received serious consideration from U.S. intelligence analysts, that a Ukrainian Buk system under the control of a rogue military unit loyal to a fiercely anti-Putin oligarch traveled east into what was considered "rebel-controlled territory" to fire on what was hoped to be Putin's official plane returning from a state visit to South America, i.e. to kill Putin.

A source briefed by these analysts said the missile was fired despite the unit's doubt that the plane was Putin's. Although it's unclear to me exactly what the U.S. intelligence consensus ultimately turned out to be on MH-17 (since I have been refused official updates), there would be logic in a Ukrainian hardliner staging such an audacious missile attack deep inside "rebel territory," since any assassination of Putin would have to be explained as an accidental attack by his own allies, i.e., the ultimate case of Putin being hoisted on his own petard.

To evaluate which scenario makes more sense – that the Russians dispatched a Buk missile battery on a wild ride across eastern Ukraine or that a Ukrainian Buk battery penetrated into supposedly rebel-controlled territory with the intent of attacking a civilian plane (although not MH-17) – it would be crucial to have an explanation of where the Ukrainian Buk batteries were located on July 17, 2014.

### **Silence on Dutch Intelligence**

Some of the Russia-did-it crowd have dismissed claims that Ukrainian Buk systems were in the area as Russian disinformation, but their presence was confirmed by a report from the Dutch intelligence service, MIVD, relying on NATO information to explain why commercial airliners were still being allowed over the war zone.

The MIVD's explanation was that the only anti-aircraft missiles that could hit a

plane at 33,000 feet were controlled by Ukraine, which was presumed to have no interest in attacking commercial aircraft, and that the rebels lacked any missile system that could reach that high. Clearly, there was an intelligence failure because either some Ukrainian Buk operators did have an intent to strike a civilian plane or the rebels did have a Buk system in the area.

If the JIT were operating objectively, it would have included something about this intelligence failure, either by showing that it had investigated the possibility that Ukrainian Buk missiles were used by a rogue unit or explaining how Western intelligence could have missed Russia's introduction of a Buk system into eastern Ukraine.

Instead, there was just this video that includes cryptic phone intercepts, assertions about unnamed witnesses and computer-generated graphics "showing" the movement of a Russian Buk convoy along darkened roads in Ukraine.

Despite the unusual nature of this "indictment," it was widely accepted in Western media as the final proof of Russian perfidy. The evidence was called "overwhelming" and "conclusive."

Rather than treating the video report as a prosecutor's brief – a set of allegations yet to be proved – Western journalists accepted it as flat fact, much as they did Secretary of State Colin Powell's similar presentation on Feb. 5, 2003, "proving" that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. (Powell also used computer-generated images – of Iraq's "mobile chemical weapons labs" that, in reality, didn't exist.)

The day after the JIT video report was issued, The New York Times' lead editorial was headlined, "Mr. Putin's Outlaw State." It read:

"President Vladimir Putin is fast turning Russia into an outlaw nation. As one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, his country shares a special responsibility to uphold international law. Yet, his behavior in Ukraine and Syria violates not only the rules intended to promote peace instead of conflict, but also common human decency.

"This bitter truth was driven home twice on Wednesday [Sept. 28]. An investigative team led by the Netherlands concluded that the surface-to-air missile system that shot down a Malaysia Airlines plane over Ukraine in July 2014, killing 298 on board, was sent from Russia to Russian-backed separatists and returned to Russia the same night. ...

"Russia has tried hard to pin the blame for the airline crash on Ukraine. But the new report, produced by prosecutors from the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine, confirms earlier findings. It uses strict

standards of evidence and meticulously documents not only the deployment of the Russian missile system that caused the disaster but also Moscow's continuing cover-up. ...

"President Obama has long refused to approve direct military intervention in Syria. And Mr. Putin may be assuming that Mr. Obama is unlikely to confront Russia in his final months and with an American election season in full swing. But with the rebel stronghold in Aleppo under threat of falling to the government, administration officials said that such a response is again under consideration.

"Mr. Putin fancies himself a man on a mission to restore Russia to greatness. Russia could indeed be a great force for good. Yet his unconscionable behavior – butchering civilians in Syria and Ukraine, annexing Crimea, computer-hacking American government agencies, crushing dissent at home – suggests that the furthest thing from his mind is becoming a constructive partner in the search for peace."

### **Rich Irony**

Granted, there is some rich irony in a major U.S. newspaper, which helped justify illegal aggression against Iraq with false reporting about Iraq buying aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges, pontificating about international law.

Indeed, the very idea that any serious person in the United States would lecture other countries about international law would be laughable if the hypocrisy were not delivered in such a serious set of circumstances. For decades now, the United States has been a law unto itself, deciding which countries should be bombed and who should be assassinated.

President Obama himself has acknowledged authorizing military strikes in seven countries during his presidency and many of those attacks were done outside international law. Indeed, the Times editorial appears to urge Obama to launch illegal military strikes against the Syrian government and, not surprisingly, doesn't mention the U.S. airstrike that killed some 62 Syrian government soldiers just last month, delivering a death blow to the partial ceasefire.

Instead, you get a medley of the Times' greatest anti-Russian propaganda hits while ignoring the U.S. role in destabilizing and overthrowing Ukraine's elected government in favor of a harshly anti-Russian nationalist regime that then began slaughtering thousands of ethnic Russians who resisted the coup.

Nor does the Times mention that Russia is operating inside Syria by invitation of the sovereign government, while the U.S. has no such authority. And the Times leaves out how the U.S. government and its allies have covertly armed and funded

jihadist rebels who have inflicted many of the hundreds of thousands of dead in Syria. Not everyone, including Syrian soldiers, was killed by Assad and the Russians, although that's the impression the Times leaves.

A more nuanced account would reflect this murky reality in which sophisticated U.S. weapons, such as TOW missiles, have ended up in the possession of Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate and its jihadist allies. It would acknowledge that many sides are at fault for these tragedies in Syria and Ukraine – not to mention all the bloodshed that has followed the U.S.-led and U.S.-enabled wars that have torn apart the Middle East over the past decade and a half.

The Times might also admit that Putin was helpful in resolving the 2013 sarin crisis in Syria and achieving a breakthrough on the Iran nuclear talks in 2014. But that would not fit the propaganda need to demonize Putin and ready the American people for another, even more terrifying “regime change,” this time in Moscow.

What we can now expect are a series of legal actions brought against Russia in connection with the MH-17 case and other controversies. The goal will be to further demonize Putin and to destabilize Russia, a process already underway with economic sanctions that have helped throw Russia's economy into recession.

The neocon plan is to ratchet up tensions and pain so Putin's elected government will somehow collapse with the neocons hoping that some U.S. lackey will take over and allow another round of “shock therapy,” i.e. the plunder of Russia's resources to the benefit of a few favored oligarchs and their American consultants.

However, given the dreadful experience that the average Russian faced from the earlier round of “shock therapy” in the 1990s – including a stunning decline in life expectancy – the more likely outcome from even a successful neocon scheme of “regime change” would be the emergence of a much more hard-line Russian nationalist than Putin.

Whereas Putin is a calculating and rational leader, the guy who follows him might well be an ideologue ready to use nuclear weapons to protect Mother Russia's honor. After all, it's not as if one of these neocon “regime change” calculations has ever gone wrong before.

Yet, whichever way things go, Official Washington – and its complicit mainstream media – now appear determined to push Russia into a corner with military encroachments from NATO on Russia's borders and with criminal accusations before biased international “investigations.” Any misstep in this dangerous game could quickly end life as we know it.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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## Clinton Shows a Dovish Side on Nukes

**Exclusive:** Hillary Clinton, who has carved out [a reputation as a war hawk](#), has quietly voiced opposition to a \$1 trillion plan to modernize America's nuclear arsenal, including a nuke-tipped cruise missile, notes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Whoever is hacking Hillary Clinton's emails just did her a big favor, at least with anti-war critics: One newly released message reveals her skepticism about wasteful and dangerous spending on new nuclear weapons in the name of "modernization." It's a refreshing change from her usual hawkish stand on national security.

An email [leaked](#) to the conservative *Washington Free Beacon* includes an audio file of Clinton's remarks at a private fundraiser in McLean, Virginia, last February. Asked by a former senior Pentagon official about her willingness to cancel plans for a next-generation nuclear cruise missile program, she replied, "I certainly would be inclined to do that."

"The last thing we need are sophisticated cruise missiles that are nuclear armed," Clinton added.

Current Air Force plans call for spending upward of \$30 billion on the Long Range Stand-Off (LRSO) missile program to acquire 1,000 such weapons. The Air Force [says](#) it will begin awarding contracts as early as next summer for the stealthy missiles, which will be launched from bombers more than 2,000 kilometers from their targets.

The LRSO program, in turn, is part of the Obama administration's grandiose [plan](#) to spend more than \$1 trillion over the next three decades on new land, sea, and air-launched nuclear weapons. That plan calls for building 12 new nuclear-armed submarines, 100 long-range strategic bombers armed with a new class of bombs, and at least 400 silo-based ballistic missiles, in addition to the new cruise missiles.

While nearly every aspect of the administration's plan has garnered criticism,

including the sheer improbability of finding enough funds to pay for such an extravagant “all of the above” program, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter delivered a resounding defense during a recent speech at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, home to Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, B-52 bombers, and several hundred nuclear-armed cruise missiles.

Offering more rhetoric than substance, Carter insisted that failure to rebuild every leg of America’s nuclear force “would mean losing confidence in our ability to deter, which we can’t afford in today’s volatile security environment.”

### **Senators Object**

Carter’s speech was a belated reply to a letter from 10 prominent progressive senators, including Bernie Sanders, asking President Obama to reconsider his nuclear modernization program. “In particular,” they wrote, echoing Clinton’s own concerns, “we urge you to cancel plans to spend at least \$20 billion on a new nuclear air-launched cruise missile, the Long Range Standoff weapon, which would provide an unnecessary capability that could increase the risk of nuclear war.”

Experts in the arms control community backed them up. “The Air Force does not need a costly new and more capable nuclear-armed cruise missile,” said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, “especially if the new long-range penetrating bomber is truly penetrating. We are seeing a return to the days of nuclear excess and overkill.”

Even more authoritative criticism of the LRSO program came from former Secretary of Defense William Perry, who guided development of the current generation of air-launched cruise missiles, and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Andy Weber, who oversaw all nuclear weapons programs in the Obama administration from 2009 to 2014.

They warned that the missiles are not just a waste of money, but could actually put our national security at risk.

“Because they can be launched without warning and come in both nuclear and conventional variants, cruise missiles are a uniquely destabilizing type of weapon,” Perry and Weber observed. Canceling the new cruise missile program, they declared, “would not diminish the formidable U.S. nuclear deterrent in the least” and “could lay the foundation for a global ban on these dangerous weapons.”

British Defense Secretary and Conservative Party politician Philip Hammond offered a similar view in 2013: “A cruise-based deterrent would carry



significant risk of miscalculation and unintended escalation. At the point of firing, other states could have no way of knowing whether we had launched a conventional cruise missile or one with a nuclear warhead. Such uncertainty could risk triggering a nuclear war at a time of tension. So, the cruise option would carry enormous financial, technical and strategic risk.”

### **Nuclear War ‘Flexibility’**

To such criticisms, the Pentagon has argued chillingly that the new cruise missiles will give the United States greater “flexibility” in fighting a nuclear war – contrary to President Reagan’s common-sense dictum that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

Clinton has made few firm pledges about nuclear weapons policy, but she told supporters at the private fundraiser that “This is going to be a big issue. It’s not just the nuclear-tipped cruise missile. There’s a lot of other money we’re talking about to go into refurbishing and modernization.”

That event was not the first or only place she has raised questions about the current direction of America’s nuclear policy. At a town hall meeting in September 2015, Clinton expressed admiration for President Dwight Eisenhower’s famous warning about the military-industrial complex and ridiculed the idea of spending a trillion dollars on new nuclear programs.

This January, in Iowa, Clinton told an activist that the Obama administration’s current plan for nuclear modernization “doesn’t make sense to me.”

Clinton also takes great pride in her role in negotiating a 2011 nuclear agreement with Russia, which limited the number of strategic nuclear warheads that each side can deploy.

To be sure, history gives little reason for optimism that Clinton would follow through as president on her concerns.

President Obama’s transformation from an eloquent advocate of a nuclear-free world to a supporter of unprecedented nuclear spending suggests that the military-industrial complex remains a powerful force.

Still, it’s encouraging to know that Clinton isn’t a hard-wired hawk, and that at least a few generals and defense lobbyists may be losing sleep over the uncertain future of their prized weapons systems.

**Jonathan Marshall** is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including [The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic](#) (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles

for Consortiumnews were "[Obama Flinches at Renouncing Nuke First Strike](#)," "[Dangerous Denial of Global Warming](#)," "[How Arms Sales Distort US Foreign Policy](#)," "[The US Hand in the Syrian Mess](#)"; and "[Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War](#)."

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## Russia-Baiting and Risks of Nuclear War

**Exclusive:** The propaganda war on Russia is spinning out of control with a biased investigation blaming Moscow for the MH-17 tragedy and angry exchanges over Syria, raising the risks of nuclear war, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

As U.S. and Russian officials trade barbed threats and as diplomacy on Syria is "on the verge" of extinction, it is tempting to view the ongoing propaganda exchange over who shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014 as a side-show. That would be a huge mistake – easily made by President Obama's wet-behind-the-ears sophomoric advisers who seem to know very little of the history of U.S.-Russia relations and appear smug in their ignorance.

Adult input is sorely needed. There are advantages to having some hands-on experience, and having watched how propaganda wars can easily escalate to military confrontation. In [a Sept. 28 interview](#) with *Sputnik Radio*, I addressed some serious implications of the decision by the U.S. and two of its European vassal states (the Netherlands and Ukraine) to stoke tensions with Russia still higher by blaming it for the downing of MH-17.

In short, there is considerable risk that the Russians may see this particular propaganda offensive (which "justified" the European Union's economic sanctions in 2014), together with NATO's saber rattling in central Europe, as steps toward war. In fact, there is troubling precedent for precisely that.

A very similar set of circumstances existed 33 years ago after the Soviets did shoot down Korean Airlines Flight 007 on Sept. 1, 1983, when it strayed over sensitive military targets inside the Soviet Union and the KAL-007 pilots failed to respond to repeated warnings. After the tragic reality became obvious, the Soviets acknowledged that they had downed the plane but said they did not know it was a passenger plane.

However, 1983 was another time of high tensions between the two superpowers and President Ronald Reagan wanted to paint the Soviets in the darkest of hues. So, his administration set out to sell the storyline that the Soviets had willfully

murdered the 269 passengers and crew.

U.S. government propagandists and their media stenographers laid on all the *Sturm und Drang* they could summon to promote the lie that the Soviets knew KAL-007 was a civilian passenger plane before they shot it down. As Newsweek's headline declared, "Murder in the Sky."

Exploitation of the tragedy yielded a steep rise in tensions, and almost led to a nuclear exchange just two months later. There is an important lesson, now three decades later, as Western governments and the mainstream media manufacture more endless fear and hatred of Russia.

### **The Dutch/Ukrainian Follies**

On Wednesday, new "evidence" blaming Russia for the downing of MH-17 over eastern Ukraine was made public – brought out of the oven, as it were, at a Dutch Maid bakery employing Ukrainian confectioners. A bite into the evidence and it immediately dissolves like refined sugar – and leaves an unpleasant artificial taste in the mouth.

The Dutch-Ukrainian charade played by the "Joint Investigation Team," on which Belgium, Australia and Malaysia also have members, is an insult to the relatives and friends of the 298 human beings killed in the shoot-down. Understandably, those relatives and friends long for truth and accountability, and they deserve it.

Yet, as happened in 1983 with the credulous acceptance of the Reagan administration's version of the KAL-007 case, the mainstream Western media has embraced the JIT's findings as "conclusive" and the evidence as "overwhelming." But it is in reality extraordinarily thin, essentially a case of deciding immediately after the event that the Russians were to be blamed and spending more than two years assembling snippets of intercepted conversations (from 150,000 provided by the Ukrainian intelligence service) that could be stitched together to create an impression of guilt.

In the slick video, which serves as the JIT's investigative "report," the intercepted voices don't say anything about Russian Buk missiles actually being deployed inside Ukraine or shooting down a plane or the need to get the Buk missiles out of Ukraine afterwards. One voice early on says he'd like to have some Buks but – after that – Buks aren't mentioned and everything in the video is supposition. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Troubling Gaps in MH-17 Report.](#)"]

There's also no explanation as to why the Russians would have taken a bizarrely circuitous route when a much more direct and discreet course was available. The JIT's embrace of that strange itinerary was made necessary by the fact that the

only “social media” images of a Buk system traveling on July 17, 2014, before the MH-17 shoot-down, show the Buks heading east toward Russia, not west from Russia. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Official and Implausible MH-17 Scenario.”](#)]

In other words, to make the storyline fit with the available images, the JIT had to take the alleged Russian-Buk convoy on a ridiculous trip far out of the way so it could be photographed in Donetsk before doubling back toward the alleged firing site near Snizhne, which could have been reached easily from the Russian border without the extensive detour through heavily populated areas.

### **Ignoring Inconvenient Evidence**

The JIT also had to ignore its own evidence that on the night of July 16-17, 2014, Ukrainian military convoys were pressing deep inside what has been called “rebel-controlled territory.” The obvious implication is that if a Ukrainian convoy could move to within a few miles of Luhansk, as one of the intercepts described, a Ukrainian Buk convoy could have traveled to the east as well.

And, the JIT’s presumed motive for the Russians taking the extraordinary decision of supplying a Buk battery to the rebels – that it was needed to shoot down Ukrainian warplanes attacking rebels on the front lines – doesn’t fit with the placement of a Buk system on farmland south of Snizhne, far from the frontlines. Indeed, very little about the JIT’s case makes sense.

It also appears that the JIT devoted no effort to examining other plausible scenarios regarding who might have shot down MH-17. The JIT video report makes no reference to the several Ukrainian Buk systems that were operating in eastern Ukraine on the day that MH-17 was shot down.

The Dutch intelligence service MIVD, relying on NATO’s intelligence capabilities, reported earlier that the only anti-aircraft-missile systems in the area on July 17, 2014, capable of shooting down MH-17 were under the control of the Ukrainian military.

But the JIT’s report offered no explanation of where those Ukrainian Buk systems were located or whether Ukraine had accounted for all the Buk missiles in those batteries. The JIT’s blinders can be explained by the fact that it was coordinating with (and relying on) Ukraine’s SBU intelligence agency, which has among its responsibilities the protection of Ukrainian government secrets.

The shocking reality about the JIT is that one of the major suspects for having shot down MH-17, Ukraine, was pretty much running the inquiry.

Yet, since the JIT’s accusations on Wednesday, the West’s mainstream media has

put on its own blinders so as not to notice the gaps and inconsistencies in the case. But what should be apparent to anyone without blinders is that the JIT set its sights on blaming the Russians for the MH-17 shoot-down in 2014 and nothing was going to get in the way of that conclusion.

That predetermined conclusion began with Secretary of State John Kerry's rush to judgment, just three days after the shoot-down, putting the blame on the Russians. It then took the JIT more than two years to scrape together enough "evidence" to "confirm" Kerry's findings.

### **The Near-Nuclear Clash**

As a longtime CIA analyst covering the Soviet Union, the MH-17 case immediately brought to my mind the exploitation of the KAL-007 tragedy for propaganda purposes in 1983. After KAL-007 went down, the U.S. propaganda machinery, led by the U.S. Information Agency, went into high gear, even doctoring evidence for a U.N. Security Council meeting to "prove" the Soviets *knew* KAL-007 was a civilian aircraft and still shot it down deliberately.

"Barbaric" was the word used then – and in recent days U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power has applied that epithet again to the leaders in the Kremlin.

The same sort of anti-Russian hysteria is in play today as it was in 1983. And we now know based on declassified records that the extreme vilification of Moscow back then led Soviet leaders to believe that President Reagan was preparing for a nuclear war, a conflict that almost got started because of the harsh propaganda, combined with unprecedented military exercises and other provocations.

Last year, a former CIA colleague and senior manager of Soviet analysis, Mel Goodman, wrote about the "war scare" in the Kremlin in the fall of 1983, and asked if history may be repeating itself. Goodman personally helped persuade Reagan to ratchet down the tension, but it's less clear if any adult remains who could tell President Obama to do the same now.

Goodman wrote: "1983 was the most dangerous year in the Soviet-American Cold War confrontation since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. President Reagan declared a political and military campaign against the 'evil empire' ... Soviet leaders believed that the 'correlation of world forces,' Soviet terminology for the international balance, was unfavorable to Moscow and that the U.S. government was in the hands of a dangerous anti-Soviet crowd.

"In response to Reagan's references to the Soviet Union as the 'focus of evil in the world' ... the new Soviet general secretary, Yuri Andropov, a former KGB

chief, suggested that Reagan was insane and a liar ... Andropov would take no chances. Soviet leaders believed the Reagan administration was using a mobilization exercise called 'Able Archer' in November 1983 to prepare a nuclear surprise attack. The KGB instituted a sensitive collection effort to determine if the United States was planning such an attack. ...

"In addition to the Able Archer mobilization exercise that alarmed the Kremlin, the Reagan administration authorized unusually aggressive military exercises near the Soviet border that, in some cases, violated Soviet territorial sovereignty. The Pentagon's risky measures included ... naval exercises in wartime approaches to the USSR where U.S. warships had previously not entered. Additional secret operations simulated surprise naval attacks on Soviet targets."

### **Reining in Reagan**

Goodman continued: "One of the great similarities between Russia and the United States was that both sides feared surprise attack. The United States suffered psychologically from the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor; it has still not recovered from 9/11. Yet, the United States has never appreciated that Moscow has similar fears due to Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion in the same year as Pearl Harbor, a far greater nightmare.

"Russia's fear of surprise attack was accentuated in 1983, when the United States deployed the Army's Pershing-II missile and land-based cruise missiles in West Europe as a counter to the Soviet Union's SS-20 missiles. The SS-20 was not a 'strategic' weapon because of a limited range (3,000 miles) well short of the United States. The P-II, however, could not only reach the Soviet Union, but it could destroy Moscow's command and control systems with incredible accuracy. Since the Soviets would have limited warning time – less than five minutes – the P-II was viewed as a first-strike weapon that could destroy the Soviet early warning system.

"In addition to the huge strategic advantage from the deployment of P-II and numerous cruise missiles, the U.S. deployment of the MX missile and the D-5 Trident submarine placed the Soviets in an inferior position with regard to strategic modernization. Overall, the United States held a huge strategic advantage in political, economic, and military policy.

"The Pentagon's psychological warfare program to intimidate the Kremlin, including dangerous probes of Soviet borders by the Navy and Air Force, was unknown to CIA analysts. Thus, the CIA was at a disadvantage in trying to analyze the war scare because the Pentagon refused to share information on military maneuvers and weapons deployments.

“In 1983, the CIA had no idea that the annual Able Archer exercise would be conducted in a provocative fashion with high-level participation. The exercise was a test of U.S. command and communications procedures, including procedures for the release and use of nuclear weapons in case of war.”

Goodman continued: “I believed that Soviet fears were genuine and Reagan’s national security advisor, Robert McFarlane, was even known to remark, ‘We got their attention’ but ‘maybe we overdid it.’ ... [CIA Director William] Casey took our analysis to the White House, and Reagan made sure that the exercises were toned down.

“For the first time, the Able Archer exercise was going to include President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and Secretary of Defense Weinberger, but when the White House understood the extent of Soviet anxiety regarding U.S. intentions, the major principals bowed out. ... Soviet military doctrine had long held that a possible U.S. *modus operandi* for launching an attack on the USSR would be to convert an exercise into the real thing.

“Three decades later, history seems to be repeating itself. Washington and Moscow are once again exchanging ugly broadsides over the confrontations in Ukraine and Syria. The Russian-American arms control and disarmament dialogue has been pushed to the background, and the possibilities of superpower conflict into the foreground. Pentagon briefers are using the language of the Cold War in their congressional briefings, referring to Putin’s Russia as an ‘existential threat.’”

(END of excerpts from Mel Goodman’s account of “Able Archer.”)

### **The KAL-007 Prequel**

As I wrote after the MH-17 shoot-down in 2014:

The death of all 298 people onboard the Malaysia Airline flight, going from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, will surely provide plenty of fuel for the already roaring anti-Russian propaganda machine. Still, the U.S. press might pause to recall how it’s been manipulated by the U.S. government in the past, including three decades ago by the Reagan administration twisting the facts of the KAL-007 tragedy.

In that case, a Soviet fighter jet shot down a Korean Air Line plane on Sept. 1, 1983, after it strayed hundreds of miles off course and penetrated some of the Soviet Union’s most sensitive airspace over military facilities in Kamchatka and Sakhalin Island.

Over Sakhalin, KAL-007 was finally intercepted by a Soviet Sukhoi-15 fighter.

The Soviet pilot tried to signal the plane to land, but the KAL pilots did not respond to the repeated warnings. Amid confusion about the plane's identity – a U.S. spy plane had been in the vicinity hours earlier – Soviet ground control ordered the pilot to fire. He did, blasting the plane out of the sky and killing all 269 people on board.

The Soviets soon realized they had made a horrendous mistake. U.S. intelligence also knew from sensitive intercepts that the tragedy had resulted from a blunder, not from a willful act of murder (much as on July 3, 1988, the USS Vincennes fired a missile that brought down an Iranian civilian airliner in the Persian Gulf, killing 290 people, an act which President Ronald Reagan explained as an “understandable accident”).

But a Soviet admission of a tragic blunder regarding KAL-007 wasn't good enough for the Reagan administration, which saw the incident as a propaganda windfall. At the time, the felt imperative in Washington was to blacken the Soviet Union in the cause of Cold War propaganda and to escalate tensions with Moscow.

To make the blackest case against Moscow, the Reagan administration suppressed exculpatory evidence from the U.S. electronic intercepts. The U.S. mantra became “the deliberate downing of a civilian passenger plane.” Newsweek ran a cover emblazoned with the headline “Murder in the Sky.”

“The Reagan administration's spin machine began cranking up,” wrote Alvin A. Snyder, then-director of the U.S. Information Agency's television and film division, in his 1995 book, *Warriors of Disinformation*.

USIA Director Charles Z. Wick “ordered his top agency aides to form a special task force to devise ways of playing the story overseas. The objective, quite simply, was to heap as much abuse on the Soviet Union as possible,” Snyder recalled.

Snyder noted that “the American media swallowed the U.S. government line without reservation.” Said the venerable Ted Koppel on the ABC News ‘Nightline’ program: ‘This has been one of those occasions when there is very little difference between what is churned out by the U.S. government propaganda organs and by the commercial broadcasting networks.’”

On Sept. 6, 1983, the Reagan administration went so far as to present a doctored transcript of the intercepts to the United Nations Security Council. ...

“The tape was supposed to run 50 minutes,” Snyder said about the recorded Soviet intercepts. “But the tape segment we [at USIA] had ran only eight minutes and 32 seconds. ... ‘Do I detect the fine hand of [Richard Nixon's secretary] Rosemary Woods here?’ I [Snyder] asked sarcastically.’”



But Snyder had a job to do: producing the video that his superiors wanted. “The perception we wanted to convey was that the Soviet Union had cold-bloodedly carried out a *barbaric* act,” Snyder wrote.

### **Seeing the Whole Story**

Only a decade later, when Snyder saw the complete transcripts – including the portions that the Reagan administration had hidden – would he fully realize how many of the central elements of the U.S. presentation were false.

The Soviet fighter pilot apparently did believe he was pursuing a U.S. spy plane, according to the intercepts, and he was having trouble in the dark identifying the plane. At the instructions of Soviet ground controllers, the pilot had circled the KAL airliner and tilted his wings to force the aircraft down. The pilot said he fired warning shots, too. “This comment was also not on the tape we were provided,” Snyder wrote.

It was clear to Snyder that in the pursuit of its Cold War aims, the Reagan administration had presented false accusations to the United Nations, as well as to the people of the United States and the world. To Reagan’s people, the ends of smearing the Soviets had justified the means of falsifying the historical record.

In his book, Snyder acknowledged his role in the deception and drew an ironic lesson from the incident. The senior USIA official wrote, “The moral of the story is that all governments, including our own, lie when it suits their purposes. The key is to lie first.”

[End of my excerpt]

In 2016, as we deal with the West’s new hysteria regarding Russia – complete with rehashes of prior propaganda themes and military escalations – the pressing question is whether there are any adults left at senior levels of Official Washington who can rein in the madness before things spin entirely out of control.

Santayana famously noted, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” But the real danger now is that history won’t stop at repeating itself but will continue beyond, plunging over the nuclear precipice.

**Ray McGovern 27-year career as a CIA analyst included leading CIA’s Soviet Foreign Policy Branch. He later conducted morning briefings of President Reagan’s most senior national security advisers with the *President’s Daily Brief*. He now works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington.**

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# How US Hardliners Help Iran's Hardliners

U.S. neocons keep pounding the propaganda drum about Iran in line with Israel's regional desires but not helpful to American interests or even to the cause of moderating Iran's behavior, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The unrelenting urge among American politicians to keep punishing Iran – or more precisely, to be seen supporting steps with that objective – continues to work against sensible statecraft and U.S. interests in multiple respects. One of those respects concerns how measures taken by the United States affect political competition within Iran.

Here's the current background to questions of U.S. policy toward Iran. The most important development in recent years regarding such policy – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the formal name for the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear activity – has been in effect for over a year. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which does the detailed monitoring of the Iranian program, Iran is fully in compliance with its obligations under the agreement.

Those in the United States who have opposed any agreement with Iran all along continue to seek any possible basis for accusing Iran of violations. One of the most recent such accusations concerned some issues of implementation that opponents described as “secret exceptions” granted to Iran. They were in fact not that but rather were typical of the detailed questions that inevitably arise in implementation of any agreement this extensive.

A Joint Commission was created under the agreement precisely to resolve such questions, and it has successfully been doing exactly that. The principal real questions of adherence to the agreement involve whether the United States and the West have been fully living up to their obligations regarding sanctions relief and refraining from further steps to damage the Iranian economy.

Despite the record of Iranian compliance, the months since conclusion of the JCPOA have seen a stream of anti-Iran bills introduced in Congress. Examination of most of these bills yields little idea of how if they were to come into effect they would advance any U.S. interests pertinent to Iran, and little evidence of any thought that in this respect went into the writing of the bills. The bills instead seem to be vehicles for members to demonstrate, through their sponsorship or support of such legislation, their anti-Iran credentials.

Typical of these proposals is a recent amendment introduced by Rep. Ron DeSantis, R-Florida, that would require any issuer of securities, as it registers with the Securities and Exchange Commission, to declare in its registration statement whether it does business in Iran or with any entity organized under the laws of Iran. Although this may sound like an innocent requirement for information, existing law already requires such a disclosure by issuers of securities with regard to any business done with the government of Iran, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian central bank, the entire Iranian petroleum industry, and certain other Iranian individuals and entities subject to sanctions.

So the DeSantis amendment would only serve to impose the reporting requirement on those dealing with portions of the Iranian private sector that not only have no connection with the Iranian regime but also have given no reason to be sanctioned in the long history of U.S. sanctions legislation directed against Iran. This would discourage commerce with the very sectors in Iran that are most in favor of peaceful engagement with the rest of the world.

The legislation would be counterproductive with regard to any political and economic evolution in Iran in a direction favorable to U.S. interests. (The legislation also probably would violate the U.S. obligation under the JCPOA not to take any new steps to prevent Iran from realizing the economic benefits of sanctions relief.)

Another recent example of a backward approach to affecting political competition within Iran is an interview with Dennis Ross of the Washington Institute for New East Policy. Ross, operating squarely within the school of thought that sees nothing good coming out of any business with Tehran and who sees Iran only as an object for confrontation and punishment, focuses on Iran's conduct within the Middle East.

As usual with that topic and that school of thought, there are many general references to Iranian "aggression" without considering exactly what Iran is or is not doing in the region and why, say, Iranian assistance to an incumbent regime in Syria is any more "aggressive" than what other powers have been doing to stoke a rebellion and to try to overthrow the regime.

And Ross's attempt to square his position that Iran "cannot be a partner in the struggle against ISIS" with the fact that in Iraq, Iran is, just like the United States, not only supporting the incumbent regime but also actively opposing ISIS, seems to come down to an assertion that the Iranians are following narrow (undescribed) policies in Iraq that will leave a lot of angry Sunnis on their Western doorstep but evidently are too stupid to realize that is what they are doing.

For the present purpose note what Ross says about the connection between U.S. actions and political contests within the Iranian regime. He says we should try to decrease the influence of General Soleimani and the Revolutionary Guard, who favor a more “confrontational approach,” relative to the influence of president Rouhani, who favors more of a “normalizing approach.” So far so good.

But how is the United States supposed to affect that Iranian political balance? Ross says we should do it by being confrontational ourselves – by “applying pressure” that would “demonstrate the costs to Iran of Soleimani’s actions.” When asked what this means in practical terms, Ross mentions military contingency planning with Israel and the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

### **Stop Making No Sense!**

Let’s see if we have this straight. We supposedly are all agreed that we would like to see less influence in Tehran for hardliners such as those centered in the Revolutionary Guard. Those hardliners are the ones who, in debate within Iran, argue that doing peaceful business with the United States (as with the JCPOA) does not bring any benefits to Iran, that the United States is determined to use its military might and other power to harm Iran, that Washington will always be acting in cahoots with Iran’s regional rivals in Israel and the Gulf Arab states, and that Iran thus has to stand firm and tough against such predatory U.S. behavior in order to protect Iranian interests.

So acting in a way that *confirms* the hardliners’ narrative is supposed to *reduce* their influence in Tehran? The groundlessness of such an argument can be seen with some role reversal. Such confrontation from a foreign adversary tends to strengthen, rather than to weaken, hawkish and hardline sentiment in U.S. politics. It works pretty much the same way in Iranian politics.

The sort of illogicality voiced by Ross has some general roots in American exceptionalism and the notion that the United States should be able to push other states around but that other states don’t push the United States around. There is more to it than that, however, where Iran is involved, as suggested by comparing the Iranian case with other cases that offer some parallels. One worth looking at is Burma (a.k.a. Myanmar). President Obama announced this week that the United States is ready to lift economic sanctions on Burma, in light of political reforms there.

This decision is not an obvious call. The Burmese military, which maintained a harsh and closed dictatorship for many years, retains much political power. The former opposition leader and now de facto head of the civilian government, Aung San Suu Kyi, has made many concessions to the military and has become in

important respects a partner of the generals rather than a replacement of them. The treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, most conspicuously the Muslim Rohingya community, is still bad. Human rights organizations believe the sanctions are being lifted too soon.

The U.S. administration decided, however, that enough change has taken place in Burma to warrant change in U.S. policy toward Burma. At least as important, the administration determined that further economic and political change in a favorable direction in Burma would be more likely by opening up the country to normal commerce and relations than it would by keeping it isolated.

President Obama's Republican opponents in Congress have, on this issue, taken a constructive and balanced approach. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has had a strong interest in Burma, made remarks on the Senate floor that appropriately noted both the progress to date and the significant problems and challenges that remain.

That's a much different approach than McConnell and his colleagues take on Iran, and it is a difference in the approach itself and not just in the two countries involved. If they applied to Burma the same perspective they apply to Iran, what we would be hearing is that moderates in Burma don't matter, that it is nefarious hardliners who still run the show, that gross human rights violations continue, that any relief from sanctions would mean the military-dominated regime would have more resources to do bad things, and that Obama is making a big mistake by lifting sanctions.

Two explanations chiefly account for the difference. One is the objective of denying Mr. Obama any significant foreign policy achievement, consistent with Sen. McConnell's earlier declaration that the number one objective of his caucus was to deny the president a second term. The opening to Iran and the JCPOA constitute such a significant achievement; nothing the administration is doing on Burma is of comparable importance.

The other explanation is that continued isolation and punishment of Iran is part of a larger objective of the administration's opponents of taking sides in the Middle East, and in particular to take whatever side the Israeli government is on. Ross's mention of military contingency planning with Israel directed against Iran represents not so much a way to scare Iran about costs of General Soleimani's activities but instead the side-taking that underlies the impulse to keep Iran perpetually isolated and punished in the first place.

And the counterproductive effect of confirming the Iranian hardliners' narrative is not really counterproductive if the objective is to maintain Iran as a *bête noire* forever; if you want a *bête noire*, a regime in which hardliners dominate

is the best kind of bête noire to have.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

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## How Israel Stole the Bomb

**Exclusive:** When Israel launched a covert scheme to steal material and secrets to build a nuclear bomb, U.S. officials looked the other way and obstructed investigations, as described in a book reviewed by James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

In 1968, CIA Director Richard Helms was presented with a disturbing National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) stating that Israel had obtained atomic weapons, a dangerous development that occurred earlier than the CIA had anticipated.

It was particularly dangerous because just the year before, the Six Day War had marked the beginning of open hostilities between the Israelis and Arab nation states. To prevail, Israel had launched preemptive air attacks against Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq at the start of the conflict. Considering that violent backdrop, Helms immediately arranged a meeting with President Lyndon Johnson to inform him of this troubling milestone.

The man who had prepared the NIE and gave it to Helms was the CIA's chief science and technology officer, Carl Duckett. After Helms met with Johnson, the CIA Director told Duckett about the President's rather odd reaction. LBJ did not get upset, and he did not order an investigation into how it happened. Further, he did not tell Helms to let both the Defense Department and State Department know about it so they could establish intelligence inquiries or consider sanctions.

Instead, Johnson did the opposite. He told Helms to keep the news secret and specifically told the Director *not* to let the secretaries of State or Defense know about it.

Helms obeyed the orders of his Commander in Chief, but he decided to talk to the FBI about how this development had occurred earlier than expected. Thus begins Roger Mattson's *Stealing the Atom Bomb: How Denial and Deception Armed Israel*, the riveting story of duplicity, betrayal, cover-ups and deceit.

As the book shows, the cover-ups and duplicity did not just come from Israel and its agents in America. The deceit also came from men inside the American government who, for whatever reasons, decided to cast a blind eye on what was really happening under their jurisdiction, even after they had been alerted to it.

What Mattson reveals is no less than an atomic heist – one that could have been prevented if men in high positions had done their duty.

### **Highly Enriched Uranium**

After Johnson told Helms not to tell State or Defense, the CIA Director called Attorney General Ramsey Clark, because what made this news even more ominous – and a potential crime – was what the CIA had discovered when it conducted a chemical test around the Israeli nuclear reactor at Dimona, in the Negev desert.

Duckett had concluded that Israel had something that they should not have possessed at that time: HEU, or highly enriched uranium, which could only be produced by one of the five major powers that already had nuclear weapons.

But the test had also revealed characteristics that showed the material had originated in the United States. (Mattson, p. 97) Specifically, the HEU came from Portsmouth, Ohio and then was further processed at a plant in Apollo, Pennsylvania.

The importance of this information was that the HEU was processed to such a degree – well over 90 percent U 235 – that it was classified as weapons grade uranium. The technical term for it is the acronym SNM, or Special Nuclear Material, meaning that it is fissile: it can easily be split with neutrons. Although the Portsmouth plant is shut down today, beginning in 1956 it did produce weapons-grade uranium.

It was in Apollo, Pennsylvania, that the trail of the SNM and the crime of its diversion becomes exceedingly suspect. The plant that did the further processing of HEU, and the ultimate shipping, was named Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corporation, or NUMEC, and there were a number of reasons why suspicion had centered on NUMEC even before Helms called Clark.

First, NUMEC had a rather unreliable record when it came to keeping track of HEU and other materials that had been given to it through the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The way the system worked is that the particular company would forward its business requests – from either private or governmental agencies – to the AEC. The AEC would then estimate how much nuclear material NUMEC would need to fulfill the contract. If a company was using up more material than the AEC properly estimated, that company would be fined quite a lot of money. If the

shortages persisted, the AEC and the FBI could then open up an investigation.

With CIA's discoveries, the possibility presented itself that a diversion of the nuclear material could be taking place. Either someone from the outside was stealing the material, or someone on the inside was embezzling it.

As Mattson shows with charts, graphs and testimony, NUMEC had an extraordinarily bad record in this regard. The company was eventually fined over \$2 million for missing materials, which, with inflation factored in, would be about \$15 million today. Mattson adduces that from 1959 to 1977, about 345 kilograms of HEU went missing from NUMEC, which translates to well over 700 pounds. (ibid, p. 286)

### **Explaining the Deficits**

In just one year, there was a loss of over 56 kilograms (or about 123 pounds). The company made up all sorts of rationales as to why this much HEU was missing, including losses during the mechanical processing. But as the author points out, there are two problems with this accounting.

First, no other plant in America reported losses of this magnitude. The AEC concluded that the losses at Apollo were more than double what they were at any other comparably sized atomic plant in the U.S. (ibid, p. 65)

Secondly, even if one chalks up some of the missing HEU to a processing loss, that still does not account for the entire record of NUMEC. Mattson figures that, even giving the company the benefit of the doubt, it still leaves about 200 pounds of missing HEU. (ibid, p. 67) That's enough for about six atomic bombs, larger than the one used on Hiroshima.

As Mattson reports, what makes NUMEC an even more intriguing suspect is the fact that the company had some legitimate business transactions with Israel, concerning the irradiation of plants. And these legitimate packages were sent at about the time the HEU went missing. Further, the inventory records at NUMEC were extremely sloppy and some appear to have been destroyed in direct violation of the AEC code, meaning NUMEC should have been cited, but wasn't. (ibid, p. 75)

That brings us to the founders of the NUMEC plant in Apollo, Pennsylvania, a small town of approximately 1,600 people that lies about 30 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. In 1955, the Apollo Steel Plant was purchased by David Lowenthal. Two years later, Lowenthal and Zalman Shapiro cooperated in forming NUMEC.

Shapiro, a very accomplished metallurgist who lived next door to Lowenthal, had been employed for a number of years at the nearby Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory, which supported the AEC's Office of Naval Reactors.



In May 1958, Lowenthal merged Apollo Steel with the San Toy Mining Company in Maine. San Toy then changed its name to Apollo Industries, with the main operating officers of this new corporation Morton Chatkin, Ivan Novick and Lowenthal. (ibid, p. 43)

The board comprised these three men plus Shapiro, and later others. In the early 1960s, the steel plant's name was changed to Raychord Steel, but with the decline of the steel industry, Raychord became a subsidiary company to Apollo.

### **Ties to Zionist Groups**

Novick, one of Apollo's officers, later served as national president of the Zionist Organization of America, in which Chatkin, another officer, also held a leadership role. The ZOA was a member group of the American Zionist Council, which later became the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which today is considered to be the leading lobbying group for Israel and one of the most powerful lobbying groups in Washington.

Novick also later served as a personal liaison between Ronald Reagan's White House and the administration of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Lowenthal, who was born in Poland in 1921, came to America in 1932 and served in the American armed forces in World War II, eventually becoming a citizen in 1945. After the war, he worked with the Haganah, the Jewish paramilitary force inside Palestine, on the Zionist mission to ferry Jews into Palestine in 1947 on board the boat SS Exodus.

Since almost none of the passengers had legal immigration certificates to enter Palestine, the British Royal Navy, which ran the Palestinian Mandate, seized the ship and deported its passengers back to Europe. Lowenthal's mission was a practical failure, but a tremendous propaganda success for the Zionist cause. The event was novelized by author Leon Uris in the number-one best-selling book *Exodus*, which was published in 1958 and was made into a movie two years later by director Otto Preminger, starring Paul Newman.

Lowenthal later served on board the ship Pan York, which also attempted to evade the British quarantine but was captured in Cyprus with the crew arrested, including Lowenthal. He escaped and fled to Palestine where he served with the Haganah during the war that broke out there in 1948 after the British abandoned the mandate early. (ibid, p. 44)

Lowenthal ended up serving under the legendary Meir Amit, the leading intelligence officer in Israel during the 1960s. Lowenthal was also personally acquainted with future prime ministers David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir.

## **Nuclear Experience**

Shapiro, who had advanced degrees in chemistry and metallurgy from Johns Hopkins, worked for Westinghouse and the Navy on the nuclear reactor that powered America's first atomic submarine, the Nautilus. Shapiro also helped develop the fuel for the first commercial nuclear reactor, the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania.

Like Lowenthal, Novick and Chatkin, Shapiro also was active in supporting Israeli causes, although his activities had a slightly educational tone. He was a member of the Technion Society, which supported advances in Israeli science and technology. Indeed, he became an Honorary Life Member of the group.

He also was a Director of Hillel, an international organization that tries to acquaint Jewish students with each other on campuses and organize student trips to Israel. Like Novick and Chatkin, he was a member of the Zionist Organization of America. Many years later, it was discovered that Shapiro was on the Board of Governors of the Israeli Intelligence Center, which honors spies for Israel who clandestinely advanced the interests of the state. (Mattson, p. 84)

Beyond the individual backgrounds of these four men, there was also something else which should have attracted the U.S. intelligence community's attention prior to Helms's meeting with President Johnson. While running NUMEC, both men – Shapiro and Lowenthal – were taking trips to Israel and had contacts with high officials of Israeli intelligence as well as Israel's version of the AEC.

Further, NUMEC had a guest worker, an Israeli metallurgist, in its plant, as part of an agreement NUMEC had with Israel to serve as a training consultancy which resulted in the formation of a joint company with Israel called ISORAD that initially was to deal with irradiation of citrus fruits through gamma rays. But the FBI later discovered that NUMEC also had contracts with Israel for the development of plutonium oxide as fuel elements in nuclear reactors. (Mattson, pgs. 80-81)

Since Lowenthal had so many acquaintances in high positions, he often visited Israel, including a most curious instance at about the time he purchased Apollo Steel in 1956. It was at this time that Israel was making decisions about foreign sourcing for nuclear materials and technology.

A year later, NUMEC was formed and Shapiro immediately applied for a license from the AEC to process uranium fuel in a building formerly occupied by Apollo Steel. John Hadden, CIA station chief in Tel Aviv, later noted the unusual coincidence of these events on two continents. (ibid, p. 45)

## **Israeli Visits**

But declassified FBI files reveal that the visitations were not just one way, i.e. from Apollo, Pennsylvania, to Israel. There were also visits and meetings of Israeli officials who went to Apollo.

At the time of those meetings, there were four main branches of Israeli intelligence. The Shin Bet corresponded with the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Mossad with the Central Intelligence Agency; the Aman roughly with the Defense Intelligence Agency; and the LAKAM, which was responsible for security at Dimona and for procuring scientific and technological data from Western sources. (Mattson, p. 108)

In the mid-1960s, France started scaling back its support for the Dimona reactor, which was supposedly a research facility. With France's pullback, LAKAM began seeking out and purchasing parts and supplies from other sources to complete the project.

LAKAM's job included concealing the reactor's true function – the development of a nuclear bomb – from American inspections. (ibid) During an American inspection in 1964, LAKAM even created a "Potemkin village" control room to deceive the visitors.

Unlike American intelligence, Israel also had a special operations unit that served all branches. Established in 1957, it was run by Rafi Eitan and his deputy, Avraham Bendor. (In the 1980s, Eitan became notorious for the Jonathan Pollard spy case, in which Pollard, a navy intelligence employee, was paid tens of thousands of dollars to spy for Israel in the United States with Eitan his ultimate control agent.)

In September 1968, the AEC told the FBI that they were giving permission to NUMEC for a visit by four Israelis, including Eitan and Bendor. However, in the application to the AEC, the occupations of the two were disguised. Eitan was said to be a chemist in the Defense Ministry; Bendor supposedly worked for the electronics division. (ibid, p. 110)

The other two men were Avraham Hermoni, who was billed as a Scientific Counselor in the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and Dr. Ephraim Biegun, described as working in the Division of Electronics for Defense. Again, this was misleading. Hermoni did, at times, work out of Washington's Israeli Embassy, but his prime and most important function was overseeing and planning Israel's nuclear weapons program, which he did from 1959-69. Biegun was actually head of the technical division of the Mossad from 1960-70.

### **CIA Suspicions**

After the visit, NUMEC reported that the four men were in Apollo to buy thermo-

electrical generator systems. (ibid, p. 119) Why Eitan and Bendor had to be there for that purpose is not readily apparent.

CIA officer John Hadden thought the real reason for the visit was that Shapiro was divulging top-secret technical information about plutonium manufacture – and that he was aided in this by the visiting Israeli scientist working at NUMEC. The FBI later came to agree that this was most likely the true reason for the visit. (ibid, p. 120)

Hermoni revisited Shapiro in November 1968, but the capstone to the visits to Apollo came later that month. As noted previously, France had cut back on its support for Dimona in the mid-1960s, halting the supply of uranium fuel in 1967.

In late November 1968, the Mossad arranged a covert operation called Operation Plumbat, which employed a front company in West Germany to purchase 200 tons of uranium yellowcake from Belgium. The transaction was approved by Euratom, the European organization controlling such transactions, but once the transport ship set sail for the port of Genoa, Italy, it was intercepted by another ship used by the Mossad. When the original ship reached port, the hull was empty.

The timing of this operation, on the heels of the mysterious visits by Israeli intelligence agents to Apollo, seems to constitute powerful circumstantial evidence of Israeli intentions.

Then, right after the completion of the Plumbat mission, who arrived in Israel? None other than Zalman Shapiro. The FBI discovered that in November 1968, in addition to the personal visits, Shapiro was in frequent phone contact with a number of Israeli intelligence agents, including Hermoni. (Mattson, p. 126)

### **A Longstanding Goal**

Israel's long trail of subterfuge and duplicity was part of a longstanding goal. As early as 1948, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, stated that what Einstein, Teller and Oppenheimer did for America, they could easily do for Israel, since they were all Jews. In fact, he offered Einstein Israeli citizenship, which the great man declined. (ibid, p. 22) Ben-Gurion then had two meetings with Oppenheimer and numerous ones with Teller.

Ultimately, Israel settled on David Bergmann, a brilliant chemist whom Ben-Gurion appointed first chief of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission in 1952. By 1955, Bergmann was essentially running the day-to-day operations of Israel's atomic program.

In a conversation with the American ambassador, Bergmann said the Israeli science education program was adequate in physics and chemistry but weak in

engineering and non-existent in metallurgy. He also revealed that the design he had laid out for a reactor was the same as the one at Shippingport, Pennsylvania, an intriguing clue because Shapiro was a metallurgist and had worked on the Shippingport power station.

Indeed, Shapiro eventually met Bergmann and the two became close friends and colleagues, serving on the board of ISORAD, which was a joint venture of NUMEC and the IAEC. Bergmann made his first visit to America for IAEC in 1956, the year before Lowenthal turned Apollo Steel into NUMEC.

There were two significant investigations of Shapiro and NUMEC. The first was instigated by Dick Helms's call to Ramsey Clark in 1968 and the discovery of the highly enriched uranium at Dimona. (Mattson, p. 99) The second began in 1976 when Jim Conran, a whistleblower at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, voiced complaints about the background and actions of Shapiro. Conran was a security officer and his warnings eventually got the attention of the White House. (ibid, p. 161)

During the first investigation, the FBI could not find enough evidence to justify a violation by Shapiro of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which mandates that any person in the U.S. who is representing a foreign country's interests has to register with the Justice Department. But the FBI did recommend cancelling Shapiro's security clearances, based on wiretaps that revealed Shapiro in close contact with Israeli intelligence officials and with members of the IAEC. (ibid, p. 138)

During these calls Shapiro reportedly said he would help Israel in any way that he could. He also expressed frustration with the new ownership at NUMEC, which had been purchased by ARCO. But his Israeli contacts said he was too valuable to leave and encouraged him to stay there. (ibid, p. 139)

### **FBI Surveillance**

One of the most curious episodes that the FBI surveillance revealed was a meeting between Shapiro and a man named Jeruham Kafkafi, a suspected Mossad officer working under diplomatic cover. He had left Washington by air on the morning of June 20, 1969, and met Shapiro at the Pittsburgh airport for about an hour. He then left and flew back to Washington.

As a result of that surveillance, Shapiro was interviewed by the AEC in August 1969, with some of Shapiro's answers to questions rather dubious. For instance, he said he did not know Hermoni was in charge of the Israeli nuclear development program and thought he was a university professor. Shapiro said his discussions in September and October 1968 with the Israeli officers were about water

contamination, saboteur detection and military activities.

When asked why the Israelis could not have talked to the Defense Department about those topics, Shapiro had no answer. The interviewer wrote in his summary that Shapiro was cool and calm throughout except when the Kafkafi meeting was brought up. At first, Shapiro said he could not recall it, even though it happened just two months earlier. He then said he did remember it, claiming it was about an overdue invoice and a power supply resource. (p. 142)

The AEC investigators did not find the last reply credible, since it did not seem to justify an airline flight from Washington to Pittsburgh and back. Shapiro adjusted his answer by saying that there was some discussion of an investigator whom he knew from America who was going to visit Israel. He also added the figure of \$32,000 as to how much Israel owed NUMEC. As Mattson notes, again, this explanation does not seem to justify an air flight and an hour-long meeting with a clandestine Mossad officer.

### **Closing the Inquiry**

The man who ultimately decided to close this initial inquiry was Glenn Seaborg, head of the AEC. Not only did he not see any civil or criminal charges as being viable, but when President Richard Nixon's Attorney General John Mitchell recommended revoking Shapiro's security clearances, Seaborg balked at that also.

Mattson clearly sees Seaborg as being a villain in the piece. Late in the book, he explicitly accuses him of running a cover-up. (see p. 297) And, there is evidence to back up this charge. It was later discovered, during the second inquiry, that Seaborg had a close personal friendship with Shapiro. (ibid p. 268)

Earle Hightower, assistant director of safeguards at AEC, explicitly stated that the whole case regarding NUMEC was rigged because it was known that Seaborg would not take action. Little more than three years after Seaborg left the AEC, it was dissolved in 1975 and was replaced by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, in part, because critics accused the AEC of an insufficiently aggressive regulatory program.

The second, much longer, and more vigorous inquiry into NUMEC and Shapiro came about at the creation of the NRC when Jim Conran was tasked with reviewing the record of how safeguards had worked previously for the AEC so they could be strengthened in the future. In that review process, he came across the case of Shapiro and NUMEC.

When Conran asked to see more files on both, he was denied access, causing him to go up the NRC ladder to Chairman William Anders, who was briefed by, among

others, Carl Duckett of the CIA. Since Anders was about to leave for a diplomatic post, he took his concerns to James Connor at President Gerald Ford's White House.

In March 1976, the CIA's Duckett addressed an informal gathering of pilots and astronauts, saying there was little doubt Israel had about 20 nuclear warheads. Although this was supposed to be off the record, the information leaked. In April 1976, *Time* reported that this claim was accurate, except the newsmagazine put the size of the arsenal at 13 bombs and added that the warheads could be delivered by Phantom jets or Jericho missiles.

Duckett wrote a memo to CIA Director George Bush in which he said he suspected that the Israeli program was jumpstarted by a diversion of enriched uranium from the NUMEC plant. (p. 165) He attached various appendices to the memo to show the results of previous inquiries into NUMEC and explain why his belief was justified.

One of the appendices consisted of a paper by John Hadden in which he expressed the suspicion that NUMEC was actually a shell company the Israeli government had set up for the express purpose of diverting materials, technology and information that Israel needed to speed up and facilitate its longstanding quest for atomic weapons. (ibid, p. 166)

### **A New Investigation**

Attorney General Edward Levi was then sent a summary of the FBI's previous investigation of NUMEC. Levi alerted Ford that he thought NUMEC was culpable for several crimes and, with Ford's permission, he wished to begin a criminal inquiry. Since Ford's close adviser James Connor was also disturbed by these findings, the President approved the investigation.

What followed was a tedious bureaucratic battle between the CIA and FBI. The FBI felt it did not have direct proof that a diversion had taken place, while the CIA had the proof – the chemical tests at Dimona – but was reluctant to reveal the intelligence to the FBI. Also, the CIA did not want to furnish the FBI with technical experts to help educate the investigating agents so they could effectively cross-examine important witnesses. Thus, the FBI's inquiry dragged on through three presidents: Ford, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.

But even with these obstructions, the FBI did eventually find witnesses to a diversion from the Apollo plant. It turned out that the FBI did not do enough interviews of plant employees in its initial inquiry because there were at least four of them willing to talk. Those witnesses form the climax of Mattson's book.

In 1980, one witness said that when he read newspaper accounts about the losses

of enriched uranium at Apollo, he had to chuckle to himself. When asked why, he replied that in 1965 or 1966, he was walking near the loading dock at Apollo and saw people loading containers – the dimensions that were used for HEU packets – into equipment boxes. He noticed that the shipping papers for the boxes revealed that the packages were destined for Israel. This witness then suggested some other workers at the plant who had seen similar activity. (Ibid, p. 272)

### **Suspicion Shipment**

One of these witnesses saw a flatbed truck backed up into the loading dock area with Shapiro pacing around the area while the driver was loading “stove pipes” into a cabinet on the truck. This struck the witness as odd because the plant had regularly assigned workers for loading duties during the day but this shipment was being prepared in the evening. He explained that “stove pipes” were cylindrical containers that the plant used to pack enriched uranium inside. Each stove pipe usually contained three or four packets of HEU.

When he glanced at the clipboard resting on a package, he saw the destination was Israel. The clipboard then was yanked away and an armed guard escorted him off the dock. He also said it was unusual to see Shapiro in this area of the plant, and further, that Shapiro was very seldom there at night. (ibid, p. 275)

There were two other witnesses who told the FBI about similar events. The FBI also interviewed an NRC inspector named James Devlin, who told the agents that, contrary to what Shapiro had said, the security at the Apollo plant was below par and that NUMEC did not employ a professional security force. The company had one regular armed guard and Devlin happened to know who he was, since he was also a deputy for the township. The only other guards were unarmed and non-uniformed. (ibid, pgs. 272-73)

By this time, the FBI did not want to continue the investigation, believing that nothing would come of it, although the Justice Department urged the investigators on. But the FBI was correct since, as Mattson notes more than once in his book, the last president who really wanted to stop Israel from becoming a nuclear power was John F. Kennedy. (See pgs. 38-40, p. 256)

Richard Helms’s conversation with a disinterested President Johnson underscores how that attitude changed after Kennedy’s death. As Mattson further notes, opposition to Israel’s nuclear-weapons program was more or less negated by President Richard Nixon’s meeting with Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1969 when he agreed that the U.S. would not make any public statements revealing Israel’s nuclear arsenal nor demand that it sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as long as Israel did no testing and made no public threats.



Even that policy was probably violated in 1979 with the Vela Incident: a suspected Israeli nuclear test done in the Indian Ocean.

Author Roger Mattson was part of the inquiry about the illegal transfer of atomic secrets to Israel, working in the NRC's safeguards department when Conran first voiced his fears about a diversion at NUMEC. Thus, Mattson became part of an internal review of the Shapiro case, seeing firsthand how certain intelligence agencies were, by accident or design, obstructing the investigation.

Mattson concludes his important book by stating that this policy of casting a deliberate blind eye towards a nuclear heist by Israel places the U.S. in a compromised position when trying to enforce a policy of non-proliferation on other nations because of the obvious double standards.

To point out one paradox, the U.S. government executed Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for purportedly supplying nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union with less evidence. Plus, the tinder box of the Middle East is probably the last place where America should have allowed atomic weapons to proliferate, but it did.

Because of that, the U.S. has little or no moral authority on the issue today.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is [Reclaiming Parkland](#).**

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## North Korea's Understandable Fears

Official Washington is in full-throated fury over a new North Korean nuclear test, but fails to note that North Koreans face a vast array of U.S./South Korean military might, including potential U.S. nuclear weapons, writes James Bradley.

By James Bradley

North Korea carried out its fifth nuclear test on Friday, drawing condemnation from President Obama and a charge from the Pentagon that the test was a "serious provocation." Ho-hum, here we go again.

Every year, America pays its vassal-state South Korea huge sums of U.S. taxpayer money to mount 300,000-man-strong military "games" that threaten North Korea.

North Koreans view images that never seem to make it to U.S. kitchen tables: hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of U.S. armaments swarming in from the sea, hundreds of tanks and thousands of troops – their turrets and rifles pointed north – and nuclear-capable U.S. warplanes screaming overhead.

But when a young dictator straight out of central casting responds to U.S. threats with an underground test on North Korea's founding day, it's the number-one story on the front page of the *New York Times*.

Let's connect some dots. Washington and their note takers in the American press constantly tell us that crazies in Pyongyang and Tehran are nuclear threats. The misplaced, but easily sold, fears of the "North Korean missile threat" and the "Iran missile threat" allows the Pentagon to install "defensive" missile systems in South Korea and Eastern Europe which actually amount to offensive systems targeting Beijing and Moscow (by making first strikes against China and Russia more feasible).

We need to look beyond the simplistic, race-based cartoon-like scaremongering to see that far more reality-based and frightening is the nuclear threat posed by the United States.

President Obama – the Nobel Prize winner who pledged to lead a nuclear-free world – has committed over \$1 trillion dollars to modernize America's nuclear arsenal. Almost unreported by the press, we have been spending a bundle to make nukes "usable," by miniaturizing them. And to top it off, Obama has maintained a "first use" option for the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Forget the tin-pot dictator with a bad crew-cut who leads an impoverished country. Here's for some really scary reading:

### **Obama's Trillion-Dollar Nuclear-Arms Train Wreck**

### **Obama plans to retain first-use nuclear option**

### **New U.S. Nuclear Bomb Moves Closer to Full-Scale Production**

### **THAAD: A Major Security Risk for the ROK**

**James Bradley** is author of several bestsellers including *Flyboys* and *Flags of Our Fathers*. His most recent book is *The China Mirage: The Hidden History of American Disaster in Asia*.

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# Obama Flinches at Renouncing Nuke First Strike

**Exclusive:** The U.S. threat to launch a first-strike nuclear attack has little real strategic value – though it poses a real risk to human survival – but President Obama fears political criticism if he changes the policy, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

Time is running short for President Obama to make good on his 2009 promise “to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet as both the Wall Street Journal and New York Times recently reported, Obama’s advisers may have just nixed the single most important reform advocated by arms control advocates: a formal pledge that the United States will never again be the first country to use nuclear weapons in a conflict.

Ever since President Truman ordered two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945, the United States has reserved the right to initiate nuclear war against an overwhelming conventional, chemical or biological attack on us or our allies. But peace advocates – and more than a few senior military officers – have long warned that resorting to nuclear weapons would ignite a global holocaust, killing hundreds of millions of people.

In a talk to the annual meeting of the Arms Control Association on June 6, Deputy National Security Advisor Benjamin Rhodes promised that President Obama would continue to review ways to achieve his grand vision of a nuclear-free world during his last months in office. Obama was reportedly considering a “series of executive actions” to that end, including a landmark shift to a “no first use” policy.

Two-thirds of adult Americans surveyed support such a policy. So do 10 U.S. senators who wrote President Obama in July, proposing a no-first-use declaration to “reduce the risk of accidental nuclear conflict” and seeking cut-backs in his trillion dollar plan for nuclear modernization over the next 30 years.

But Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz (who oversees the nuclear stockpile), and Secretary of State John Kerry all warned during a National Security Council meeting in July that declaring a policy of “no first use” would alarm America’s allies, undercut U.S. credibility, and send a message of weakness to the Kremlin at a time of tense relations with Russia.

Yet until they took charge of giant bureaucracies whose funding depends on

keeping the threat of nuclear war alive, both Carter and Moniz were on record *supporting* “a new strategy for reducing nuclear threats” and achieving security “at significantly lower levels of nuclear forces and with less reliance on nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.”

In a 2007 manifesto, Carter, Moniz, and other centrist Democratic foreign policy experts rejected the old claim that nuclear weapons are still needed to deter non-nuclear attacks.

“Nuclear weapons are much less credible in deterring conventional, biological, or chemical weapon attacks,” they wrote. “A more effective way of deterring and defending against such non-nuclear attacks – and giving the President a wider range of credible response options – would be to rely on a robust array of conventional strike capabilities and strong declaratory policies.”

They also gave strong implicit support to a no-first-use doctrine, stating that “nuclear weapons must be seen as a last resort, when no other options can ensure the security of the U.S. and its allies.”

### **Risk of Overreaction**

Why does a no-first-use policy matter? In a *New York Times* column last month, Gen. James Cartwright, former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and head of the United States Strategic Command, emphasized the folly of introducing nuclear weapons into any conflict.

“Using nuclear weapons first against Russia and China would endanger our and our allies’ very survival by encouraging full-scale retaliation,” he and a colleague wrote. “Such use against North Korea would be likely to result in the blanketing of Japan and possibly South Korea with deadly radioactive fallout.”

A policy of no first use, backed up by a reconfiguration of U.S. nuclear forces to reduce their offensive capabilities, would lower the chance of a rival nuclear power rushing to launch early in a crisis and unleashing World War III. Today some nuclear powers like Russia have their forces on hair-trigger alert for fear of being wiped out by a U.S. surprise attack; as a result, the world is just one false alarm away from all-out nuclear war.

As two senior officials at the Arms Control Association observed recently in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, “Among other advantages, a clear US no-first-use policy would reduce the risk of Russian or Chinese nuclear miscalculation during a crisis by alleviating concerns about a devastating US nuclear first-strike.

“Such risks could grow in the future as Washington develops cyber offensive

capabilities that can confuse nuclear command and control systems, as well as new strike capabilities and strategic ballistic missile interceptors that Russia and China believe may degrade their nuclear retaliatory potential.”

They also discounted the claim that U.S. allies such as Japan or Korea would rebel against such a change of policy: “They are highly likely to accept such a decision, since no first use will in no way weaken US military preparedness to confront non-nuclear threats to their security. . . Many US allies, including NATO members Germany and the Netherlands, support the adoption of no-first-use policies by all nuclear-armed states.”

Warnings by nuclear hawks that a common-sense doctrine of no-first-use would undercut U.S. “credibility” or project “weakness” are simply business-as-usual attempts by national security bureaucrats to inflate threats and keep the war machine in high gear. If they succeed in blocking reform, America and the rest of the world will remain at real risk of annihilation through accidental nuclear escalation.

The question now is whether President Obama will listen to the fear-mongers in his cabinet, or remember what he said in May at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial: “Among those nations like my own that hold nuclear stockpiles, we must have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them.”

**Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were “Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions”; “Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran”; “Saudi Cash Wins France’s Favor”; “The Saudis’ Hurt Feelings”; “Saudi Arabia’s Nuclear Bluster”; “The US Hand in the Syrian Mess”; and “Hidden Origins of Syria’s Civil War.” ]**

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## Christianity and the Nagasaki Bomb

Though Christianity began as a religion of peace, it soon became a cloak for genocidal violence, such as the incineration of defenseless civilians in Nagasaki, including many Japanese Christians, 71 years ago, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Seventy-one years ago, on Aug. 9, 1945, an all-Christian bomber crew dropped a plutonium bomb on Nagasaki City, Japan, instantly vaporizing, incinerating,

irradiating and otherwise annihilating tens of thousands of innocent civilians, men, women and children. Very few Japanese soldiers were affected.

In a nation whose citizens are historically non-Christian (Shintoism or Buddhism are the major religions), a disproportionately large number of the Nagasaki victims were Christian (see below for the history of that reality). The bomb mortally wounded uncountable thousands of other victims who succumbed to the blast trauma, the heat trauma and/or the radiation trauma.

In 1945, the U.S. was regarded as the most Christian nation in the world. The bomber crew, as were the two Christian military chaplains of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki crews, were products of the type of Christianity that failed to teach what Jesus taught concerning violence (that it was forbidden to his followers) – which has been the case for the vast majority of Christians, both clergy and laity, for the past 1,700 years. For the first three centuries of its existence, Christianity was a pacifist religion.

Ironically, prior to the bomb exploding directly over the Urakami Cathedral, Nagasaki was the most Christian city in Japan, and the massive cathedral had been the largest Christian church building in the Orient.

Those Christian airmen, following their wartime orders to the letter, did their job, and they accomplished the mission with military pride. Most Christian Americans would have done what they did if they had been in the shoes of the crew.

And, if those Christians had never seen, heard or smelled the suffering humanity that the bomb caused on the ground, most of them would not have experienced any remorse for their participation in the atrocity – especially if they had been blindly treated as heroes in the aftermath.

Some of the crew did admit that they had had some doubts about what they had participated in afterwards. But none of them actually witnessed the horrific suffering of the tens of thousands of victims up close and personal.

“Orders are orders” and must be obeyed, and disobedience in wartime was known to be severely punishable, even by summary execution. So the bomber crew had no alternative but to obey the orders. Even the two chaplains had no doubts before they finally understood what they had participated in.

### **Hard for Japan to Surrender**

It had been only three days since the August 6th bomb had incinerated Hiroshima. The Nagasaki bomb was dropped amidst massive chaos and confusion in Tokyo, where the fascist military command was meeting with the Emperor Hirohito to discuss

how to surrender with honor. The military leadership of both nations had known for months that Japan had already lost the war.

The only obstacle to ending the war had been the Allied Powers insistence on unconditional surrender (which meant that Hirohito would have been removed from his figurehead position in Japan and perhaps even subjected to war crime trials). That demand was intolerable for the Japanese, who regarded the Emperor as a deity.

The USSR had declared war against Japan the day before (Aug. 8), hoping to regain territories lost to Japan in the humiliating (for Russia) Russo-Japanese War 40 years earlier, and Stalin's army was advancing across Manchuria. Russia's entry into the war had been encouraged by President Harry Truman before he knew of the success of the atom bomb test in New Mexico on July 16.

But now, Truman and his strategists knew that the bomb could elicit Japan's surrender without Stalin's help. So, not wanting to divide any of the spoils of war with the USSR, and because the U.S. wanted to send an early Cold War message to Russia (that the U.S. was the new planetary superpower), Truman ordered bomber command to proceed with using the atomic bombs against a handful of targets as weather permitted and as atomic bombs became available (although no more fissionable material was actually available to make another bomb after Nagasaki).

### **Decision to Target Nagasaki**

Aug. 1, 1945, was the earliest deployment date for the Japanese atom bombing missions, and the Target Committee in Washington, D.C. had already developed a short list of relatively un-damaged Japanese cities that were to be excluded from the conventional USAAF (US Army Air Force) fire-bombing campaigns (that, during the first half of 1945, had used napalm, augmented by high explosives, to burn to the ground over 60 essentially defenseless Japanese cities).

The list of protected cities included Hiroshima, Niigata, Kokura, Kyoto and Nagasaki. Those five cities were to be off-limits to the terror bombings that the other cities were being subjected to. They were to be preserved as potential targets for the new "gimmick" weapon that had been researched and developed in labs and manufacturing plants all across America over the several years since the Manhattan Project had begun.

Ironically, prior to August 6 and 9, the residents of those five cities had considered themselves lucky for not having been bombed as had the other large cities. Little did the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki know that they were only being temporarily spared for an even worse carnage from a revolutionary

experimental weapon that could cause the mass annihilation of entire cities and their human guinea pig inhabitants.

The plutonium bomb that had been field tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico, was identical to the one that was dropped at Nagasaki. It had been blasphemously code-named "Trinity" (a distinctly Christian term) and had been detonated in secrecy three weeks earlier on July 16, 1945. The results were impressive, but the blast had just killed a few hapless coyotes, rabbits, snakes and some other desert varmints.

Trinity had produced large amounts of an entirely new type of rock that was later called "Trinitite." Trinitite was a "man-made" radioactive molten lava rock that had been created from the intense heat that was twice the temperature of the sun. Samples of it still exist in the desert at Alamogordo.

At 3 a.m. on the morning of Aug. 9, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress bomber (that had been "christened" Bock's Car) took off from Tinian Island in the South Pacific, with the prayers and blessings of the crew's two chaplains. Barely making it off the runway just yards before the heavily loaded plane could have gone into the ocean (the bomb weighed 10,000 pounds), it headed north for Kokura, the primary target.

Bock's Car's bomb was code-named "Fat Man," partly because of its shape and partly to honor the rotund Winston Churchill. "Little Boy," first called "Thin Man" (after President Franklin Roosevelt), was the code name of the uranium bomb that had been dropped on Hiroshima three days earlier.

Japan's Supreme War Council in Tokyo, scheduled to convene their next meeting at 11 a.m. on Aug. 9, had absolutely no comprehension of what had really happened at Hiroshima. So the members had no heightened sense of urgency. The council was mostly concerned about Russia's declaration of war.

But it was already too late, because by the time the War Council members were arising and heading to the meeting with the emperor, there was no chance to alter the course of history. Bock's Car – flying under radio silence – was already approaching the southern islands of Japan, heading for Kokura, the primary target. The crew was hoping to beat an anticipated typhoon and the approaching clouds that would have delayed the mission.

The Bock's Car crew had instructions to drop the bomb only on visual sighting. But Kokura was clouded over. After making three failed bomb runs over the clouded-over city and then experiencing engine trouble on one of the four engines (using up valuable fuel all the while) the plane headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki.



## History of Nagasaki Christianity

Nagasaki is famous in the history of Japanese Christianity. The city had the largest concentration of Christians in all of Japan. St. Mary's Urakami Cathedral was the megachurch of its time, with 12,000 baptized members.

Nagasaki was the community where the legendary Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier planted a mission church in 1549. The Catholic community at Nagasaki grew and eventually prospered over the next several generations. However it eventually became clear to the Japanese that the (Catholic) Portuguese and Spanish commercial interests were exploiting Japan. It didn't take very long before all Europeans – and their very foreign religion – were expelled from the country.

From 1600 until 1850, being a Christian in Japan was a capital crime (punishable by death). In the early 1600s, Japanese Christians who refused to recant of their new faith were subject to unspeakable tortures – including crucifixion. After a well-publicized mass crucifixion was orchestrated, the reign of terror stopped, and it appeared to all observers that Japanese Christianity was extinct.

However, 250 years later, after the gunboat diplomacy of U.S. Commodore Matthew 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 secret in a catacomb-like existence, completely unknown to the government.

With this revelation, the Japanese government started another purge; but because of international pressure, the persecutions stopped and Nagasaki Christianity came up from the underground. By 1917, with no financial help from the government, the re-vitalized Christian community had built their massive cathedral in the Urakami River district of Nagasaki.

So it was the height of irony that the massive Cathedral – one of only two Nagasaki landmarks that could be positively identified from 31,000 feet up – became Ground Zero. (The other identifiable aiming point landmark was the Mitsubishi armaments factory complex – which had run out of raw materials because of the successful Allied naval blockade.)

At 11:02 a.m., during Thursday morning confessions, an unknown number of Nagasaki Christians were boiled, evaporated, carbonized or otherwise disappeared in a scorching, radioactive fireball that exploded 500 meters above the cathedral.

The “black rain” that soon came down from the mushroom cloud also contained the mingled cellular remains of many Nagasaki Christians as well as many more

Shintoists and Buddhists. The theological implications of Nagasaki's Black Rain surely should boggle the minds of theologians of all denominations.

### **Nagasaki Christian Body Count**

Most Nagasaki Christians did not survive the blast. Six thousand of them died instantly, including all who were at confession that morning. Of the 12,000 church members, 8,500 of them eventually died as a result of the bomb. Many of the others were seriously sickened with a highly lethal entirely new disease: radiation sickness.

Located near the cathedral were three orders of nuns and a Christian girl's school. They all disappeared into black smoke or became chunks of charcoal. Tens of thousands of other innocent non-Christian non-combatants also died instantly, and many more were mortally or incurably wounded. Some of the original victims (and their progeny) are still suffering from the trans-generational malignancies and immune deficiencies caused by the deadly plutonium and other radioactive isotopes produced by the bomb.

And here is one of the most important ironies: **What the Japanese Imperial government could not do in 250 years of persecution (i.e., to destroy Japanese Christianity) American Christians did in mere seconds.**

Even after a slow revival of Christianity after WWII, membership in Japanese Christian churches still represents a tiny fraction of 1 percent of the general population, and the average attendance at Christian worship services across the nation is reported to be only 30 per Sunday. The decimation of Nagasaki crippled what at one time was a vibrant church.

Father George Zabelka was the Catholic chaplain for the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group (the 1,500-man USAAF group whose only mission was to deliver atomic bombs to Japanese civilian targets). Zabelka was one of the few World War II clergy leaders who eventually came to recognize the serious contradictions between what his modern church had taught him and what the early pacifist church believed concerning homicidal violence.

Several decades after Zabelka was discharged from the military chaplaincy, he finally concluded that both he and his church had made serious ethical and theological errors in religiously legitimating the organized mass slaughter that is modern war. He eventually came to understand that (as he articulated it) "the enemy of me and the enemy of my nation is not an enemy of God. Rather my enemy and my nation's enemy are children of God who are loved by God and who therefore are to be loved (and not killed) by me as a follower of that loving God."

Father Zabelka's sudden conversion away from the standardized war-tolerant

Christianity changed his Detroit, Michigan ministry around 180 degrees. His absolute commitment to the truth of gospel nonviolence – just like Martin Luther King's commitment – inspired him to devote the remaining decades of his life to speaking out against violence in all its forms, including the violence of militarism, racism and economic exploitation.

Zabelka travelled to Nagasaki on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, tearfully repenting and asking for forgiveness for the part he had played in the crime.

Likewise, the Lutheran chaplain for the 509th, Pastor 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.

### **Wars That Ruined Their Souls?**

In Daniel Hallock's important book, *Hell, Healing and Resistance*, the author described a 1997 Buddhist retreat that was led by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. The retreat involved a number of combat-traumatized Vietnam War veterans who had left the Christianity of their birth.

The veterans had responded positively to Nhat Hanh's ministrations. Hallock wrote, "Clearly, Buddhism offers something that cannot be found in institutional Christianity. But then why should veterans embrace a religion that has blessed the wars that ruined their souls? It is no wonder that they turn to a gentle Buddhist monk to hear what are, in large part, the truths of Christ."

Hallock's comment should be a sobering wake-up call to Christian leaders who seem to regard as important both the recruitment of new members and the retention of old ones. The fact that the U.S. is a highly militarized nation makes the truths of gospel nonviolence difficult to teach and preach, especially to military veterans (particularly the homeless, psychologically tormented, spiritually-depleted, malnourished, over-diagnosed, over-medicated, over-vaccinated, homicidal and suicidal ones) who may have lost their faith because of horrors experienced on the battlefield.

I am a retired physician who has dealt with hundreds of psychologically traumatized patients (including combat-traumatized war veterans), and I know that violence, in all its forms, can irretrievably damage the mind, body, brain and spirit. But the fact that the combat-traumatized type is totally preventable – and oftentimes impossible to cure – makes prevention work really important.

An ounce of prevention is indeed worth a pound of cure when it comes to combat-induced PTSD. And where Christian churches should and could be instrumental in

the prevention of the soul-destroying combat-type PTSD is by counseling their members to not participate in it (which should be obvious when considering the ethical message of the nonviolent Jesus, a message that guided the pacifist church in the first three centuries of its existence)

Experiencing violence, whether as victimizer or victim, can be deadly, and it can run through families like a contagion. I have seen violence, neglect, abuse and the resultant traumatic psychological and neurological illnesses spread through both military and non-military families – even involving the third and fourth generations after the initial victimizations.

And that has been the experience of the hibakusha (the long-suffering atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), whose progeny continue to suffer disease – which has likewise been the experience of many of the progeny of the warrior-perpetrators who participated in the act of killing in every war.

Years ago I saw an unpublished Veteran's Administration study that showed that, whereas most Vietnam War-era soldiers were active members of Christian churches before they went off to war, if they came home with PTSD, the percentage returning to their faith community approached zero. Daniel Hallock's sobering message above helps explain why that is so.

Therefore the church – at least by its silence on the critical issues of war and war preparation – seems to be actually promoting (rather than forbidding) homicidal violence, contrary to the ethical teachings of Jesus, by failing to teach what the primitive church understood was one of the core teachings of Jesus, who preached, in effect, that "violence is forbidden for those who wish to follow me."

Therefore, by refraining from warning their adolescent members about the faith- and soul-destroying realities of war, the church is directly undermining the "retention" strategies in which all churches engage. The hidden history of Nagasaki thus has valuable lessons for American Christianity.

### **Bock's Car Crew and Chain of Command**

The members of the Bock's Car bomber crew, like conscripted or enlisted men in any war, were at the bottom of a long, complex and very anonymous chain of command whose superiors demand unconditional obedience from those below them in the chain.

The Bock's Car crew had been ordered to "pull the trigger" of the lethal weapon that had been conceptualized, designed, funded, manufactured and armed by any number of other entities, none of which would feel morally responsible for doing the dirty deed because they didn't have literal blood on their hands.

As is true in all wars, soldier trigger-pullers are often the ones unjustly singled out and blamed for the killing in the combat zone, and therefore they often have the worst post-war guilt and shame that is often the most lethal part of combat-induced PTSD (other than the suicide and violence-inducing aspects of many psychiatric drugs and the chronic illness-stimulating aspects of the over-vaccination schedules to which all military recruits are subjected).

However, the religious chaplains that are responsible for their spiritual lives of their soldiers, are also at the bottom of the chain of command and may share their guilt feelings. Neither group usually knows the real reasons their commanders are ordering them to kill or participate in the killing operations.

The early church leaders, who knew the teachings and actions of Jesus best, rejected the nationalist, racist and militarist agendas of whatever passed for nationalism 2,000 years ago.

And by following the Sermon on the Mount, true Christians of today similarly reject the homicidal agendas of the national security state, the military-industrial-congressional complex, the war-profiteering corporations, the mesmerizing major media, and the eye-for-an-eye retaliation church doctrines that have, over the past 1,700 years, enabled baptized and confirmed Christians to, if ordered to do so, willingly kill other humans in the name of Christ.

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