

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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The Alarming Worldwide Alliance of Parties on the Far Right

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Stefan Merken

It is critical we keep a focus on who we are and where we are going

IF YOUR EMAIL INBOX IS ANYTHING like mine, you are getting daily requests to sign petitions. Just this morning I received several informative emails addressing the issue of net neutrality, a couple more to change directions of the current administration in Washington, and still several more to raise awareness of issues different organizations want those in power to reverse. I can't say I sign them all. But I do take the time to read what is being sent to me and try to pick and choose the issues that I feel are important. I want to have my voice heard.

An issue that seems to be creeping into not only American but European political scenes is how some political parties are moving to the far right. Many here in the US and in Europe are coming together to make strong alliances to push a very right-wing agenda. Despite her recent defeat, the candidacy of Marine Le Pen in France reveals the strength of such alliances and how much power they still can gain. This issue of Shalom has an article by Lawrence Wittner about such al-

liances and the rise of the far right. Also in this issue are two articles about the nuclear threat in America. One by Murray Polner and another by W.J. Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF), raise the issue of just how serious this nuclear threat is today. "What is frightening to me is that the far right is gaining popularity and, with the availability of nuclear arsenals, we are leaving the door open for a nuclear disaster."

The editorial board of the Shalom included in the last two issues of this newsletter some of JPF's critical positions. We wanted to restate our purpose and reaffirm our vision and mission as an organization. It is critical that we keep a focus on who we are and where we are going as an organization.

When the JPF was begun back in 1941 there was no Internet full of information at a finger's touch. Now, anyone can find the information they want, no need to show up for a meeting. Today we are connected over the Net. Many peace groups are suffering from just this issue. No new members show up to volunteer or donate. The JPF used to print a newsletter and then mail it to members. Today, we do everything on line. Drop us a note and let us know your thoughts on the matter. We'd love to hear from you. ✧

STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

Yes! Here is my tax-deductible contribution to the Jewish Peace Fellowship!



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Mail this slip and your contribution to: Jewish Peace Fellowship ✧ Box 271 ✧ Nyack, NY 10960-0271

Murray Polner

Nuclear War Anyone?

CQ ROLL CALL RECENTLY REPORTED THAT the Defense Science Board(DSB), a Pentagon panel, had advised our new president to prepare the military to use a “tailored nuclear option for limited use.” Great News.

Even though, as *CQ Roll Call* added (and the “realist” *National Interest* commented on extensively in “Could America Really Win a ‘Limited’ Nuclear War?”), this “recommendation is more evolutionary than revolutionary,” it was Jim who once wisely explained to Huck Finn, that “time goes fast.” Above all, the DSB’s recommendation reminded me of the experts who once fantasized that limited or even top of the line nuke blasts would somehow allow post-attack millions to live on and thrive. T. K. Jones, a Pentagon official, famously advised his fellow Americans in 1982, Years

“You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.”—

Attributed to Leon Trotsky

after Khrushchev moronically threatened to bury the U.S., Pentagon official T. K. Jones still felt compelled to respond in kind when he famously advised his fellow Americans in 1982, “If there are enough shovels to go around everybody’s going to make it.” And so school kids were told to duck under their desks and apartment house owners set aside basements as shelters.

All the same, ordinary Americans have not always been so trusting, especially since Vietnam. Millions protested the draft and a war based on lies, marched for a nuclear freeze and before 2003 against the invasion of Iraq. And while the



Above: Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev hug in 1961 — in Cuba.

Right: Nikita Khrushchev letter to President Kennedy stating that the Cuban Missile Crisis quarantine “constitute[s] an act of aggression propelling humankind into the abyss of a world nuclear-missile war.”

Уважаемый господин Президент,
Получил Ваше письмо от 23 октября, ознакомился с ним и отвечаю Вам.
Представьте себе, господин Президент, что мы поставили бы Вам те ультимативные условия, которые Вы поставили нам своей акцией. Как бы Вы реагировали на это? Думаю, что Вы возмутились бы таким напором с нашей стороны. И его было бы нам понятно.
Поставив нам эти условия, Вы, господин Президент, бросили нам вызов. Кто Вас просил делать это? По какому праву Вы это сделали? Наши связи с Республикой Куба, как и отношения с другими государствами, независимо от того, какое это государство, касаются только двух стран, между которыми имеются эти отношения. И если уж говорить о карантине, упоминаемом в Вашем письме, то его, как это принято в международной практике, могут устанавливать только государства по договоренности между собой, а не какая-то третья сторона. Существуют, например, карантины на сельскохозяйственные товары и продукты. Но в данном случае речь идет совсем не о карантине, а о гораздо более серьезных вещах, и Вы это сами понимаете.
Его Превосходительству
господину Лесли Кеннеди,
Президенту Соединенных Штатов Америки
г. Вашингтон

mass protests after Trump’s election avoided foreign policy, it shouldn’t take long to arouse Americans if they find themselves buried in permanent and unwinnable wars against, say, North Korea and Iran and the despised draft reinstated to provide cannon fodder.

An anxious NY Times reader reflected that view when he wrote, “The times we live in are truly more dangerous than I thought.” Another, a self-described 20 year Marine veteran, wrote, “We are the provocateurs, not the North Koreans.” He wondered why the constant threats to the cruel hermit nation, “an unstable regime with

a delusional leader. Perhaps we are the crazy ones,” adding that we should let countries solve their own problems. An anonymous reader, in the often insightful paleo-conservative American Conservative magazine, offered this gem:

MURRAY POLNER is SHALOM’s co-editor.



Now it is President Donald Trump's turn to decide who, if anyone, gets nuked.

War, is one of a relatively few scholars who questions the existing groupthink. “North Korea is the only country in the world to have been systematically blackmailed by U.S. nuclear weapons going back to the 1950s, when hundreds of nukes were installed in South Korea,” he wrote. “Why on earth would Pyongyang not seek a nuclear deterrent?”

Vice President Mike Pence in Tokyo, with Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso in Japan, Tuesday, April 18, 2017.

“The U.S. cannot defeat Iran or Russia [or for that matter, China, should it choose to intervene as it did in 1951 if it sees North Korea being destroyed]—or other targets—because to do so takes far more sacrifice than the American people are willing to make. Ordinary Americans are not convinced,” he continued, that these wars pose enough of a threat to volunteer themselves, or send their own children, to be killed or maimed in a pointless exercise.” And from England an interpretation rarely heard from our comfortable, far from the battlefield foreign policy elites: “The hubris of American officials is that somehow what they devise will alter the violent Middle East landscape.”

Today, as Trump's neophyte agents Michael Pence and Rex Tillerson saber-rattle, the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet, armed with tactical nukes, patrols nearby waters while U.S. bombers can easily make the trip from North American bases to North Korea, which also has nukes but chemical and biological weapons too, the same sort of weapons used so extensively by the U.S. in Vietnam.

Historian Bruce Cumings, who wrote *The Korean*

But this crucial background doesn't enter the mainstream American discourse. History doesn't matter, until it does—when it rears up and smacks you in the face.”

Critics who might agree with him have been silent. Fewer even have spoken and written that the certain outcome of any U.S. nuke attack on North Korea, deliberately or by miscalculation, could lead to a calamitous war, leaving Pyongyang and Seoul in ashes and its millions vaporized, including tens of thousands of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea and Japan.

John Dower, MIT professor emeritus of history and author of *Embracing Defeat*, which received the Pulitzer Prize, has written a new and thoughtful if depressing book, *The Violent American Century: War and Terror Since World War Two*, in which he offers these words of warning about our addiction to war: “The mystique of exceptional [American] virtue does not accommodate serious consideration of irresponsibility, provocation, intoxication with brute force, paranoia, hubris, reckless and criminal actions, or even criminal negligence.”

Now it is President Donald Trump's turn to decide who, if anyone, gets nuked.✪

SHALOM

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Lawrence Wittner

The Alarming Worldwide Alliance of Parties on the Far Right

Political parties on the far right are today enjoying a surge of support and access to government power that they have not experienced since their heyday in the 1930s.

This phenomenon is particularly striking in Europe, where massive migration, sluggish economic growth, and terrorism have stirred up zealous nationalism and Islamophobia. In France, the National Front founded in 1972 by former Nazi collaborators and other right-wingers employing anti-Semitic and racist appeals has tried to soften its image somewhat under the recent leadership of Marine Le Pen. Nevertheless, Le Pen's current campaign for the French presidency, in which she is one of two leading candidates, includes speeches delivered against a screen filled with immigrants committing crimes, jihadists plotting savage attacks, and European Union (EU) bureaucrats destroying French jobs, while she assails multiculturalism and promises to "restore order." In Germany, the Alternative for Germany party, established three years ago, won up to 25 percent of the vote in state elections in March 2016. Led by Frauke Petry, the party calls for sealing the EU's borders (by shooting migrants, if necessary), forcing the migrants who remain to adopt traditional German culture, and thoroughly rejecting Islam, including a ban on constructing mosques. According to the party platform, "Islam does not belong in Germany."

Elsewhere in Europe, the story is much the same. In

This phenomenon is particularly striking in Europe, where massive migration, sluggish economic growth, and terrorism have stirred up zealous nationalism and Islamophobia.

Britain, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), led until recently by Nigel Farage, arose from obscurity to become the nation's third largest party. Focused on drastically reducing immigration and championing nationalism (including pulling Britain out of the EU), UKIP absorbed the constituency of neo-fascist groups and led the struggle for Brexit, which it won. In the Netherlands, a hotly-contested parliamentary election in March 2017 saw the far right Party for Freedom emerge as the nation's second largest political party. Calling for recording the ethnicity of all Dutch citizens and closing all Islamic schools, the party is headed by Geert Wilders, who has been tried twice in that country for inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims. In Italy, the Northern League

(so-named because it originally pledged to liberate industrial Italian workers in the north from subsidizing lazy Italians in the south), demands drastic curbs on immigration and removal of Italy from the Eurozone. Its leader, Matteo Salvini, contends that Islam is "incompatible" with Western society.

Other European parties of the far right include Hungary's Jobbik (the country's third-largest party, which is vehemently hostile to immigration, the EU, and homosexuality), the Sweden Democrats (now vying for second place among Sweden's parties, with roots in the white supremacist movement and a platform of heavily restricting immigration and opposing the EU), Austria's Freedom Party (which, founded decades ago by Nazis, nearly won two recent 2016 presidential elections, vigorously opposes immigration, and proclaims "yes to families rather than gender madness"), and the People's Party-Our Slovakia (which supports leaving the EU and the Eurozone and whose leader has argued that "even one immigrant is one too many").

Only one of these rising parties is usually referred to

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Marine Le Pen at the 1st of May National Front's rally in honour of Joan of Arc, Paris.



President Donald Trump's official portrait.

as fascist: Greece's Golden Dawn. Exploiting Greece's economic crisis and, especially, hatred of refugees and other migrants, Golden Dawn has used virulent nationalism and the supposed racial superiority of Greeks to emerge as Greece's third-largest party. Golden Dawn spokesman, Elias Kasidiaris, is known for sporting a swastika on his shoulder and for reading passages from the anti-Semitic hoax, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, to parliament. The party also employs a swastika-like flag, as well as gangs of black-shirted thugs who beat up immigrants. Party leaders, in fact, are on trial for numerous crimes, including violent attacks upon migrants.

Other far right parties in Europe, although striving for greater respectability, also provide reminders of 1920s- and 1930s-style fascism. Addressing a Northern League rally, Italy's bombastic Salvini wore a black shirt while supporters waved neo-Nazi symbols and photos of Benito Mussolini. In Hungary, Jobbik's platform includes a call to "stop hushing up such taboo issues" as "Zionist Israel's efforts to dominate Hungary and the world." Meanwhile, the leaders of Alternative for Germany have revived words once employed by the Nazis. In January 2017, one leader created a scandal when, addressing a party youth gathering, he criticized Germany's commemoration of Holocaust crimes. That same month, speaking at a rightwing gathering in Germany, Wilders used the occasion to lament that "blonde" Eu-

ropeans were becoming "strangers in their own countries."

Around the globe, the same trend is in evidence. In the United States, of course, Donald Trump won a startling victory in his run for the presidency, employing attacks on Mexican migrants, Islamophobia, calls for law and order, and promises to "make America great again." The Republican Party, moving rightward for years before Trump captured the party nomination, quickly embraced this agenda.

In Russia, Vladimir Putin and his United Russia party solidified their grip upon power, with Putin telling parliament that social and religious conservatism provided the only ways to keep Russia and the world from slipping into "chaotic darkness."

Defending "traditional values," Putin attacked multiculturalism, aligned himself with the reactionary Orthodox Church, promoted a mystical, authoritarian nationalism, and fostered a government crackdown on Russia's Muslims.

In India, the *BJP*, a Hindu nationalist party with a past that included violent attacks upon the nation's Muslim minority, grew substantially and captured control of parliament. Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the *BJP* opposes Muslim immigration, supports a program of social and economic conservatism, and trumpets the slogan "India First."

Although these parties of the far right have some differ-

The Republican Party, moving rightward for years before Trump captured the party nomination, quickly embraced this agenda.

ences, they also share some key characteristics. Uninterested in challenging economic and social inequality, they develop their popular appeal by flaunting extreme nationalism, hostility to immigrants and religious minorities, a disdain for multiculturalism, and, in most cases, a call to return to “traditional values.” Not surprisingly, then, they usually get on very well. Responding to Donald Trump’s election, a spokesman for Golden Dawn praised it as a victory for “clean ethnic states.” He added: “A great global change is starting, which will continue with nationalists prevailing.” In January 2017, three of the top stars of the rising far right—Le Pen, Petry, and Wilders—shared the platform at a rightwing conference in Germany, at which they promised a new day for Europe.

Europe’s far right parties have been particularly enthusiastic about Putin. Unlike most other European political groupings, they applauded his war against Georgia and military meddling in Ukraine. When Putin invited representatives of their parties to observe the referendum to have Russia annex Crimea, they dutifully attended the event, after which France’s National Front, Britain’s UKIP, Austria’s Freedom Party, and Italy’s Northern League endorsed its legitimacy. Hailing Russia’s president as a true patriot, Le Pen lauded him as a defender of “the Christian heritage of European civilization.” Farage, asked which world leader he most admired, responded without hesitation: Putin! The leader of Austria’s Freedom Party, Heinz-Christian Strache, praised Putin as a “pure democrat.” Indeed, Europe’s far right parties blame the EU and NATO for the crisis in the Ukraine, support lifting EU sanctions on Russia, and back Russia’s military intervention in Syria. In the European parliament, their representatives vote in favor of Russian interests nearly all the time.

In turn, Russia’s president has assisted these parties in their struggle for power. In 2014, the National Front received an 11 million euro loan from a Russian bank to help finance its successful municipal election campaign. During the current French presidential campaign, the National Front applied for a substantially larger Russian bank loan, Russian media outlets are working hard for Le Pen; Putin received her in Moscow with the kind of buildup usually accorded a head of state. In Germany, Russian media and social networks played up a false story of an alleged gang rape of a 13-year-old girl by migrants, prompting tens of thousands of Germans to take to the streets in protest and startling electoral gains by Alternative for Germany. That party has denied allegations that Russia is providing it with funding, but not the possibility that Russia is behind the mysterious appearance of millions of copies of its campaign newspaper and thousands of its election signs. Meanwhile, the youth group of Alternative for Germany has forged an alliance with Putin’s United Russia party.

Russia’s president has assisted these right wing parties in their struggle for power.



Vladimir Putin

The story is much the same in other nations. In Austria, the Freedom Party appears to be receiving Russian financial assistance through a thinly veiled intermediary, a prominent Russian oligarch. Russian cooperation with Austria’s far right became official in December 2016, when the United Russia party signed a cooperation agreement with the Freedom Party. In Britain, the Russian government, despite formal statements of neutrality, clearly sided with UKIP’s Brexit campaign. Enamored of Farage, it provided him with frequent guest appearances on *Russia Today* and, following passage of the Brexit referendum, even offered him his own show on that state-funded network. In the Netherlands, Russia’s disinformation and propaganda arms have worked to assist Wilders and his Party for Freedom by trumpeting false news stories.

No one, however, has inspired the rising far right more than Donald Trump. As early as March 2016, Salvini was enthusiastic about the U.S. business magnate, and in late April he traveled to Pennsylvania to participate in a Trump rally. Here he held a “Trump: Make America Great Again” sign and afterward had a 20-minute meeting with the Republican presidential front-runner that consummated their alliance. Farage took part in Trump’s presidential campaign that August in Mississippi, where he shared the rally platform with him and lauded his fellow right-winger before the cheering crowd. In October 2016, Golden Dawn en-



Matteo Salvini in Piazza Cesare Battisti in Trento.

dorsed Trump on the floor of the Greek parliament, hailing the “patriotic wind” sweeping through Europe and North America. Furthermore, if U.S. intelligence agencies are correct, Vladimir Putin set Russian covert operations in motion to help secure Trump’s political triumph.

Naturally, Trump’s election victory sent a surge of euphoria through the far right. From France, Le Pen lauded it as “a sign of hope,” showing “that people are taking their future back.” Farage, addressing a victory party near the White House, declared: “Brexit was great, but Trump becoming the president of the USA is Brexit plus, plus, plus.”

Farage, in fact, was the first British politician to meet with Trump after the US election; he posed for photographs with the president-elect in the gold-plated elevator of Trump Tower. Exhilarated by Trump’s election, the leaders of Alternative for Germany immediately dispatched a congratulatory telegram to him. At a celebration in Munich, a party leader told the cheering crowd that what Trump had done in the United States, their party would do in Germany. “America First is coming to Deutschland,” he boomed, with the crowd erupting in thunderous applause.

As might be expected, Trump’s executive orders banning refugees and other immigrants from predominantly

Muslim nations sent parties of the far right into ecstasy. In Greece, thousands of Golden Dawn supporters surged into the streets, carrying torches and waving their Nazi-like flags. “Well done,” President Trump, exulted Wilders; “it’s the only way to stay safe and free.” In a National Front rally brimming with nationalist fervor, Le Pen declared that Americans had “kept faith with their national interest,” while National Front supporters shouted joyously: “This is our country!” Trump’s action was also lauded by the Northern League, Alternative for Germany, and the whole panoply of ultra-right parties. Although government officials of most nations condemned Trump’s immigrant ban, India’s prime minister conspicuously refrained from any criticism, while India’s foreign secretary said that the world should not “demonize” Trump.

Viewing Trump as a kindred spirit, as well as the leader of the world’s most powerful nation, the parties of the far right are keen on cementing an alliance with him. Upon Trump’s election, Alternative for Germany informed him that it was a “natural ally” at his side. Farage was so eager to court Trump that he met with him three times during the first weeks of Trump’s presidency. Salvini told the rightwing Breitbart News that his party shared many of the policies of the new administration and was a logical ally. “On many issues,” the Italian leader said, “we see eye-to-eye with President Trump and we look forward to partnering with his administration.” Arguing that “a direct channel with the new American president is crucial,” Salvini promised to quickly establish “direct, serious, non-mediated contact” with the Trump administration.

But what is the attitude of Trump and his circle toward these leaders of the far right? Apparently, it is quite favorable. When Trump, during his campaign for the presidency, first spoke with Salvini, he told him: “Matteo, I hope you become prime minister of Italy soon.” Moreover, Trump, as a fan of Farage and keen supporter of Brexit, has not only met

with Farage on numerous occasions, but has publicly declared that the rightwing leader would make a good British ambassador to the United States. Le Pen, like her rightwing allies, made a much-publicized, post-election victory visit to Trump Tower, although Trump’s

transition team denied that the incoming president met with her.

Trump has also displayed a remarkable affection for rightwing politicians in power. Political observers have been struck by Trump’s consistent admiration for Vladimir Putin, whom Trump has praised for his “strong control” over Russia. “He’s been a leader,” said Trump, “far more than our president has been.” So intertwined have Trump and his associates been with Russian officialdom that the FBI is conducting a criminal investigation of collusion between Trump campaign officials and the Russian government during the U.S. presidential election campaign.

Trump’s executive orders banning refugees sent Europe’s far-right parties into ecstasy.

ILLUSTRATIONS: 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 8 Wikimedia Commons.

Similarly, within three days of taking office, Trump conversed on the telephone with India's Prime Minister Modi, one of the few world leaders with whom he had spoken since his inauguration. According to a White House statement, Trump said that he considered India a "true friend and partner in addressing challenges around the world," and was looking forward to welcoming Modi to the United States later in the year. In turn, Modi said that he had had a "warm conversation" with Trump, and that the pair had "agreed to work closely in the coming days."

Some of Trump's aides have been even more outspoken in praising parties and leaders of the far right. For years, Steve Bannon, who managed the final portion of Trump's election campaign and who is now the president's top political strategist, ran Breitbart, a far right news service that he described as "the platform for the alt-right." Under his leadership, Breitbart worked assiduously to provide favorable publicity for UKIP, Alternative for Germany, the Party for Freedom, and other right-wing parties. Farage recalled that "when Bannon opened up the Breitbart office in London and began to give the arguments that I was making... a very, very big audience," this turned the tide for Brexit. Consequently, Farage publicly offered "a personal thank you and tribute to Steve Bannon for having the foresightedness of doing that with Breitbart," for which he was "extremely grateful."

And the project continues. In November 2016, after Breitbart announced plans to expand to Berlin and Paris, Reuters, citing sources "close to Bannon", reported that "the aim is to help elect right-wing politicians in the two countries."

Bannon's alliance with the far right is not merely a marriage of convenience, but is based on a deep-seated nationalist ideology and love of power that he shares with it. "I think strong countries and strong nationalist movements in countries make strong neighbors," Bannon told an audience of conservative religious activists in 2014. These were "the building blocks that built Western Europe and the United States, and I think it's what can see us forward."

Sometimes, the Trump administration's intense nationalism seems built on a very unsavory past. Bannon, who wrote Trump's "America First" inaugural address, is an admirer of a nationalist right-winger, Charles Maurras, a vicious anti-Semite and supporter of France's World War II Nazi-dominated regime who, after the war, was sentenced to life imprisonment as a collaborator. Sebastian Gorka, a Hungarian immigrant who worked for Bannon at Breitbart and, like Bannon, is now a White House advisor, was recently named by officers of a quasi-Nazi Hungarian nationalist group as a sworn member of their organization. Although Gorka denied this allegation, he did wear its medal to a Trump inaugural ball and did add a "v" middle initial to his

Steve Bannon's alliance with the far right is not merely a marriage of convenience

name, a practice that comports with the group's traditions. Other Republican officeholders have also displayed an affinity with Europe's far right politics. In March 2017, U.S. Representative Steve King publicly praised Geert Wilders, who, in his latest anti-immigrant tirade, referred to Moroccans as "scum." "Wilders understands that culture and demographics are our destiny," King declared, with admiration. "We can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies." In September 2016, he posted online a photo of Wilders and himself, warning of "cultural suicide by demographic transformation."



Chief White House Strategist Steve Bannon speaking at the 2017 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in National Harbor, Maryland.

Although numerous public officials condemned King's latest racist broadside, White House press secretary Sean Spicer refused to comment on it. Trump was also silent on King's remarks. But back in 2014 when Trump campaigned for the Iowa congressman's election, he called King

a "special guy, a smart person, with really the right views on almost everything." With their ideologies so in sync, said Trump, "we don't have to compare notes."

In this fashion, then, political forces around the world have been drawing together in recent years into a far right international. Although its future remains uncertain, especially if Putin and Trump come to a parting of the ways, it certainly has plenty of political momentum at present. "Long live Trump, long live Putin, long live Le Pen, and long live the League," exulted the Northern League's Salvini in early 2017. "Finally, we have an international alliance." ✪

W. J. Astore

The Threat of Nuclear Weapons to America

Did you know the U.S. has built nearly 70,000 nuclear weapons since 1945? Did you know the U.S. Air Force lost a B-52 and two hydrogen bombs in an accident over North Carolina in 1961, and that one of those H-bombs was a single safety-switch away from exploding with a blast equivalent to three or four million tons of TNT (roughly 200 Hiroshima-type bombs)? Did you know a U.S. nuclear missile exploded in its silo in Arkansas in 1980, throwing its thermonuclear warhead into the countryside?

That last accident is the subject of a PBS *American Experience* documentary that I recently watched “Command and Control.” I highly recommend it to all Americans, not just for what it reveals about nuclear accidents and the lack of safety, but for what it reveals about the U.S. military.

Here are a few things I learned about U.S. nuclear weapons and the military from the documentary:

During the silo accident, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) general in charge of nuclear missiles was a pilot with no experience in missiles. His order to activate a venting fan during a fuel leak led to the explosion that destroyed the missile and killed an airman. (Experts from Martin Marietta, the military contractor that built the Titan II missile, advised against such action.)

Airmen who courageously tried against long odds to mitigate the accident, and who were wounded in the explosion, were subsequently punished by the Air Force.

The Air Force refused to provide timely and reliable knowledge to local law enforcement as well as to the Arkansas governor (then Bill Clinton) and senators. Even Vice President Walter Mondale was denied a full and honest accounting of the accident.

Nuclear safety experts concluded that “luck” played a role in the fact that the Titan’s warhead didn’t explode. It was ejected from the silo without its power source, but if that power source had accompanied the warhead as it flew out of the silo, an explosion equivalent to two or three megatons could conceivably have happened.

WILLIAM J. ASTORE, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF), has taught at the Air Force Academy and the Naval Postgraduate School. He currently teaches history at the Pennsylvania College of Technology.

In short, the U.S. has been very fortunate not to have nuked itself with multiple hydrogen bombs over the last 70 years.

Finally, the number of accidents involving U.S. nuclear weapons is far greater than the military has previously reported. Indeed, even the nation’s foremost expert in nuclear weapons development was not privy to all the data from these accidents.

In short, the U.S. has been very fortunate not to have nuked itself with multiple hydrogen bombs over the last 70 years. Talk today of a threat from North Korea pales in comparison to the threat posed to the U.S. by its own nuclear weapons programs and their hair-raising record of serious accidents and safety violations.

Despite this record, President Obama and now President Trump have asked for nearly a trillion dollars over the next generation to modernize and improve U.S. nuclear forces. Talk about rewarding failure!

Threatening genocidal murder is what passes for “deterrence,” then and now. This madness will continue as long as people acquiesce to the idea the government knows best and can be trusted with nuclear weapons that can destroy vast areas of our own country, along with most of the world.

To end the insanity, we must commit to eliminating nuclear weapons. Ronald Reagan saw the wisdom of total nuclear disarmament. So should we all.

An Addendum: In my Air Force career, I knew many missileers who worked in silos. They were dedicated professionals. But accidents happen, and complex weapons systems fail often in complex and unpredictable ways. Again, it’s nuclear experts themselves who say that luck has played a significant role in the fact that America hasn’t yet nuked itself. (Of course, we performed a lot of above-ground nuclear testing in places like Nevada, making them “no-go” places to this day due to radiation.)✪