

SHALOM

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Murray Polner

Opting Out of the 'Good War'

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Stefan Merken

A Q&A for Pacifists: *Missile Strikes Against Syria*

AS I WRITE THIS, THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION IS threatening missiles strikes on Assad's Syria to show him and his allies that if he does not surrender his stock of chemical weapons, the US will not stand by and let him gas his own people. Secretary of State John Kerry, echoing the president, has been unrelenting in trying to make a moral case that we cannot sit by and let this happen.

As a Jewish pacifist, I am mindful of the horror of so many people killed by chemical weapons but also of the one hundred thousand people already killed by conventional weaponry, not to mention those maimed and homeless because of the civil war. Still, I believe that launching missiles would be a serious blunder and that many more will die if we send in missiles. As always, I have come up with questions to better understand the problem and, with hope, find a solution that fits this situation. Here are some of those questions:

Is it morally, not to mention politically and militarily, correct for the US to become involved in yet another country's internal conflict?

My response is No. There are wars and civil wars around the world and more ahead, and we as a nation cannot and should not be the moral judge and jury that once again asks our young men and women soldiers to shoulder the burden of war and sacrifice.

But can we turn our backs on those who have been gassed by one party or another and do nothing?

No. Dropping missiles on parts of Syria is not the solu-

tion. It will not automatically lead to peace, and it will only create more deaths, especially in a region historically divided between religions, sects, and unforgiving extremists of all stripes. Missiles will neither solve nor remedy the complex problems of the Middle East, as other nations have learned.

Will the action our president proposes change the situation ?

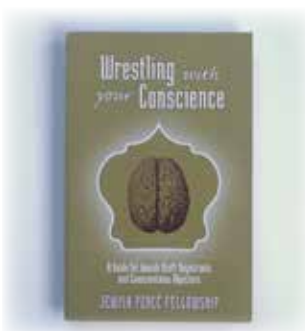
No. In such a potentially explosive region, there is a serious risk of retaliation and counter-retaliation, and of other nations, including the US military, being drawn into a wider conflict.

But is any war justifiable for pacifists?

No! Never. Certainly not anymore, given that extraordinarily destructive weapons are more easily available than ever. We are hopeful that the UN and its major nations will find a peaceable solution and help effect a cease-fire while banning arms shipments to all sides, help the many distressed and frantic Syrian refugees, and encourage all nations, including Syria, Iran and Israel, to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention and Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan have taken a great toll on our military and their families. Today, we are gratified that the American people overwhelmingly oppose getting into another Middle East war. To try to sell so misleading an idea, which is overwhelmingly rejected by a majority of the American public, can never bring peace at home or abroad. Last year we quit Iraq. Next year we should leave Afghanistan, another lost cause, and this is not the time to become mired in yet another bloody clash. ☆

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



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Henry Siegman

Iran, Israel, and the Settlements

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU'S VERY public confrontation with President Barack Obama over his reluctance to go to war with Iran in order to halt its nuclear program brings to mind a confrontation that nearly twenty-five years ago occurred between President George H. W. Bush and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir over the settlements that Israel's government was establishing in the occupied Palestinian territories.

At the time, the government of Israel and American Jewish organizations were seeking US housing loan guarantees to help finance Israel's absorption of Jewish refugees who were leaving the Soviet Union in large numbers. President Bush agreed to provide the guarantees, but asked Israel to cease its illegal settlement construction. He pointed out that given the fungibility of money, US financial assistance would be going to fund an activity the US and the entire international community deemed illegal and intended to preempt negotiations over the disposition of the occupied territories by creating irreversible "facts on the ground."

Shamir refused to end settlement construction, and American Jewish organizations sponsored a large rally in Washington, DC, on September 12, 1991, in opposition to President Bush's stand, demanding that the issue of the settlements not be allowed to overshadow the critical humanitarian need of providing assistance for Russian Jews arriving in Israel.

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Apparently it did not occur to Shamir, or to the American Jewish leaders, that the dispossession of the Palestinian people caused by the settlements might be creating a humanitarian problem as serious as the one they were seeking to resolve for Soviet Jews.

In 1965, as director of international affairs for the National Jewish Community Relations Council, I organized the first national demonstration in Washington that served to help place the plight of Soviet Jews on the American Jewish agenda. And in 1991, at the time of that rally, I served as national director of the American Jewish Congress, an organization that played a pioneering role in the struggle to free Soviet Jews. But I saw Prime Minister Shamir's refusal to halt the settlement project, even if it meant foregoing what he claimed was financing critical to the success of that struggle, as implying that the settlement movement's land grabs were more important than the fate of Soviet Jews.

It suggested an order of priorities that undermined the moral justification for the urgency claimed by Israel and American Jewish organizational leaders for the loan guarantees demanded from the US administration.

I shared these views with General Brent Scowcroft, at the time the president's national security advisor. When he met afterward with an AIPAC delegation that told him the American Jewish community was united in opposition to President Bush's stand on this issue, Scowcroft informed them he knew that was not so.

The dishonesty of Shamir's position in his confrontation with Washington closely parallels the dishonesty of Prime Minister Netanyahu's position in his confrontation with President Obama over Iran's nuclear program. In both instances Israeli prime ministers resorted to deception to shield their government's illegal settlement project.



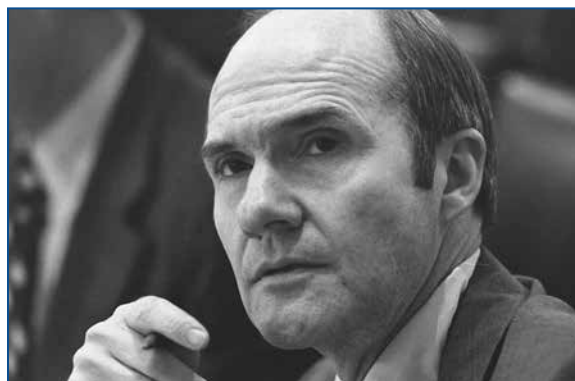
Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (left) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right). "If Netanyahu is convinced Iranians intend another Holocaust against the Jews in Israel, are the settlements worth risking such a tragedy?"

Netanyahu has demanded repeatedly that the US commit itself to going to war to halt Iran's nuclear program because he is convinced the nuclear weapon Iran seeks to develop is intended to inflict another Holocaust on Israel's Jews. But if Netanyahu really believes this, why has he not taken the one measure that would predictably deprive Iranian leaders of their only rationale for their hostility towards Israel — an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines in a peace accord with the Palestinians? That would not only remove the threat of the bomb but likely normalize relations with much of the Arab and Islamic world, a normalization held out by the Arab Peace Initiative that Netanyahu and his predecessors have done their best to ignore.

Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories would be a far more certain answer to the existential threat Netanyahu claims faces Israel than an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, which would be rebuilt by Iran with even greater determination and popular support in a matter of at most a few years.

Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as well as his predecessor stated publicly that a peace accord acceptable to the Palestinians would be acceptable to Iran, because Iranians need not be more Palestinian than the Palestinians. And while Iran's current president, Hassan Rohani, has clearly denied making a statement, falsely attributed to him by official Iranian news agencies, that Israel is "a sore that must be removed," Netanyahu's spokesman insisted that even if he did *not* say it, that's what he must be thinking.

If Netanyahu is convinced Iranians intend another Ho-



National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. When an AIPAC delegation that told him the American Jewish community was united in opposition to President George H.W. Bush's stand on Israel's West Bank settlements, Scowcroft informed them he knew that was not so.

locust against the Jews in Israel, are the settlements worth risking such a tragedy? To pose the question is to expose the disingenuousness of the prime minister's rants about the mortal dangers facing Israel. Netanyahu correctly noted at last year's memorial observance for Yitzhak Rabin that the assassinated prime minister also saw the Iranian nuclear program as a danger. But Rabin did not construe that danger to be another Holocaust, nor was he prepared to indulge Jewish religious and chauvinistic obsessions with territory to justify a predatory land-grabbing policy.

Ironically, it is that policy that has created the kind of existential threat to Israel that Netanyahu attributes to Iran. As several Israeli prime ministers and Secretary John Kerry have warned, the loss of a two-state solution — which is the goal of Israel's settlement project — may well end Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state.

By accepting the pre-1967 armistice line (with mutually agreed swaps) as Israel's border in the renewed peace talks begun in Washington by Secretary Kerry, Netanyahu would not be giving up anything that rightfully belongs to the state of Israel. What he would be giving up is the settlers' and his own efforts to create "facts on the ground" that will do to Palestinians what he claims Iran intends to do to Israel: remove their national home from the map of the Middle East.

If the renewed peace talks are to have even the slightest chance of succeeding, the US must finally begin calling things by their right name. ✧

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Rabbi Arthur Waskow

When I Sued the FBI — and Won

IN RECENT MONTHS WE HAVE BEEN LEARNING A GREAT deal about massive and continuing wiretapping of the phone calls and e-mails of hundreds of millions of Americans by “our” government.

For me, this has had a strong personal kick to it. To explain why, I have to share with you a story that began forty-five years ago.

In 1968 the Federal Bureau of Investigation undertook an effort called “COINTELPRO” — short for “counter-intelligence program” — that used such illegal means as warrantless wiretapping, theft, forgery, agents provocateurs, and worse — to disrupt the lawful civil rights, Black-liberation, and antiwar movements.

It was directly supervised by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, with orders to keep it totally secret within the FBI.

But in 1975, post-Watergate investigations by a Senate committee chaired by Senator Frank Church made COINTELPRO widely known.

So in 1976, nine Washingtonians, including me, sued the FBI for violating our First Amendment right “of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

We won.

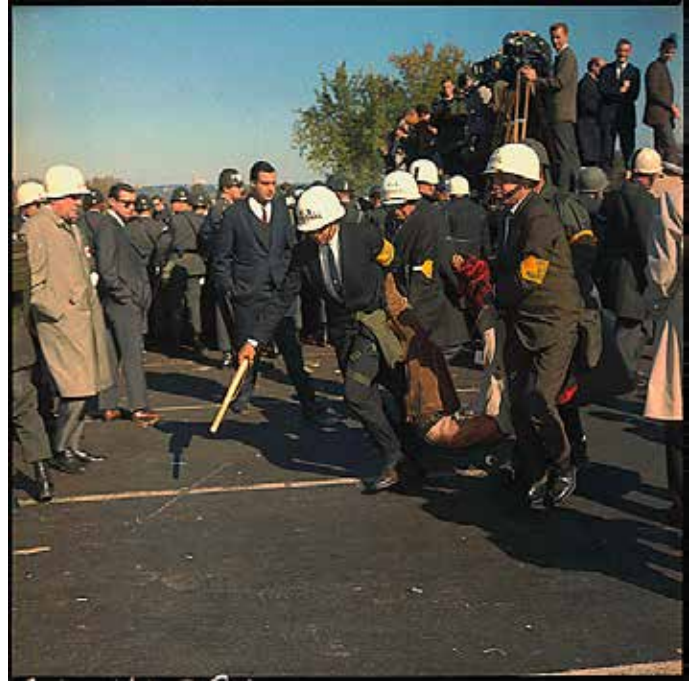
Years later, our lawsuit became the subject of a chapter in a book by Ellen Alderman and Caroline Kennedy — yes, the Caroline Kennedy who has just been appointed US ambassador-designate to Japan.

It’s worth reading the stories of who the activists and the FBI agents were, how we faced each other, what the court case was like.

The book is about the real-life importance of various provisions of the Bill of Rights in protecting the rights of grassroots American citizens. Its title is *In Our Defense: The Bill of Rights in Action* (Morrow, 1991).

When they were writing, Kennedy and Alderman were law students at Columbia University. They interviewed me in a lunch booth in a crowded restaurant near Columbia. I was startled to find I could hardly speak in answer to their questions without coming to the verge of tears.

RABBI ARTHUR WASKOW *chairs the Shalom Center* (<https://www.theshalomcenter.org>). *Reprinted with permission.*



US Marshals dragging away a Vietnam War protestor in Washington, DC.

Why? I wasn’t sure then and am not sure now. Maybe the memory of Caroline as a little girl when her father was killed? Maybe sadness over all the deaths and losses, wars and disasters, of the thirty years since then?

We won our case — an unprecedented decision that robbing Americans of their constitutional rights, even if they don’t suffer any financial losses, requires the government to pay damages.

When the FBI appealed, we won again. The unanimous decision in 1986 of the DC Circuit Court of Appeals included then Judge Antonin Scalia — a fact that astonished me then and still does.

The damages I received were \$8,000. With \$2,000 I bought my first computer, for use in The Shalom Center’s work. To each of my two children I offered a \$3,000 grant to support them for a year if they chose to do political activist work of their choice.

I told them the gift should be understood as the J. Edgar Hoover Memorial Fellowships.

Both of them agreed. David Waskow spent the year as a community organizer for tenants' rights, and worked for years afterward as a community organizer. He is now an activist policy expert on climate issues. Shoshana Waskow spent a year working at a shelter for battered women. She is now a pediatrician.

The first lines of the Alterman-Kennedy chapter are these:



Congressional hearings chaired by Senator Frank Church (left) revealed the extent of COINTELPRO's domestic spying conducted by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover (right).

By August of 1969, Abe Bloom and Arthur Waskow were spending almost every night planning a massive demonstration against the Vietnam War scheduled for November 15 in Washington, DC. Bloom, an electronics engineer by training, was treasurer of the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (New Mobe). Waskow, a PhD historian and scholar, was a member of the New Mobe steering committee. Like Bloom, he had attended or spoken at every major demonstration in Washington in the 1960s...

Its last lines are these:

When it comes to the future, "I am inclined to guarantee that you will never see a resumption of that type of activity by the FBI again," Charles Brennan [chief of the Internal Security Section of the FBI] said at the trial. "The delineation of what the FBI can or can't do is very clear, and the Department of Justice has taken much firmer control over the FBI so that it is not going to operate in the autonomous manner that it did under Mr. Hoover."

Tina Hobson [one of the activist plaintiffs] is not so sanguine. "I think that since our case is over, somebody else better follow. You have to try to create a government that's close to your heart's desire. If you don't do it, somebody else will."

Of course, Tina Hobson has proved to be correct, One generation later, the National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency and the FBI have been penetrating the private lives of almost all Americans.

For them, and the administrations that control them, "freedom" is only what the *government* has — freedom to poke around in people's lives.

"Freedom" is not what the Occupy demonstrators had

when a concerted national police response, after using provocateurs to incite violence and infiltrators to stymie decision making, finally used outright force to expel them from public parks. "The right of the people peaceably to assemble" be damned.

And "freedom" is not what Bradley Manning had when the government tortured him with months of solitary confinement, nor what he has now when "our" government has thrown him in prison for the next

thirty-five years. Nor what Edward Snowden has as the US government charges him too with espionage, after bribing or blackmailing most of the world's governments to deny him political asylum.

And "freedom" is not what journalists and whistleblowers have while the Obama administration charges them under the Espionage Act of 1917. Twice as many have been charged under this president as were under all presidents from Woodrow Wilson to George Bush II put together.

The US government has claimed that these invasive techniques are essential to prevent terrorist attacks, and even claimed that an emergency response last August to al-Qaeda threats was possible only because of this surveillance.

But we already know that the threats came from a specific al-Qaeda leader, and it did not take guzzling up billions of everyone's e-mails to get a warrant based on "probable cause" to listen to him specifically.

That is what the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States requires. Freedom denied to whistleblowers and journalists is freedom denied to us all — because without the information they give us, we cannot either give or refuse "the consent of the governed" (see Jefferson et.al., Declaration of Independence, 1776) to what our government is doing.

I have said that the climate crisis and its danger to the whole web of life on Earth is the most crucial issue that we face.

But we cannot face it, or any other issue, if we allow the power-hungry pharaohs of our day — whether they are called "corporate" or "governmental" — to shut down our freedoms of criticism, petition, assembly, and to vote, or to threaten us with prison, or to bludgeon us with money.

The only memorial J. Edgar Hoover deserves is the passion and compassion of free citizens — together.

That is why I decided to share this story with you.

Shalom, salaam, paz, peace. ✧

Murray Polner

Opting Out of the "Good War"

IN A NATION WHERE WORLD WAR II IS COMMONLY celebrated in films and on television with an aura of triumphalism, Charles Glass's book, *The Deserters* (Penguin 2013), reexamines a phase of the war essentially overlooked by uncritical extollers of the "Good War."

Other than the unfortunate Private Eddie Slovik, the only GI executed for desertion during the Second World War, deserting the military is hardly an anomaly. During the Civil War, which took the lives of seven hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, about three hundred thousand men deserted from the Union and Confederate armies, Mark Twain famously among them. During the First World War, some three hundred British deserters were executed. Not until 2006, following a campaign organized by a citizen's group Shot at Dawn, did the British government finally deign to pardon them.

The Deserters is not a defense of desertion. It is a rational examination that asks why so many chose to escape. Charles Glass was the chief Middle East correspondent for ABC News who also covered Africa and the Balkans. His study tells us that during World War II, one hundred thousand British and fifty thousand American soldiers deserted; several thousand Americans were punished, and forty-nine received death sentences, none carried out. The truth, as more Americans now realize, is that war is not all about glory, as Hollywood and television usually portray it, but a potential abattoir where young men and women, some not long past their teens, are often broken in body and mind.

Glass focuses on three deserters: the Americans Stephen Weiss and Alfred Whitehead, and John Vernon Bain, a British soldier.

At age seventeen, Brooklyn-born Stephen Weiss volunteered

and soon after fought in Italy and France. Stranded behind German lines he joined a group of French partisans. When he reconnected with his unit, his buddies asked why he even bothered to return. Tried and found guilty of desertion he was imprisoned, eventually freed, and is today a psychiatrist in California.

Alfred Whitehead was awarded Silver and Bronze Stars for heroism. Then, after experiencing periods of almost sustained fighting, he deserted and joined other Americans who ran criminal and black market gangs in post-liberation Paris.

Captured, he was punished and discharged. Whitehead eventually self-published a memoir. When Whitehead died, his son told Glass, "For years Dad just went through the emotions of being alive. He never laughed, rarely smiled and was always distant in mood," adding that he believed his father died long before "in the fields and hedgerows of France."

John Vernon Bain, who later called himself Vernon Scannell, had been a working-class boxer who volunteered in 1940, grew to despise military life, and deserted. He was captured and tortured

in a British prison in Egypt, returned to the front lines, fought and deserted twice more. In 1953 Winston Churchill declared a general amnesty for World War II deserters, and Scannell married, taught, and became a celebrated and honored poet, seven of whose books are listed in Glass's bibliography. Clearly, the war never left him, and he relived it in many of his poems.

Relying on extensive interviewing, diaries, courts-martial proceedings and self-published memoirs, Glass's challenging and striking book points out that of the three million American troops shipped to Europe only about ten percent "were in combat at the same time," and it was infantrymen who suffered the overwhelming number of the casualties. "Too few did most of the fighting in World War II" and "Few deserters were cowards," Glass argues. "I was nothing more than a dog-faced slogging infantry soldier," Weiss wrote of fighting in the Italian campaign.



A legacy of the 'war to end war': A display on exhibit at the Army Medical Services Museum, Aldershot, England.

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“For troops who were not killed or injured,” Glass comments, “the only way out was surrender, a self-inflicted wound, insanity or desertion.” Many would crack under the strain of battle or simply desert.

How to cope with wartime deserters was a real problem for the Army, given that an Army provost marshal report estimated that thousands of deserters were loose in France, probably protected by French civilians and soldiers who refused to turn them in. Initially, the Army tried its traditional get-tough approach: courts-martial, threatened executions, and lengthy prison sentences at hard labor. But that never stopped the outflow. Following the widespread negative public reaction to reports that General George Patton had slapped a soldier obviously suffering from combat fatigue, some field commanders changed their normally get-tough views.

Major General John E. Dahlquist, Weiss’s combat infantry commander, for example, wrote his superior that “The problem of war weary men in the Infantry of the old divisions which fought in Italy is one of the most serious we have,” and he urged that they “should be removed from the Infantry because they have lost their ‘zip’ and tend to weaken the fighting spirit of the new men.” In effect, he was urging treatment rather than punishment. Dahlquist’s judgment, though, was rejected by his rear-echelon superiors.

Glass also cites an investigation by General Elliot D. Cooke, who set out to discover why so many Americans refused to serve. (However, Glass makes no mention of the uproar about a one-year draft law passed in October 1940 by just one congressional vote, which was followed the follow-

ing October by the spontaneous “Over the Hill in October” movement led by draftees who wanted out.) Good connections always counted, as Cooke learned when he found that some draft boards had generously exempted the favored few. In one case, a local board had declared fourteen members of the Rice University football team ineligible for service. Such favoritism, often based on class, political ties or privileged occupation, continued well into Vietnam, when virtually no major league baseball player served on active duty during the war (nor did most adult children of Washington’s politically-connected elite), thanks to what appeared to be a tacit arrangement between draft officials and baseball clubs allowing otherwise eligible healthy young players to enlist in hard-to-secure havens in the Reserves and National Guard, a subject about which the independent scholar Ron Briley has written.

I once overheard a World War II vet at a “Support Our Boys” pro-Vietnam War rally say, “Scratch a guy who wants war and you’ll find he never served in combat.” True or not, I remember reading a *New York Times* op-ed essay in 2010 by Larry Pressler, a Vietnam vet and former Republican senator from South Dakota. In it, he recalled the time he served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “Many of those who avoided the [Vietnam] war became advocates of a muscular foreign policy,” he wrote. “I encountered far too many Democrats and Republicans who did not serve in the war when they had a chance, and who overcompensated for their unease by sending others into harm’s way.”

As they did in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who knows, may yet do again in the Middle East. There is, however, a sane alternative: No war, no deserters. ☆

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