

SHALOM

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Stefan Merken

Passover — Nissan 15-22, 5775

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, my father always opened our Passover Seder by telling everyone at the table that we Jews had been celebrating and retelling the Passover story for more than three thousand years. I never forgot that. Now, I begin our Passover Seder with the same statement, namely that we have been telling and retelling the narrative of slavery-to-freedom so that every generation celebrates and remembers this extraordinary journey.

Years ago, my wife and I decided to adopt some changes to our Seder. We wanted to emphasize issues we felt the original Haggadah did not. For example: that the drops of wine for the plagues represent what we experienced in Egypt. We realized they were not the same issues we experience today. So we added an option for people at our Seder to add in their own words the things in their lives that challenge and haunt them. As a result, some interesting conversations have resulted. Some of the more vivid life events encountered by our Seder companions have been racism, age discrimination, police brutality, financial hardships and many more. Our changes have brought the whole issue of the Passover story into the twenty-first century.

STEFAN MERKEN *is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.*

But we didn't stop there. We realized we had to think and talk about the meaning of freedom in our time. What are we modern Jews freeing ourselves from? In the original Passover story we were slaves in Egypt. But are modern Jews slaves? We certainly don't suffer from lack of freedom, or from oppression or tyranny. But there are some in the world who still suffer under these conditions; and some modern Jews have roadblocks in their personal lives that prevent them from living the kind of life we want to live, regardless of what society and some traditions demand of us.

Why, then, is it so important for Jews to sit every year and retell this story? Because it emphasizes some of the more critical ethical values on which

Judaism places so much importance. For example: we cannot and should not occupy or maltreat others — a valued lesson for young and old alike. Every Passover we have the opportunity to embark on a transformational journey, just as our forefathers and mothers did thousands of years ago when they began their journey with no idea where it would lead them.

The Jewish Peace Fellowship and the editors of Shalom wish you and your family and friends a most happy and healthy Passover. ☆



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David K. Shipler

Iran: Threatening and Threatened

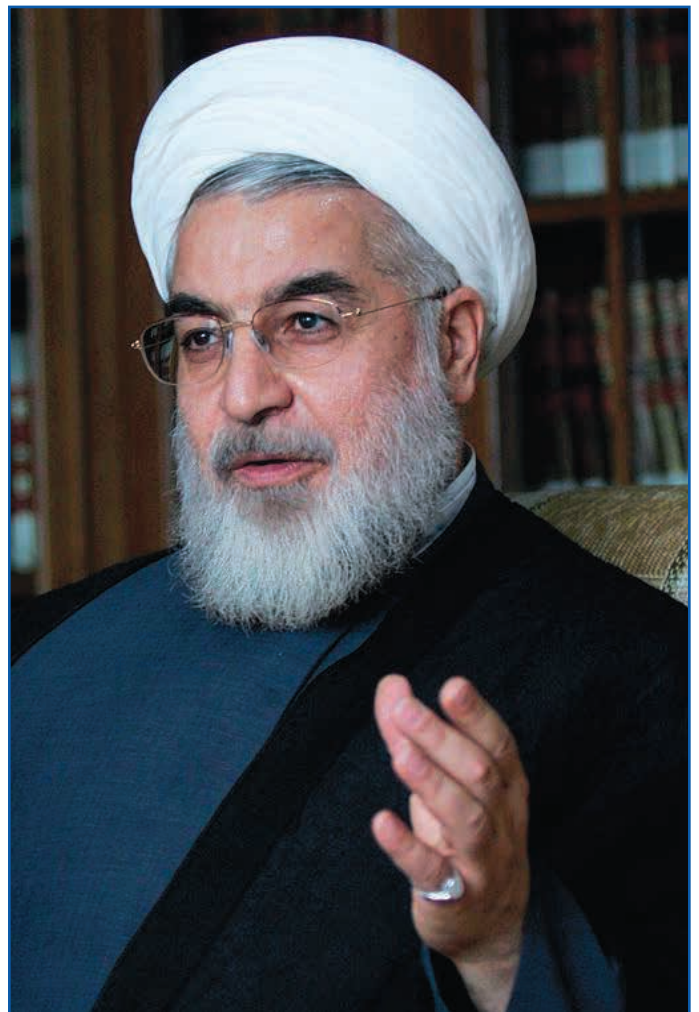
Everyone is entitled to his own opinion,
but not to his own facts.
Daniel Patrick Moynihan

WHY WOULD HARDLINERS in Iran want to forego the prospect of becoming a nuclear power, especially when faced with hardliners in the US and Israel, both in possession of nuclear weapons? The question is raised again by the condescending little lecture on the American constitutional system, delivered by forty-seven Republican Senators in the form of an open letter. Without Congress or the next president's approval, they told Iranian leaders, no agreement by President Obama would be honored by Washington.

Undermining the full faith and credit of the US has now been extended from financial matters to foreign policy. Republicans, who lament our supposedly weak president, work relentlessly to weaken him. (Don't think Vladimir Putin fails to take notice.) And while I admit to knowing no more about Iran than any informed citizen — never having been there and having read too little about that complicated country — I really wonder why policymakers there would want to take the huge gamble of abandoning their weapons program when their apparent enemy the US cannot be counted on to uphold its side of a bargain.

Yes, Iran would like to get out from under the crippling sanctions, which have grown internationally and strengthened during Obama's tenure. They deny Iran markets for its oil and access to international financial institutions. Yes, Iran's theocracy is tempered by cross-currents of moderation among those partial to opening the country to Europe, the US, and the rest of the industrialized world. And yes, Iran has refrained from actually going nuclear, notes Gary Sick, an Iran expert at Columbia, despite its reported ability to do so for the last decade. "The entire US intelligence community and most of our allies — apparently including Israel — have

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President of Iran Hassan Rouhani

concluded with high confidence that Iran has not made a decision to build a bomb," Sick writes.

Why not? It could be that Iran thinks it can string us along — us being not just the US but the other partners in these negotiations, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany — while hiding its nuclear work. International inspectors are dissatisfied with Iran's failure to give access to scientists, documents, and a critical military site and to provide

adequate information about its past development efforts, particularly on detonators for triggering bombs. “Iran not only defies inspectors,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Congress last week, “it also plays a pretty good game of hide-and-cheat with them.”

He should know, because Israel did just that with American officials as it secretly built its own nuclear bomb-making facilities in the 1960s, Walter Pincus notes, in *The Washington Post*. “Iran is following Israel’s path to a nuclear weapons capability,” he writes provocatively. Therefore, it doesn’t take a leap of logic to conclude that Iran would like to retain the nuclear option, even if it’s deferred, and progress suspended, to get sanctions eliminated.

It would be reassuring to think that moderates in Teheran — President Hassan Rouhani, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, and others — recognize the terrible nuclear arms race that could be set off in the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and oil-rich Gulf states joining in, and nukes possibly falling into dangerous hands. To the certifiably insane nihilists who have risen out of the rubble of Middle East wars and coups, as Thomas Friedman noted, “mutually assured destruction’ is an invitation to a party — not a system of mutual deterrence.” *The Economist* assesses the current threat of nuclear war or mishap at a high.

Does the doomsday scenario scare Iranian leaders more than their lack of nuclear capability? Do they think that a nuclear arsenal will protect them sufficiently from the rampages of nation-state collapse and tribal disorder? The bomb would surely make them unassailable by responsible countries that operate rationally, if those were the only actors. North Korea is effectively immune from attack. India and Pakistan balance each other in a tense accommodation. Some Ukrainians wish they hadn’t given up the Soviet nukes on their territory in exchange for Moscow’s empty promise to leave Ukraine alone. And despite Putin’s posturing, we can still bet that both Russia’s expansionism and NATO’s re-

sponse are limited by the nuclear threat. That’s the deterrent factor. The weapons are also useless in the burgeoning world of non-state movements such as the Islamic State. Iran, as a sponsor of such movements elsewhere — Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza — must know this very well.

Yet it’s clear from the rough sketch of the emerging agreement that the US and its partners have given up on trying to induce Iran to obliterate all of its accumulated nuclear technology and know-how. Unfortunately, that would seem to be a bridge too far. It’s why Netanyahu denounced both Iran and the Obama administration to Congress, and why Republicans kept jumping to their feet and roaring like drunken college kids at a football game.

If the display was supposed to cow Teheran into capitulation, it might have done the opposite. It can’t help but give credence to hardliners asking why anyone in his right mind would not want the ultimate defense against such an angry, impulsive adversary that seems to be ruled by a mob in suits. Obama managed a sardonic smile in reaction to the Republicans’ open letter, as he remarked ruefully on the irony of their “wanting to make common cause with the hardliners in Iran. It’s an unusual coalition.”

He’s right that these negotiations are, for the moment, all that stand in the way of Iran’s speeding toward a bomb. We’ve seen this before, Gary Sick observes. After the Bush administration rejected Iran’s proposal in 2003-5 to limit itself to three thousand centrifuges (too many, Washington believed), “we all know what happened. With sanctions increasing almost by the day, and with increasing threats of a unilateral attack by Israel (which would probably draw in the US and others), Iran steadily increased its nuclear program.” By the next negotiations that began in 2013, “Iran had about twenty thousand centrifuges installed in two major sites — one of them deep underground — and a substantial stockpile of enriched uranium.” ☆

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Eleanor Beardsley

A French Rabbi And His Muslim Team

There's work to be done



Rabbi Michel Serfaty, third from right, and employees of his French Jewish Muslim Friendship Association. He says he has only grown more determined to do his bridge-building work since the terror attacks in Paris in January.

RABBI MICHEL SERFATY drives to his first appointment of the day, in a suburb south of Paris, just a couple miles from the notorious housing project where gunman Amedy Coulibaly grew up.

Coulibaly was the self-proclaimed Islamist radical who killed a police officer and later four people in a Kosher market in Paris terrorist attacks in January.

France has Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish communities. For the last decade Serfaty and his team have been working in Paris's bleak *banlieues*, trying to promote under-

standing between the two populations.

Serfaty is still going to the same places since the attacks, but there's now a team of undercover police officers who accompany him everywhere. Still, The rabbi says he's more determined than ever.

"These are difficult times for France and especially for French Jews," he says. "But if anything, we realize our work is even more important."

The rabbi makes his way into a community center where his French Jewish Muslim Friendship Association has a stand at a local job fair. Serfaty hopes to recruit several more young people to help with community outreach in the largely Muslim, immigrant communities where most people have never

ELEANOR BEARDSLEY *reports from Paris for National Public Radio. This article first appeared on www.npr.org.*



A poster for the French Jewish Muslim Friendship Association, which works in many poor, immigrant neighborhoods.

even met a Jewish person.

“In these places they often have specific ideas about Jews,” says Serfaty. “And if they’re negative, we bring arguments and try to open people’s eyes to what are prejudices and negative stereotypes. We try to show children, mothers and teenagers that being Muslim is great, but if they don’t know any Jews, well this is how they are, and they’re also respectable citizens.”

Serfaty says people need to realize they must all work together to build France’s future.

The rabbi takes advantage of funding from a government program that helps youths without work experience find their first job. Serfaty takes them on for a period of three years, giving them valuable training in mediation and community relations. Serfaty’s recruits also study Judaism and Islam. And he takes them on a trip to Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp.

Serfaty is looking to hire three or four new people. With his affable manner and easy laugh, the job interviews are more like a friendly conversation. He needs Muslim employees for his work, but French laws on secularism forbid him from asking applicants about their religion. So Serfaty draws out the candidates’ views and beliefs in discussion — and through provocative questions.

“What if I say to you Jews are everywhere and run the media and all the banks?” He asks one young woman. “What

would you think?”

She tells Serfaty she believes Jews have been largely misunderstood and have a lot to contribute to society.

Some rather frightening misconceptions pour from a withdrawn, young man who’s a recent convert to Islam. He’s never heard of the Holocaust. He also believes there are twenty million French Jews. In reality France has approximately seven million Muslims and a half-million Jews.

Serfaty is soon joined at the table by his current assistants, Mohammed Amine and Aboudalaye Magassa, to discuss the candidates. The rabbi says the most important thing is to find young people like them who harbor no anti-Semitic feelings.

Magassa, twenty-four years old, says working with Serfaty has been a great discovery. He says it’s hard to understand the kind of people who carried out January’s attacks.

“These people have weak minds and they are easily manipulated by social networks,” he says. “They also don’t understand a thing about religion and how it should be practiced.”

Amine and Magassa say they are proud to be French and Muslim. They drive me to the station so I can catch a train back to the city center. I ask if they don’t sometimes feel their work with the rabbi is futile. Not at all, says Amine.

“We are waking up people’s consciences,” says Amine. “This is a job that counts and we could have a real impact if there were more of us.” ☆

Activestills

Women in Black

Standing up to the Occupation for 26 years



IN HONOR OF International Women's Day on March 8 of this year, Activestills paid tribute to more than a quarter century of anti-occupation activism by the Women in Black group in Israel. Every Friday since 1988, the women have stood in the main squares of cities or at highway junctions with signs calling to end the Israeli Occupation. Often spat at, cursed or violently harassed by passersby, they have become a symbol of persistence. *Project by Keren Manor & Shiraz Grinbaum / Activestills.org.*

ACTIVESTILLS is a collective established in 2005 by a group of Israeli and international documentary photographers. The group focuses on various topics in Israel and Palestine, including the Palestinian popular struggle against the Israeli occupation, women's rights, immigration, asylum-seekers, social justice struggles, the siege on Gaza, housing rights, animal rights and more.

Their work can be seen at www.activestills.org.



Edna Glukman, 83, of the Tel Aviv group and co-founder of Women In Black holds a sign that reads “Stop the Occupation” in Hebrew.



Stela Tzur, 86, co-founder of Women In Black and part of the Haifa group holds a sign that reads “An eye for an eye until all go blind” in Hebrew.

DAFNA KAMINER: It was the time of the First Intifada, and we wanted to support the Palestinian struggle. So we decided that we would stand out there with signs calling to end the occupation. It was the simplest and most visual thing we could do.

EDNA GLUKMAN: In the beginning, the right-wing protesters started to attack us during the vigils. We sewed big black banners and with small white letters we wrote slogans against the occupation, as well as for justice, peace and women. By the time we began writing the word “women” on our banners, it was already starting to become a women’s movement.

TAMAR HUFFMAN: You could say that we are a handful of women with a lot of opinions;



Tamar Huffman, 58, Tel Aviv group, active for four years in Women In Black holds a sign that reads “Stop the Occupation” in Hebrew.

it is definitely a feminist group. If we had a man on the board, he would probably be the one making decisions.

TAMAR LEHAN: I didn’t join for feminist reasons, but rather for the persistent and clear statement of the group. However, I think that it is very logical that it is a women’s group, since women are accustomed to doing hard work for long periods of time without seeking immediate results.

DAFNA KAMINER: In times of unrest, we expect more verbal and sometimes physical violence. People curse at us as if we were the ones responsible for the situation, and not Israel’s policy makers. When things are more calm, people just walk by and say nothing. Like we are transparent or nonexistent. ☆

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Andrew J. Bacevich

The Intellectual as Servant of the State

POLICY INTELLECTUALS – eggheads presuming to instruct the mere mortals who actually run for office – are a blight on the republic. Like some invasive species, they infest present-day Washington, where their presence strangles common sense and has brought to the verge of extinction the simple ability to perceive reality. A benign appearance – well-dressed types testifying before Congress, pontificating in print and on TV, or even filling key positions in the executive branch – belies a malign impact. They are like Asian carp let loose in the Great Lakes.

It all began innocently enough. Back in 1933, with the country in the throes of the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first imported a handful of eager academics to join the ranks of his New Deal. An unprecedented economic crisis required some fresh thinking, FDR believed. Whether the contributions of this “Brains Trust” made a positive impact or served to retard economic recovery (or ended up being a wash) remains a subject for debate even today. At the

ANDREW J. BACEVICH is *emeritus professor of history and international relations at Boston University's Pardee School of Global Studies. A Vietnam veteran, he returned to the US with the rank of colonel. Bacevich is writing a military history of America's War for the Greater Middle East. His most recent book is Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country (Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2013) This article first appeared online at TomDispatch.com.*

very least, however, the arrival of Adolph Berle, Raymond Moley, Rexford Tugwell, and others elevated Washington's bourbon-and-cigars social scene. As bona fide members of the intelligentsia, they possessed a sort of cachet.

Then came World War II, followed in short order by the onset of the Cold War. These events brought to Washington a



Peter Sellers as Dr. Strangelove (from Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film).

second wave of deep thinkers, their agenda now focused on “national security.” This eminently elastic concept — more properly, “national insecurity” — encompassed just about anything related to preparing for, fighting, or surviving wars, including economics, technology, weapons design, decision-making, the structure of the armed forces, and other matters said to be of vital importance to the nation's survival. National in-

security became, and remains today, the policy world's equivalent of the gift that just keeps on giving.

People who specialized in thinking about national insecurity came to be known as “defense intellectuals.” Pioneers in this endeavor back in the 1950s were as likely to collect their paychecks from think tanks like the prototypical RAND Corporation as from more traditional academic institutions. Their ranks included creepy figures like Herman Kahn, who took pride in “thinking about the unthinkable,” and Albert Wohlstetter, who tutored Washington in the complexities of maintaining “the delicate balance of terror.”

In this wonky world, the coin of the realm has been and remains “policy relevance.” This means devising products that convey a sense of novelty, while serving chiefly to

perpetuate the ongoing enterprise. The ultimate example of a policy-relevant insight is *Dr. Strangelove's* discovery of a “mineshaft gap” — successor to the “bomber gap” and the “missile gap” that, in the 1950s, had found America allegedly lagging behind the Soviets in weaponry and desperately needing to catch up. Now, with a thermonuclear exchange about to destroy the planet, the United States is once more falling behind, *Strangelove* claims, this time in digging underground shelters to enable some small proportion of the population to survive.

In a single, brilliant stroke, *Strangelove* posits a new *raison d'être* for the entire national insecurity apparatus, thereby ensuring that the game will continue more or less forever. A sequel to Stanley Kubrick's movie would have shown General “Buck” Turgidson and the other brass huddled in the War Room, developing plans to close the mineshaft gap as if nothing untoward had occurred.

YET ONLY in the 1960s, right around the time that *Dr. Strangelove* first appeared in movie theaters, did policy intellectuals really come into their own. The press now referred to them as “action intellectuals,” suggesting energy and impatience. Action intellectuals were thinkers, but also doers, members of a “large and growing body of men who choose to leave their quiet and secure niches on the university campus and involve themselves instead in the perplexing problems that face the nation,” as *Life Magazine* put it in 1967. Among the most perplexing of those problems was what to do about Vietnam, just the sort of challenge an action intellectual could sink his teeth into.

Over the previous century-and-a-half, the US had gone to war for many reasons, including greed, fear, panic, righteous anger, and legitimate self-defense. On various occasions, each of these, alone or in combination, had prompted Americans to fight. Vietnam marked the first time that the US went to war, at least in considerable part, in response to a bunch of really dumb ideas floated by ostensibly smart people occupying positions of influence. More surprising still, action intellectuals persisted in waging that war well past the point where it had become self-evident, even to members of Congress, that the cause was a misbegotten one doomed to end in failure.

In his fine new book *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (Viking Press), Christian Appy, a historian who teaches at the University of Massachusetts, reminds us of just how dumb those ideas were.

As Exhibit A, Professor Appy presents McGeorge Bundy, national security adviser first for President John F. Kennedy and then for Lyndon Johnson. Bundy was a product of Groton and Yale, who famously became the youngest-ever dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, having gained tenure there without even bothering to get a graduate degree.

For Exhibit B, there is Walt Whitman Rostow, Bundy's successor as national security adviser. Rostow was another Yale, earning his undergraduate degree there along with a Ph.D. While taking a break of sorts, he spent two years at

Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. As a professor of economic history at MIT, Rostow captured JFK's attention with his modestly subtitled 1960 book, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, which offered a grand theory of development with ostensibly universal applicability. Kennedy brought Rostow to Washington to test his theories of “modernization” in places like Southeast Asia.

Finally, as Exhibit C, Appy briefly discusses Professor Samuel P. Huntington's contributions to the Vietnam War. Huntington also attended Yale, before earning his Ph.D. at Harvard and then returning to teach there, becoming one of the most renowned political scientists of the post-World War II era.

What the three shared in common, apart from a suspect education acquired in New Haven, was an unwavering commitment to the reigning verities of the Cold War. Foremost among those verities was this: that a monolith called Communism, controlled by a small group of fanatic ideologues hidden behind the walls of the Kremlin, posed an existential threat not simply to America and its allies, but to the very idea of freedom itself. The claim came with this essential corollary: the only hope of avoiding such a cataclysmic outcome was for the US to vigorously resist the Communist threat wherever it reared its ugly head.

Buy those twin propositions and you accept the imperative of the US preventing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, a.k.a. North Vietnam, from absorbing the Republic of Vietnam, a.k.a. South Vietnam, into a single unified country; in other words, that South Vietnam was a cause worth fighting and dying for. Bundy, Rostow and Huntington not only bought that argument hook, line and sinker, but then exerted themselves mightily to persuade others in Washington to buy it as well.

Yet even as he was urging the “Americanization” of the Vietnam War in 1965, Bundy already entertained doubts about whether it was winnable. But not to worry: even if the effort ended in failure, he counseled President Johnson, “the policy will be worth it.”

How so? “At a minimum,” Bundy wrote, “it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own.” If the US ultimately lost South Vietnam, at least Americans would have died trying to prevent that result — and through some perverted logic this, in the estimation of Harvard's youngest-ever dean, was a redeeming prospect. The essential point, Bundy believed, was to prevent others from seeing the US as a “paper tiger.” To avoid a fight, even a losing one, was to forfeit credibility. “Not to have it thought that when we commit ourselves we really mean no major risk” — that was the problem to be avoided at all cost.

Rostow outdid even Bundy in hawkishness. Apart from his relentless advocacy of coercive bombing to influence North Vietnamese policymakers, Rostow was a chief architect of something called the Strategic Hamlet Program. The idea was to jumpstart the Rostovian process of modernization by forcibly relocating Vietnamese peasants from their



General Buck Turgidson (George C. Scott) demonstrating a B-52 flying low enough to fry chickens in a barnyard.

ancestral villages into armed camps where the Saigon government would provide security, education, medical care and agricultural assistance. By winning “hearts and minds” in this manner, the defeat of the Communist insurgency was sure to follow, with the people of South Vietnam vaulted into the “age of high mass consumption,” where Rostow believed all humankind was destined to end up.

That was the theory. Reality differed somewhat. Actual “strategic hamlets” were indistinguishable from concentration camps. The government in Saigon proved too weak, too incompetent, and too corrupt to hold up its end of the bargain. Rather than winning hearts and minds, the program induced alienation, even as it essentially destabilized peasant society. One result: an increasingly rootless rural population flooded into South Vietnam’s cities, where there was little work apart from servicing the needs of the ever-growing US military population — hardly the sort of activity conducive to self-sustaining development.

Yet even when the Vietnam War ended in complete and utter defeat, Rostow still claimed vindication for his theory. “We and the Southeast Asians,” he wrote, had used the war

years “so well that there wasn’t the panic [when Saigon fell] that there would have been if we had failed to intervene.” Indeed, regionally, Rostow spied plenty of good news, all of it attributable to the American war:

Since 1975 there has been a general expansion of trade by the other countries of that region with Japan and the West. In Thailand we have seen the rise of a new class of entrepreneurs. Malaysia and Singapore have become countries of diverse manufactured exports. We can see the emergence of a much thicker layer of technocrats in Indonesia. So there you have it. If you want to know what fifty-eight thousand Americans (not to mention vastly larger numbers of Vietnamese) died for, it was to encourage entrepreneurship, exports, and the emergence of technocrats elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Appy describes Professor Huntington as another action intellectual with an unflinching facility for seeing the upside of catastrophe. In Huntington’s view, the internal displacement



Facing Armageddon in the War Room (from Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film, Dr. Strangelove).

of South Vietnamese caused by the excessive use of American firepower, along with the failure of Rostow's strategic hamlets, was actually good news. It promised, he insisted, to give the Americans an edge over the insurgents.

The key to final victory, Huntington wrote, was "forced-draft urbanization and modernization which rapidly brings the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can hope to generate sufficient strength to come to power." By emptying out the countryside, the US could win the war in the cities. "The urban slum, which seems so horrible to middle-class Americans, often becomes for the poor peasant a gateway to a new and better way of life." The language may be a tad antiseptic, but the point is clear enough: the challenges of city life in a state of utter immiseration would miraculously transform those same peasants into go-getters more interested in making a buck than in signing up for social revolution.

Revisited decades later, claims once made with a straight face by the likes of Bundy, Rostow, and Huntington — action intellectuals of the very first rank — seem beyond preposterous. They insult our intelligence, leaving us to wonder how

such judgments or the people who promoted them were ever taken seriously.

How was it that during Vietnam bad ideas exerted such a perverse influence? Why were those ideas so impervious to challenge? Why, in short, was it so difficult for Americans to recognize bullshit for what it was?

Creating a Twenty-First-Century Slow-Motion Vietnam

These questions are by no means of mere historical interest. They are no less relevant when applied to the handiwork of the twenty-first-century version of policy intellectuals, specializing in national insecurity, whose bullshit underpins policies hardly more coherent than those used to justify and prosecute the Vietnam War.

The present-day successors to Bundy, Rostow, and Huntington subscribe to their own reigning verities. Chief among them is this: that a phenomenon called terrorism or Islamic radicalism, inspired by a small group of fanatic ideologues hidden away in various quarters of the Greater Middle East, poses an existential threat not simply to America and its al-

lies, but — yes, it's still with us — to the very idea of freedom itself. That assertion comes with an essential corollary dusted off and imported from the Cold War: the only hope of avoiding this cataclysmic outcome is for the US to vigorously resist the terrorist/Islamist threat wherever it rears its ugly head.

At least since September 11, 2001, and arguably for at least two decades prior to that date, US policymakers have taken these propositions for granted. They have done so at least in part because few of the policy intellectuals specializing in national insecurity have bothered to question them.

Indeed, those specialists insulate the state from having to address such questions. Think of them as intellectuals devoted to averting genuine intellectual activity. More or less like Herman Kahn and Albert Wohlstetter (or Dr. Strange-love), their function is to perpetuate the ongoing enterprise.

The fact that the enterprise itself has become utterly amorphous may actually facilitate such efforts. Once widely known as the Global War on Terror, or GWOT, it has been transformed into the War with No Name. A little bit like the famous Supreme Court opinion on pornography — we can't define it, we just know it when we see it — with ISIS the latest manifestation to capture Washington's attention.

All that we can say for sure about this nameless undertaking is that it continues with no end in sight. It has become a sort of slow-motion Vietnam, stimulating remarkably little honest reflection regarding its course thus far or prospects for the future. If there is an actual Brains Trust at work in Washington, it operates on autopilot. Today, the second- and third-generation bastard offspring of RAND that clutter northwest Washington — the Center for this, the Institute for that — spin their wheels debating latter day equivalents of strategic hamlets, with nary a thought given to more fundamental concerns.

What prompts these observations is Ashton Carter's return to the Pentagon as President Obama's fourth secretary of defense. Carter himself is an action intellectual in the Bundy-Rostow-Huntington mold, having made a career of rotating between positions at Harvard and in "the Building." He, too, is a Yale and a Rhodes scholar, with a Ph.D. from Oxford. "Ash" — in Washington, a first-name-only identifier ("Henry," "Zbig," "Hillary") signifies that you have *truly* arrived — is the author of books and articles galore, including one op-ed co-written with former Secretary of Defense William Perry back in 2006 calling for preventive war against North Korea. Military action "undoubtedly carries risk," he bravely acknowledged at the time. "But the risk of continuing inaction in the face of North Korea's race to threaten this country would be greater" — just the sort of logic periodically trotted out by the likes of Herman Kahn and Albert Wohlstetter.

As Carter has taken the Pentagon's reins, he also has taken pains to convey the impression of being a big thinker. As a *Wall Street Journal* headline enthused, "Ash Carter Seeks Fresh Eyes on Global Threats." That multiple global threats exist and that America's defense secretary has a mandate to

address each of them are, of course, givens. His predecessor Chuck Hagel (no Yale degree) was a bit of a plodder. By way of contrast, Carter has made clear his intention to shake things up.

So on his second day in office, for example, he dined with Kenneth Pollack, Michael O'Hanlon and Robert Kagan, ranking national insecurity intellectuals and old Washington hands one and all. Besides all being employees of the Brookings Institution, the three share the distinction of having supported the Iraq War in 2003 and calling for redoubling efforts against ISIS today. For assurances that the fundamental orientation of US policy is sound — we just need to try harder — who better to consult than Pollack, O'Hanlon and Kagan (any Kagan)?

Was Carter hoping to gain some fresh insight from his dinner companions? Or was he letting Washington's clubby network of fellows, senior fellows and distinguished fellows know that, on his watch, the prevailing verities of national insecurity would remain sacrosanct? You decide.

Soon thereafter, Carter's first trip overseas provided another opportunity to signal his intentions. In Kuwait, he convened a war council of senior military and civilian officials to take stock of the campaign against ISIS. In a daring departure from standard practice, the new defense secretary prohibited PowerPoint briefings. One participant described the ensuing event as "a five-hour-long college seminar" — candid and free-wheeling. "This is reversing the paradigm," one awed senior Pentagon official remarked. Carter was said to be challenging his subordinates to "look at this problem differently."

Of course, Carter might have said, "Let's look at a different problem." That, however, was far too radical to contemplate — the equivalent of suggesting back in the 1960s that assumptions landing the US in Vietnam should be reexamined.

In any event — and to no one's surprise — the different look did not produce a different conclusion. Instead of reversing the paradigm, Carter affirmed it: the existing US approach to dealing with ISIS is sound, he announced. It only needs a bit of tweaking — just the result to give the Pollacks, O'Hanlons and Kagans something to write about as they keep up the chatter that substitutes for serious debate.

Do we really need that chatter? Does it enhance the quality of US policy? If policy/defense/action intellectuals fell silent would America be less secure?

Let me propose an experiment. Put them on furlough. Not permanently— just until the last of the winter snow finally melts in New England. Send them back to Yale for reeducation. Let's see if we are able to make do without them even for a month or two.

In the meantime, invite Iraq and Afghanistan War vets to consider how best to deal with ISIS. Turn the op-ed pages of major newspapers over to high school social studies teachers. Book English majors from the Big Ten on the Sunday talk shows. Who knows what tidbits of wisdom might turn up? ☆

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Murray Polner

Truth and Fiction About Our Wars

IN JAMES BRADLEY'S new book, *The China Mirage: The Hidden History of American Disaster in Asia* (Little, Brown), he asks why his father found himself fighting the Japanese on Iwo Jima. Bradley traces the roots of that war to ill-advised US policies, its economic and paternalistic interest in China and its fear that Japan also had a serious and competing interest in China and East Asia. He ends up concluding that his father wound up on that godforsaken island so China could be freed from Japanese control and exploitation, thus allowing the US and its British, Dutch and French imperial friends free access to its markets, resources and geographical position.

I recently watched *Sand Pebbles*, a mesmerizing 1966 film about an American gunboat navigating the Yangtze River deep into China's interior during the Nationalist-warlord-Communist civil wars of the mid-1920s. What the film never explains, however, is that the ship was there to protect commercial rights and extraterritorial privileges that European and American imperialists had seized over many decades of one-sided accords.

In 1784, the *Empress of China*, an American ship funded in part by businessmen eager to profit from the China trade, arrived in Canton. And well into the nineteenth century a few more Americans, one of whom was Franklin Delano Roosevelt's grandfather, made their fortunes from the opium trade. Long before the US became a debtor nation to China,

many American businessmen dreamed about vast treasures to be made in the lucrative China trade. "Imagine," I once heard my CCNY political science professor say in class, "if every Chinese man and woman wore a white shirt every day,

what it would mean to American manufacturers of white shirts."

It is Bradley's contention that Americans have misunderstood and misjudged China while wedded to the fantasy that China's vast population was yearning to be Westernized and Americanized, ignoring that China had national interests of its own. This was never more obvious than after 1931, when the Japanese — eager to control China — invaded Manchuria, which the

US promptly denounced as an act of aggression. For both nations the great prize was China. Japan and US were on the road to war.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, virtually every American believed, then and now, that it was an unwarranted sneak attack on an innocent America. Far less concerned about Nazi conquests in Europe, most Americans were furious at what the "Japs" did on December 7, 1941, FDR's "Day of Infamy." It then became morally and legally justifiable to incarcerate America's Nisei and Issei in western desert camps (for different reasons, Norman Thomas, Robert Taft and J. Edgar Hoover were among the few public figures to object) and fight a savage Pacific war, ending with nuclear bombs falling on Japanese civilians.

Over the years writers like Bradley have challenged the dominant consensus that Japan alone, and not the US, had



An armed Chinese armed junk, circa 1600s.

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provoked the war and was an expansionist, militarist state, unwilling to compromise — that is, accept American demands to surrender its leading role in China. Bruce M. Russett's largely forgotten 1971 book, *No Clear and Present Danger: A Skeptical View of the US Entry into WWII*, argued, instead, that the US, in concert with Britain and the Dutch, contributed mightily to the coming of war by its embargos of oil and raw materials on a Japan which had none of these vital resources. While “the threat to Japan of a raw material scarcity was obvious,” the policy of “gradually tightening economic measures,” Russett concluded, “was an escalation that was to drive Japan not to capitulation, as it was intended to do, but to war with the United States.”

Bradley's view is that if the Japanese had submitted to US demands, it would have meant abandoning China in favor of an updated imperial and pro-western Open Door policy. But Japan saw US intervention in China as no different from the Monroe Doctrine, which demanded absolute American control of the Western Hemisphere. Once its oil pipeline was shut down, Japan, writes Bradley, was stranded like “an industrialized beached whale.” Neither Tokyo nor Washington would budge, leading Dean Acheson, Henry Stimson and Henry Morgenthau Jr, among other White House hawks, to “set the war clock ticking in Tokyo.” Surprisingly, Bradley reveals that neither FDR nor Secretary of State Cordell Hull knew that Acheson & Co. had unilaterally cut off oil shipments which, the Japanese historian Akira Iriye concluded in 1981, “had a tremendous psychological impact upon the Japanese” and led directly to Tokyo's suicidal decision to go to war.

The China Mirage is a vivid, bracing and careful study, sure to be dismissed by some as revisionist history. Echoing Russett's argument about the embargos and sanctions against Japan, but going far beyond it, Bradley charges that long before Pearl Harbor, US policymakers were willing to go to war if Japan ever conquered British and French Southeast Asia and Dutch Indonesia, since that would mean the loss of rubber, tin and tungsten that helped fuel American industry. Some of Bradley's arguments were already accepted in part by George Herring's *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (2008): “[We] backed a proud nation into



December 7, 1941: The USS Arizona aflame in Pearl Harbor.

inherited his grandfather's passion for China — and his pro-Chiang Kai-shek, anti-Communist aides — agreed with the “fundamental proposition that the US could not afford to lose the raw materials and sea lanes of Southeast Asia,” never saying out loud that such a policy might lead to war — a warning for Americans today that should China ever move on those disputed rocky, uninhabited islets in the South China Sea claimed by Japan, the Philippines and China, our mutual defense treaties would oblige us to go to war.

The US managed to avoid a shooting war during the Chinese civil wars but from late 1927 on placed its bet on Chiang. As World War II drew to a close and the UN was being established, FDR insisted that Chiang's China be made a member of the UN's Big Four, which the ever quotable and opinionated Winston Churchill mocked. “In Washington,” he wrote in the fourth volume of his wartime memoirs, “I had found the extraordinary significance of China in American minds, even at the top, strangely out of proportion.” But FDR could not be persuaded.

For years, Washington's foreign policy elite and compliant mass media helped shaped popular support for Chiang and his glamorous Americanized wife, whom Henry Luce, the son of China missionaries, repeatedly praised in his influential *Time Magazine*. Meanwhile, millions of American dollars were lavished on Chiang and his wife's powerful Soong family, fostering the illusion that the Kuomintang was actually fighting the Japanese. The money often disappeared (think, too, of all those unaccountable billions sent to our Iraqi and Afghan “allies”). As Bradley puts it, “Chiang handled the foreign loot,” a sentiment with which Truman later agreed when he called Chiang and his pals thieves. Finally, in 1949, Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, America's favorites, were defeated by Mao's communists and the US

a position where its only choices were war or surrender.” John Toland's verdict was that “a grave diplomatic blunder [was enabled] by allowing an issue not vital to basic American national interests — the welfare of China — to become, at the last moment, the keystone of her foreign policy.” (Think of the US's deepening involvement with Ukraine today). Indeed, Jonathan Marshall, in his book, *To Have and Have Not: Southeast Asia Raw Materials and the Origins of the Pacific War* (1995), wrote that FDR — who

refused to recognize the change until Nixon and Kissinger took their trips to Beijing.

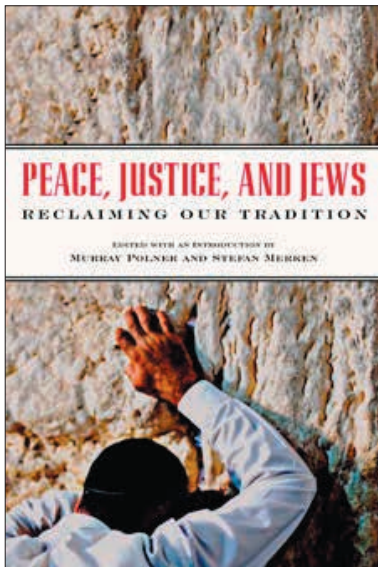
The truth is that there never would have been a Korean War (or a Vietnam War) had there not been a Cold War between Moscow and Washington. So in June 1950 it was easy for American policymakers to misread “an incident in a small Asian civil war as a challenge to their global containment policy, incorrectly concluding that Moscow — working through Beijing and Pyongyang — had ordered the crossing [of the Thirty-eighth Parallel] when it was only a North Korean action.” To call off the dogs, Acheson recommended Truman send in the military without a congressional authorization. Once the shooting began and after Chinese “volunteers” entered the war, the China Lobby and its allies in Congress began denouncing Truman as an appeaser for “losing China.” General Douglas MacArthur and the China Lobby repeatedly urged Truman to “unleash” Chiang’s exiled and defeated army against the Chinese and North Korean forces. After Truman fired MacArthur for insubordination, the China Lobby went berserk. “The son of a bitch [Truman] should be impeached,” growled Senator Joseph McCarthy. If that weren’t enough, Bradley writes that Acheson, incredibly, advised Truman “to send covert military aid to the French in Indochina for their war against Ho Chi Minh. With no debate — and none was sought — a Wise Man [Acheson], rattled by events in Asia he little understood, committed the US to current and future wars.” As David Halberstam, in *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (2007), commented, correctly, “The issue of China itself hovered over

every decision.”

“Who Lost China?” became the deceitful and inflammatory slogan of demagogic politicians, private and religious interests, wealthy businessmen and Joe McCarthy and his minions. They pounced on an intimidated and frightened State Department and White House. Veteran China specialists were fired, persecuted and prosecuted for reporting that Mao was not Stalin’s stooge and that Chiang and his cohorts were corrupt and ineffective. (See, for example, John Paton Davies, Jr’s *China Hand: An Autobiography* [2012]).

In retrospect, a fearful and angry nation had gone mad. Blacklists, jail terms, a few, but very few, Soviet spies (we had our spies in Russia, too), and a shamefully conformist mass media helped scare and silence potential critics. Bradley mentions that Acheson’s infamous and secret NCS-68 policy was adopted in April 1950 and transformed the nation into the militarized global avenger of “evil” nations and also into an enduring national security state, which Dwight Eisenhower later but unsuccessfully, warned us against. Bradley makes it easier to understand LBJ’s plunge into Vietnam, George Bush’s ill-fated invasion of Iraq, and Obama’s immersion into the Middle East’s tangle of complex religious and political rivalries.

Now, as if in a repeat of past history, Obama’s baffling, unexplained “pivot to Asia” is clearly aimed at a powerful China, no longer an American or Japanese supplicant. There are lessons to be learned about war and peace, and Bradley’s valuable book offers a warning about past and future unnecessary entanglements. ✧



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