

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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nation shall

NOT



lift up sword
against nation,
neither shall they learn

WAR anymore
ISAIAH 2:4

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Stefan Merken

Passover Seder in Seville

MY WIFE BETTY AND I ARE ON A two-month fellowship in Cadiz, Spain. We arrived at the beginning of April and realized there was no local Jewish community to celebrate the Passover Seder with. So we contacted Beit RamBam, the Jewish community in Seville, about two hours north of Cadiz. Beit RamBam in Seville is made up of 125 families. They have no rabbi and no synagogue. But the community is alive and well, with many beautiful children and interesting and diverse community members. There are Hebrew classes every week and many activities which bring the families together often. Beit RamBam was recently gifted a Torah by a reform congregation in Philadelphia.

The Seder was held at a restaurant and there were approximately 50 people in attendance. Smaller Seders were held that evening in private homes in Seville. The Haggadah at the Beit RamBam Seder was in English, Spanish and of course Hebrew. We heard all three languages during the

It is an extraordinary experience to walk into a room full of strangers and to be welcomed and accepted simply by the fact that we're all Jewish.

Seder, with attendees reading various passages of the inspiring story from slavery to freedom. There were Spanish, French, Israeli, American, and Russian participants.

It is an extraordinary experience to walk into a room full of strangers and to be welcomed and accepted simply by the fact that we're all Jewish. This was very much evident as we sat at the Seder table, relaxing, drinking wine, and listening to the younger generation ask the four questions. When walking back to our hotel after the Seder Betty and I talked about how special it was to have met new friends who also accepted us as family. ☆

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

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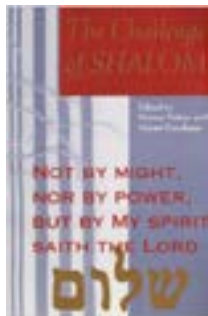
WE WORK to abolish war and to create a community of concern transcending national boundaries and selfish interests.

WE REFRAIN from participation in war or military service.

WE RESPECT the common humanity in each person, male or female, affirming differences in religion, ethnic background, national loyalties...all these are transcended by belief in the sanctity of life.

“Just to be is a blessing
Just to live is holy.”

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



The Challenge of Shalom: The Jewish Tradition of Peace and Justice
Edited by Murray Polner and Naomi Goodman

Highlights the deep and powerful tradition of Jewish nonviolence. With reverence for life, passion for justice, and empathy for suffering, Jews historically have practiced a “uniquely powerful system of ethical peacefulness.” *The Challenge of Shalom* includes sections on the Tradition, the Holocaust, Israel, Reverence for all life and Personal Testimonies. \$18.95 per copy, plus \$5 shipping.

Murray Polner

It's Mother's Day Again and We're Still at War

Few Americans know that Mother's Day was initially suggested by two peace-minded mothers, Julia Ward Howe and Anna Reeves Jarvis, mother of eleven, to remain neutral and help nurse the wounded on both sides.

AFTER THE CARNAGE OF THE SECOND World War the members of the now defunct Victory Chapter of the American Gold Star Mothers in St. Petersburg, Florida, knew better than most what it was to lose their sons, daughters, husbands and other near relatives in war. "We'd rather not talk about it," one mother, whose son was killed in WWII, told the St. Petersburg Times fifteen years after the war ended. "It's a terrible scar that never heals. We hope there will never be another war so no other mothers will have to go through this ordeal." But thanks to our wars in Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan—not to mention our proxy wars around the globe—too many Moms (and Dads too) now have to mourn family members badly scarred or lost to wars dreamed up by the demagogic, ideological and myopic.

But every year brings our wonderful Mother's Day. Few Americans know that Mother's Day was initially suggested by two peace-minded mothers, Julia Ward Howe, a nineteenth-century anti-slavery activist and suffragette who wrote the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Anna Reeves Jarvis, mother of eleven, who influenced Howe and once asked her fellow Appalachian townspeople, badly polarized by the carnage of the American Civil War, to remain neutral and help nurse the wounded on both sides.

Howe had lived through the Civil War, which led her to ask a question that's as relevant today as it was in her time: "Why do not the mothers of mankind interfere in

these matters, to prevent the waste of that human life of which they alone bear and know the costs?" Mother's Day, she insisted, "should be devoted to the advocacy of peace doctrines." Howe soon moved beyond her unquestioned support for the Union armies and became a pacifist, opposed to all wars. "The sword of murder is not the balance of justice," she memorably wrote. "Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor does violence indicate possession."

Though not a mother, my favorite female opponent of war and imperialism was the undeservedly forgotten poet and feminist Katherine Lee Bates who wrote "America the Beautiful" as a poem in 1895, which is now virtually our second national anthem for all Americans, left, right and center. The poem I love best is her "Glory," in which an officer heading for the front says goodbye to his tearful mother.

Again he raged in that lurid hell

Where the country he loved had thrown him.

"You are promoted!" shrieked a shell.

His mother would not have known him.

More recently there was Lenore Breslauer, a mother of two, who helped found Another Mother for Peace during the Vietnam War and also helped coin their memorable slogan: "War is not healthy for children and other living beings." Years later I came to know three mothers named Carol (Adams,

MURRAY POLNER is SHALOM's co-editor.



“Arise, then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts, whether our baptism be that of water or of tears!...”

“We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says ‘Disarm, Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice.’”

~Julia Ward Howe, 1870

From her Mother’s Day Proclamation for Peace

Miller and Cohen, plus my wife Louise) who formed Mothers and Others Against War to protest President Jimmy Carter’s absurd resurrection of draft registration. They stayed on to battle Ronald Reagan’s toxic proxy wars in Central America.

On this Mother’s Day we could use more anger and dissenting voices of many more women of all political stripes to protest the needless and cruel sacrifice of their sons, daughters, wives and husbands as cannon fodder, as Russian mothers did in protesting Moscow’s invasions of Afghanistan and Chechnya. In Argentina and Chile, mothers and grandmothers marched against U.S.-supported torturers and murderers during the late seventies and early eighties. And in this country, the anti-war movement has often been led by women who no longer believe “War is a glorious golden thing...invoking honor and Praise and Valor and Love of Country”—as a bitter, disillusioned and cyni-

cal Roland Leighton, a WWI British combat soldier, wrote to his fiancée, Vera Brittain, the great British anti-war writer.

Sadly, on Mother’s Day yesterday, today, and in the years ahead, peace and justice seems further away than ever. How many more war widows and grieving families do we need? Do we need yet another war memorial to the dead in Washington? More bodies to fill our military cemeteries? More crippled and murdered soldiers and civilians so our weapons manufacturer’s stock prices can rise? Do we really need to continue disseminating the myth—and lie—that an idealistic America always fights for freedom and democracy?

Vietnam, Korea, the Middle East, etc., more than one hundred thousand American men and women have been killed or grievously harmed in our endless wars, not to mention several million Asians and Middle Easterners, Israelis and Palestinians too. Do enough Americans care? They all had mothers. ✘

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David Swanson

The Middle East for Dummies

The first point I'd like to touch on is the idea that the Middle East is a culturally violent place that can be made less violent by bombing it. The first problem with this is that bombing places makes them more violent, not less. Nobody is shocked or awed into nonviolence, not 14 years ago and not for the past century. The second problem is that the Middle East's violence cannot be compared with that of other cultures without figuring out how to factor out the influence of the West. A hundred years ago, Britain and France carved up Western Asia, and not to spread democracy.

The West has been propping up brutal kings and dictators ever since. Outside of Israel, which is essentially a Western colony, the Middle East does not manufacture weapons. Just as the West once pushed opium on China or alcohol on the native peoples of this land we're sitting on, the West pushes weapons on Western Asia, and the top weapons dealer to the world, to poor nations, and to the Middle East is the United States—with records set under President Obama likely to be smashed under Trump. Virtually all the weapons used in all the wars around the world—and all the major wars around the world, apart from Afghanistan and Mexico, are in the Middle East and Northeast Africa—come from six nations. They are the five permanent members and saboteurs of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany. These are the nations that will be working hard to defeat and disrupt the treaty negotiations. They are also the nations whose weapons dealers profit from the blood of millions of innocent people too far away to see and too valueless to be reported on U.S. television.

Recently a racist drove up to New York to kill black men, thinking that would make big news. He forgot that someone white might be attacked in London. At the same time, the U.S. government was busy murdering scores of people in the Middle East. Guess which of these three killing sprees is labeled terrorism, and which other two see the media slander

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the victims and completely ignore the terror and trauma to the survivors. Imagine being a black man walking in Manhattan today. Imagine being anyone living in the Middle East today. U.S. weapons flow to Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Turkey, not to mention Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, and to non-governmental organizations that the U.S. government itself calls terrorists in places like Syria. Most if not all forces against which these weapons are used also use U.S. weapons previously given, sold, traded, or stolen. The U.S. military brings its own weapons to Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and in fact every single nation of the region, plus the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the skies above, with the possible

But of course the people of the region appreciate the effort, right? Yeah, about as much as the people of Ferguson appreciate the police.

exception of what's left of Palestine to which genocidal cause the United States philanthropically donates billions of dollars of weapons to the Orwellianly named Israeli Defense Forces. Each overthrow that the U.S. leads, including those in Iraq and Libya, leads to massive proliferation of weapons, creating chaos and death as far off as places like Mali. But of course the people of the region appreciate the effort, right? Yeah, about as much as the people of Ferguson appreciate the police.

The global policeman headquartered in Arlington is less popular in the places policed than a congressman at a health care rally. In December 2013, Gallup surveyed 65 countries around the world, and most said the United States was the greatest threat to peace on earth. In eight countries in or near the Middle East, four said the United States was

the greatest threat to peace, three placed the U.S. second behind Israel, and in Afghanistan those surveyed placed the U.S. second behind Pakistan. It's nice to be appreciated. It wouldn't take much to actually be appreciated. Stop selling weapons. Stop giving weapons. Stop bringing weapons. Withdraw troops. Send food, medicine, farm equipment, clean energy equipment. Doing that would cost a tiny fraction of what it costs to keep making everything worse.

Trump says the U.S.-initiated wars of the past 16 years have made everything worse, so we should have more of them.

He's drone murdering at 4 times Obama's pace. He's moving more troops into Syria and Kuwait. And he wants to defund everything else to fund a yet more expensive military. Charlottesville City Council to its great credit has opposed this, but one of its five members would only do so if the resolution pretended that all the killing protects U.S. rights. When we get to Q&A I'd love someone to explain to me how murdering Yemeni children gives me more rights, and how demonstrating inside a free speech cage instead of in the open the way we used to constitutes an expansion of freedom. The mayor of Charlottesville refused to support the resolution because it mentioned the U.S. military, and he wants to have some higher office purchased for him some day. Several weeks back both the ACLU and the Council on American-Islamic Relations on the same day sent out national fundraiser emails quoting a Gold Star father from Charlottesville claiming that U.S. warmaking in Iraq serves to protect the Bill of Rights. These are organizations whose entire purpose is to oppose some of the symptoms of the wars, yet they promote the wars because they have so internalized the propaganda that they literally cannot imagine questioning it.

That's the purpose of my book *War Is A Lie*, which Helena's company was good enough to publish, to encourage questioning—questioning of the sort that stopped a bombing of Syria in 2013 and supported a treaty with Iran in 2015, but completely fell apart and inserted its head into its posterior the moment an ISIS video was shown on television. Mike Signer is not the only coward among us. Our entire foreign policy and public budget are shaped by irrational fear. More likely than ISIS killing you are each of the following: a U.S. police officer killing you, the stairs in your house killing you, pollutants in your environment killing you, a toddler who finds a gun killing you, or Donald Trump retweeting you. I make

no comment on which of those fates would be the worst.

As you've heard about Yemen and Syria, let me add a couple of comments about Afghanistan and Iraq. The current U.S. war in Afghanistan is well into its 16th year, though U.S. violence there began much earlier. The U.S. military now has approximately 8,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, plus 6,000 other NATO troops, 1,000 mercenaries, and another 26,000 contractors (of whom about 8,000 are from the United States). That's 41,000 people engaged in a foreign occupation of a country 15 years after the accomplishment



Sgt. David M. Pooler scans the area across the Kunar River as he provides security in the Noorgal district in Afghanistan's Konar province, May 1, 2010. This was part of a community development council meeting.



An AH-64 Apache helicopter shoots flares over a valley to support members of the 8th Commando Kandak and coalition special operations forces during a firefight near Nawa Garay village, Kajran district, Daykundi province, Afghanistan.

U.S. and allied soldiers now being ordered into Afghanistan were in pre-school on September 11, 2001. Ordering young American men and women into a kill-or-die mission that was accomplished 15 years ago is a lot to ask.

of their stated mission to overthrow the Taliban government. Afghanistan is the most heavily bombed country of all current U.S. wars, the bulk of that bombing done under President Barack Obama, who also tripled the level of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, before reducing them. During each of the past 15 years, our government in Washington has informed us that success was imminent. During each of the past 15 years, Afghanistan has continued its descent into poverty, violence, environmental degradation, and instability.

The United States is spending \$4 million an hour on planes, drones, bombs, guns, and over-priced contrac-

tors in a country that needs food and agricultural equipment. Thus far, the United States has spent nearly \$800 billion with virtually nothing to show for it except the death, injury and displacement of millions of Afghans, and the death of thousands of U.S. soldiers plus the injury of tens of thousands and the endangerment of people in the United States, the erosion of our rights, the shame of Guantanamo, and destruction of the earth's environment.

Before Faisal Shahzad tried to blow up a car in Times Square, he had tried to join the war against the United States in Afghanistan. In numerous other incidents, terrorists targeting the United States have stated their motives as including revenge for the U.S. terrorism in Afghanistan, along with other U.S. wars in the region. In addition, Afghanistan is the one nation where the United States is engaged in major warfare in a country that is a member of the International Criminal Court. That body has now announced that it is investigating possible prosecutions for U.S. crimes in Afghanistan. Over the past 15 years, we have been treated to an almost routine repetition of scandals: hunting children from helicopters, blowing up hospitals with drones, urinating on corpses—all fueling anti-U.S. propaganda, all brutalizing and shaming the United States. U.S. and allied soldiers now being ordered into Afghanistan were in pre-school on September 11, 2001. Ordering young American men and women into a kill-or-die mission that was accomplished 15 years ago is a lot to ask. Expecting them to believe in that mission is too much. That fact may help explain this one: the top killer of U.S. troops in Afghanistan is suicide. The second highest killer of American military is green on blue, or the Afghan youth who the U.S. is training turning their weapons on their trainers. Candidate Trump said: "Let's get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghans we train and we waste billions there. Nonsense! Rebuild the U.S.A." President Trump is acting contrary to every part of that.

At 14 years since the launch of Operation Iraqi Liberation (to use the original name with the appropriate acronym, OIL) and over 26 years since Operation Desert Storm, there is little evidence that any significant number of people in the United States have a realistic idea of what our government has done to the people of Iraq, or of how these actions compare to other horrors of world history. A majority of Americans believe the war since 2003 has hurt the United States but benefitted Iraq. A plurality of Americans believe, not only that Iraqis should be grateful, but that Iraqis are in fact grateful.



Iraqi militiaman

ILLUSTRATIONS: 5 • 7 • 8 Wikimedia Commons.

A number of U.S. academics have advanced the dubious claim that war-making is declining around the world. Misinterpreting what has happened in Iraq is central to their argument. By the most scientifically respected measures available, as of some years ago, though the death and destruction has continued, Iraq had lost 1.4 million lives as a result of OIL, had seen 4.2 million additional people injured, and 4.5 million people become refugees. The 1.4 million dead was 5% of the population. That compares to 2.5% lost in the U.S. Civil War, or 3 to 4% in Japan in World War II, 1% in France and Italy in World War II, less than 1% in the U.K. and 0.3% in the United States in World War II. The 1.4 million dead is higher as an absolute number as well as a percentage of population than these other horrific losses. U.S. deaths in Iraq since 2003 have been 0.3% of the dead, even if they've taken up the vast majority of the news coverage, preventing U.S. news consumers from understanding the extent of Iraqi suffering.

In a very American parallel, the U.S. government has only been willing to value the life of an Iraqi at that same 0.3% of the financial value it assigns to the life of a U.S. citizen.

The 2003 invasion included 29,200 air strikes, followed by another 3,900 over the next eight years. The U.S. military targeted civilians, journalists, hospitals, and ambulances. It also made use of what some might call "weapons of mass destruction," using cluster bombs, white phosphorous, depleted uranium, and a new kind of napalm in densely settled urban areas.

Birth defects, cancer rates, and infant mortality are through the roof. Water supplies, sewage treatment plants, hospitals, bridges, and electricity supplies have been devastated, and not repaired. Healthcare and nutrition and education are nothing like they were before the war. And we should remember that healthcare and nutrition had already deteriorated during years of economic warfare waged through the most comprehensive economic sanctions ever imposed in modern history.

Money spent by the United States to "reconstruct"

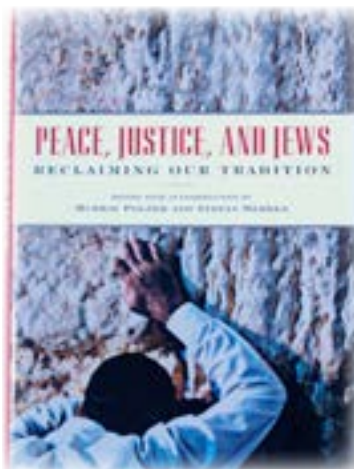
Iraq was always less than 10% of what was being spent adding to the damage, and most of it was never actually put to any useful purpose. At least a third was spent on so-called "security," while much of the rest was spent on corruption in the U.S. military and its contractors.

The educated who might have best helped rebuild Iraq fled the country. Iraq had the best universities in Western Asia in the early 1990s, and now leads in illiteracy, with the population of teachers in Baghdad reduced by 80%.

For years, the occupying forces broke the society of Iraq down, encouraging ethnic and sectarian division and violence, resulting in a segregated country and the repression of rights that Iraqis used to enjoy, even under Saddam Hussein's brutal police state.

Without Bush and Obama there would be no ISIS. Obama shifted to air war, and dropped more bombs and missiles on Iraq than Bush did. Obama set records for military spending and for weapons sales and gifts abroad. He created drone wars in Pakistan and Somalia and Yemen. He ended the idea that presidents need Congress for wars, with his war in Libya fueling the violence in Syria and Iraq among other places. He put more troops in more countries. He bombed eight countries and bragged about it. He firmly established warrantless spying, baseless imprisonment, torture, and assassination as policy choices rather than crimes. He wrote secret and public so-called laws that his successor is picking and choosing from without input from the legislature. He created a new cold war with Russia. He did these things willingly or he permitted his subordinates to do them.

Now Trump says he'll destroy ISIS, and the U.S. Secretary of Exxon-Mobil said yesterday: "Hard-fought victories in Iraq and Syria have swung the momentum in our coalition's favor, but we must increase the intensity of our efforts and solidify our gains in the next phase of the counter-ISIS fight." We're winning so we need more war is a stand-by. In distant second is, of course, we're losing so we need more war. ✧



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