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From Dictatorship to Democracy in Cairo

Stefan Merken is chair of Jewish Peace Fellowship.

THE NEWS FROM the Middle East for the past few weeks has been riveting to watch and live through. Young and old protesters taking to the streets and relying on nonviolent tactics in Tunisia, and then a few days later seeing the faces of at least a million Egyptians march in Cairo and Alexandria and calling for the end of a dictatorship, and all the while stressing nonviolence. A population so set on achieving nonviolent solutions to unseat a dictator has given me a feeling that something was working there about which one could only dare dream.

As we all know, President Obama was in Egypt in June 2009 and gave a dynamic speech about democracy. I read the speech and was quite surprised that no one balked at his subject, knowing that Egypt was not a democracy. Little did we know then what we saw happen just a few weeks ago.

How did this nonviolent revolution come about? How did so many understand the basic rules of nonviolent tactics? I was in the Philippines just prior to the ouster of the Marcos regime in 1986, teaching about nonviolence with Reverend Richard Deats. We taught workshops about nonviolent action and resistance to ecumenical audiences, students in college and seminary, a rural life center, etc. The participants were mainly Protestant who represented less than 10 percent of the religious population of the Philippines in 1986. Rev. Deats had previously taught for 13 years at the Union Theological Seminary in Manila until 1972, when all the church's current ministers were students. They had learned from him how a struggle for freedom can be won without killing, particularly through the teachings of Gandhi, King and the Bible. At about the same time, International Fellowship of Reconciliation's Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayer were also holding workshops with Catholic audiences in the Philippines.

But, why in the streets of Cairo? Nonviolence is not something that masses of people usually follow unless they have a solid understanding of how and why it works. In other words, nonviolence is something that often must be taught, must be explained — it does not come easily unless there is a deeply religious

or philosophical understanding. We humans have a tendency to retaliate with force and ask questions later. But on the streets of Cairo that was not the case, and I kept wondering why.

Finally, a *New York Times* article on February 16, 2011, written by Sheryl Gay Stolberg, provided some explanation.

Gene Sharp, who has been a giant among those of us in the peace movement but barely known outside these circles, has

worked tirelessly for years in defining what and how nonviolent strategies succeed. He has written volumes on the subject, and one book in particular — *From Dictatorship to Democracy* — is a 93-page guide to bringing down autocrats. It is on the Net in 24 languages and has been an inspiration to many. The *Times'* article went on to explain that the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (<http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/>) had quietly

led workshops in Cairo several years ago, training Egyptian democracy activists. Part of what they studied and then distributed widely was Sharp's booklet, *198 Methods of Nonviolent Action*. It was translated into Arabic and made available to many protesters in Tunisia and Egypt. It also turns out that FOR literature used in the civil rights movement (especially a comic book version of the Montgomery bus boycott) had also been translated into Arabic and widely distributed. (See the article online at <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11051/1126410-109.stm>.)

I am sure that these are not the only reasons so many Egyptians took to the streets and used nonviolence to bring down the government. Still, I believe it is a major reason that so many knew of the process.

There are times when working in the peace movement that one loses sight of the prize. There are moments when you can feel that our work is going nowhere, that there is no one out there listening to the message we feel is so critical. Once, after publicizing a meeting attended by only a few people, I mentioned this to Rabbi Michael Robinson. Mike put his hand on my shoulder and told me, "You never know if one of those announcements reached someone and got him or her thinking. You just have to keep a focus on the greater picture." Seeing the results in Egypt has made his words once again crystal clear to me. ☆



Henry Siegman

Obama's Choice

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VIRTUALLY OVERNIGHT, the Arab Middle East has been irrevocably transformed. The implications for America's vital interests in the region and for Israel-Palestine peacemaking will be far-reaching. Most observers seem to agree that Israeli fears of the growing political influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and of a resurgence of Hamas in the West Bank end what little prospect for an Israeli-Palestinian accord might have survived the latest deadlock in the U.S.-brokered peace talks. But in reality there was never the slightest possibility of the parties reaching agreement. Binyamin Netanyahu and his government were convinced they had bested Obama in their confrontation over continued settle-

ment construction, and could now continue gobbling up the West Bank with impunity, disregarding not only American interests but international law and all previous agreements committing Israel to halting the construction of settlements and dismantling all its illegal outposts. (Despite repeated promises, not only were the illegal outposts not removed, many were converted into full-blown settlements.) The long-planned goal of Israel's colonial enterprise — establishing irreversible control over Palestine through its settlements — was clearly in sight, if not already an accomplished fact.

Israel's indifference to popular outrage throughout the region over its 44-year occupation was sustained by its belief that authoritarian Arab regimes, whose survival depended

to a considerable extent on the U.S. security umbrella, would keep their subjects' rage in check. The regimes' deference to the U.S. was responsible for the stability of Egypt's and Jordan's peace accords with Israel and for the historic Arab Peace Initiative, agreed in 2002, which committed all Arab countries to full normalization of relations with Israel, provided a peace accord with the Palestinians was reached.

But America's credibility and influence had begun to be eroded even before the popular eruptions in the region, in part because of Obama's capitulation to Netanyahu. Whatever willingness there may have been among Arab regimes to

join Israel and the U.S. in an anti-Iran coalition, it will be weakened by the fall of Mubarak. Iran's influence in the region will be strengthened. The enmity of most Arab regimes towards Iran is not shared by their citizens, primarily because they saw Iran as having assumed leadership in the struggle against Israel's occupation of Palestine that their own leaders abandoned.

The challenge to Israel of the revolutionary changes now underway



President Barack Obama. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza.

may well be existential, depending on how it responds to these events. With Mubarak on the way out, Israel may once again be a pariah nation in the region. Netanyahu's government has already proved that even if Zionism is not racism, Zionists can be racists. By denying Palestinians a state of their own and bringing about an apartheid state, it may yet succeed in persuading the world that Zionism as practiced by Israel is indeed no different from the settler colonialism that existed in South Africa.

Israel's peace treaty with Egypt is what ruled out a successful military challenge by the other countries in the region. Egypt has by far the most effective military force in the Arab Middle East, and no Arab military challenge to Israel would

have been dared without Egypt's participation. A change of government in Egypt that brings to an end Mubarak's policy of supporting America's coddling of Israel would seriously undermine Israel's strategic situation. Moreover, Jordan's peace treaty with Israel is unlikely to survive if Egypt's treaty is abrogated — Jordan wouldn't want to risk being the only Arab country to maintain normal relations with Israel.

No matter what further changes there may be in the region, developments in Tunisia and Egypt have already drastically curtailed the ability of surviving Arab regimes to move towards a rapprochement with Israel. It is unlikely that the Arab Peace Initiative, disdained by Israel for nearly a decade, will remain on the table. No surviving Arab regime will dare challenge the popular rage against Israel for the humiliations it inflicts on the Palestinians. While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the prime cause of the current upheavals, the failure of Arab regimes to halt Palestinian dispossession is not far from the top of the list of popular grievances.

The Obama administration's handling of the changing realities in the Arab world will not win prizes, even if its reluctance to abandon Mubarak, the regional linchpin of its Middle East policies, is rational. It will have to act fast if it is to restore some of its lost credibility in the newly emerging Middle East, particularly given its ineptness in dealing with Netanyahu's xenophobic government.

The administration's best chance of restoring some of its lost credibility may lie here: in the attempt to rescue a functioning and sovereign state from an unyielding Israeli occupation now on the verge of swallowing Palestine whole. If the U.S. were to succeed and a viable Palestinian state emerge, not only would America's influence in the region grow and Iran's be weakened, but the major cause of Arab and wider international hostility to Israel — and of popular Arab support for Iran — would be greatly diminished.

Given the record of failed U.S. peace initiatives, is such a

rescue operation even conceivable? Can an American president finally abandon the peace process for the fraud it has been, present the parties with a detailed framework for a permanent status solution and obtain Israeli and Palestinian acceptance? The answer is yes, for two important reasons.

First, the recent upheavals have dramatically increased the cost to American interests of the country's current policies in the Middle East. Not only does it exceed by far the cost to any administration of admitting the truth about Israel's culpability for the deadlocked peace talks; it's a cost to America's interests that even congressmen in thrall to the Israel lobby may now find excessive. No one has suggested the U.S. punish Israel in order to get its way. It need only cease to reward it — with unprecedented military, diplomatic and economic gifts — for its indifference to the damage its sabotaging of a two-state solution has done not just to the Palestinians but to America's national interests and its own.

Second, Israel's own cost-benefit calculations have changed. Now that it is on the verge of reverting to an earlier isolation — its peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan are at risk, international assaults on its legitimacy are newly underway — a government that rejects the urgent demands of its only remaining friend will not survive for long.

At this historic turning point, a president who honestly and fully informs the American people of the likely consequences of U.S. leadership being abandoned in a part of the world so critical to America's national security will have their support — even if he goes so far as to put forward a framework for a two-state accord that ends the conflict between Israel and Palestine. ☆

— February 4, 2011

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Ira Chernus

A New Approach to Mideast Peace

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FOR THOSE OF US who have labored in the vineyard of Middle East peace for decades, this is the best of times and the worst of times. Around the world, the cause of a just peace between Israel and Palestine has enlisted many millions of followers. Here in the U.S. our movement, so marginalized for so long, has grown by leaps and bounds in the last few years, among Jews and gentiles alike.

Yet actual progress toward peace seems stalled at best. The shift to the right in Israeli politics makes the task more daunting than ever. The Obama administration's veto of a UN resolution that declared Israeli settlements illegal — simply stating the administration's own position — reminds us how hard it still is to pry U.S. policy away from right-wing Israeli positions.

The veto reminds us, too, that the U.S. government still holds the key to Middle East peace. No matter what the rest of the world thinks, there will be no peace agreement as long as the U.S. backs Israeli policy. If the Palestinians follow through on their talk of self-declared independence, only the U.S. can restrain a violent Israeli reaction. So the veto is a measure of how huge a task remains undone in our peace movement.

It's easy enough to blame the rightist Israel lobby in Washington for keeping U.S. policy stuck in its rut. But at a certain point, when one's movement is growing rapidly yet still so far from success, it makes sense to look in the mirror and see whether some part of the fault lies not in our opponents but in ourselves.

Within peace circles, the messages we disseminate seem logically compelling. But despite the rapid recent growth, our peace circles are still quite small. To understand our relative

lack of success, we have to step outside our own circle and see how our messages are received by the wider public. (Here, as an American, I speak only of the American public.)

The strategic messages of the Jewish peace movements generally fall into two categories. One focuses on the dreadful harm done to the Palestinians. It details the morally outrageous Israeli policies that impose on Palestinians the constant risk of physical harm and the certainty of human rights abuses. It asks Americans how they can countenance such shameful actions perpetrated with their tax dollars, how they can ignore world opinion and let their own government block a meaningful peace process.

But anyone in the American public who has any interest in the issue already has a fair idea of the facts. They see it on TV. The problem is that so many don't define what they see as outrageous or abusive. What counts as a human rights

abuse or moral outrage depends on the context. Suppose you strike out at someone who is menacing you or your child? Isn't that just self-defense?

That's how most Americans see Israel's use of force and its human rights offenses. The myth of Israel's supposed insecurity — the vulnerable little David fighting bravely against the Arab Goliath bent on destroying it — is the very foundation of U.S. political discourse about the conflict. As long as it remains so, most of the public will recognize the harshness of Israeli policy but accept it as what the Israelis claim it is: a tragic necessity. They'll sympathize when Israelis say *Ein breira* ("There is no choice").

Haven't we Americans felt forced to do dreadful things to protect our nation and its freedoms? And haven't most Americans been quite content to ignore world opinion when the chips were down and our own well-being seemed to be at stake?

The other kind of peace message warns of the great harm



Ambassador to the UN Susan E. Rice explaining the U.S.'s veto, February 18, 2011. Photo: UN News Centre.

The crucial task for the peace movement — a task ignored by too many for too long — is to attack the myth of Israeli insecurity head on, persistently, with all the tools at our disposal.

Israel is doing to itself: Continuing the occupation of the West Bank and the economic strangulation of Gaza must lead either to a full-blown apartheid state, which will bring an end to democracy in Israel, or to another war, or both.

Unfortunately that view, too, does not gain much traction. The U.S. public may well value democracy, but it generally sees national security as a higher priority. As long as most credit Israeli claims of “existential threat” as realistic and reasonable, they’ll continue to accept the argument that Israel can take no chances for peace.

After 9/11, when most Americans felt faced with an existential threat to our nation’s very existence, there was little resistance to the PATRIOT Act. In fact, relatively few had, or have, any idea of how much the act curtails their own civil liberties. Few bother to ask. They just assumed that the abridgment of democracy is a price worth paying when “the evildoers” are at the gates.

As long as the same view is applied to Israel, the peace movement’s warnings about harm done to Israelis as well as Palestinians will fall on largely deaf ears in this country. Any serious pressure from the Obama administration to push Israel towards compromise will be decried as a threat

to Israel’s very existence, and the charge will be widely believed. So Obama, whatever his personal wishes, will find it politically too dangerous to make any real changes in U.S. policy.

Most of us in the peace movement know that the myth of Israeli insecurity has no basis in reality. Perhaps, since it’s so detached from reality, it never occurs to us to take it seriously. But most of our fellow-citizens take it very seriously indeed; it’s the frame within which they place all the news they get about the Israel-Palestine conflict and U.S. Mideast policy.

The crucial task for the peace movement — a task ignored by too many for too long — is to attack the myth of Israeli insecurity head on, persistently, with all the tools at our disposal. We’ll have to keep up that effort until we finally discredit the myth and replace it with a realistic narrative based on the premise of Israel’s secure existence as a nation-state.

If we achieve that goal, there’s a chance to get the rest of our message heard, shift public opinion, and thus open the possibility of changing U.S. policy. If we don’t achieve that goal, all the rest of our effort is likely to be for naught. ✧

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Dan Fleshler

Mubarak and the Alternate Universe Of Israel's Vicious Critics

Dan Fleshler writes at the Web site *Realistic Dove* (<http://www.realisticdove.org>). He is the author of *Transforming America's Israel Lobby: The Limits of Its Power and the Potential for Change* (Potomac Books).

EVENTS IN EGYPT have reinforced my sense of living in a universe different than the one inhabited by Israel's most vicious critics (let's call them IMVCs) in the blogosphere. Oh, we have a few things in common. Like them, I am inspired by the Egyptian crowds demanding the overthrow of a tyrant. Like them, I am appalled by the continuing Israeli occupation and settlement expansion and the sufferings of the Palestinian people. But they still appear to reside in a kind of alternate reality, harboring assumptions that do not apply to the universe I know. Here are two of those assumptions:

1. *The Israel lobby in the U.S. is the only reason America propped up Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak and his corrupt regime for so long.*

This assumption derives from a longtime, reflexive habit of blaming Jews for what it is wrong with the world.

Early on, when the Egyptian tumult was first getting televised and the U.S. was struggling to formulate a public stance, the increasingly influential Philip Weiss weighed in on MondoWeiss (and then Salon):

Barack Obama's failure to honor the Egyptian protesters in his State of the Union speech Tuesday night, and Joe Biden's cold negativity toward them last night (they're not up against a dictator, we can't encourage them, this is not the awakening of Eastern Europe), reveal the unwavering influence of the Israel lobby in our public life, and how conservative that influence is.

The administration's statements reveal that it prefers stability in Egypt, no matter the cost to civil rights and human rights there, to freedom for Arab people. And why? Because Egyptian stability pre-



"[A] hand of peace instead of inveterate hostility." Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin acknowledge applause during a Joint Session of Congress in which President Jimmy Carter announced the results of the Camp David Accords, September 18, 1978. Photo: Warren K. Leffler, via Pingnews/flickr.com

serves the Israeli status quo, in which Israel gets to imprison West Bank protesters without a peep from the U.S. government and gets to destroy civilians in Gaza again without a peep from the alleged change-agent in the White House.

Weiss jumped the gun. The night after that post, Obama warned Mubarak to avoid violence and stop censoring digital media, sending at least some encouraging signals to the Egyptian protesters. Obama could have given them more, but if the Mubarak-loving Israel lobby were so powerful, surely he would have kept his mouth shut.

What is revealing here is Weiss' eagerness to believe that Israel and its support base in the U.S. was the sole explanation for American policies, instead of a very important explanation. Apparently he could not imagine any other reason for U.S. support of Mubarak. There was no mention of the perceived need for stability in order to free up the Suez Canal, which is the conduit for billions of dollars worth of oil and

It is manifestly true and tragic that Sadat's deal(s) with Begin did nothing for the Palestinians ... But none of that detracts from the fact that the Israeli Egyptian peace has also saved untold numbers of lives on both sides of the border.

American military vessels. There was nothing about the perceived American need to fight al-Qaeda and violent Islamic extremists (who would exist without Israel), and the plain fact that Mubarak's regime helped in this regard. There was nothing about growing investments from America's private sector in the region. The actual, complex calculus employed by American foreign policy decision makers is inconvenient to Weiss, as it is mitigating evidence against the inherent evil of Zionist influence.

Now, it is one thing to claim that the perceived benefits of supporting stability in Egypt — including the preservation of its cold peace with Israel — do not warrant the coddling of a brutal autocrat. Of course they don't. The U.S. clearly should have pressed Mubarak much more forcefully on human rights and democratic freedoms.

But it is both simplistic and dangerous to assert that Israel and the Israel lobby are the only drivers of America's Egyptian policy. Yet that is a common assertion by IMVCs.

2. *There was and is something inherently wrong with the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.*

I've been tangling with America's conventional Israel lobby and the mainstream Jewish community for much of my adult life. But I share that community's fond memories of extraordinary moments in 1978 when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's limousine rumbled through the streets of Jerusalem, as Israeli throngs applauded and wept, grateful that an Arab leader was, for the first time, offering a hand of peace instead of inveterate hostility. As HDS Greenway recalls, "the joy in the streets of Cairo was no less when Israel's Menachem Begin made his reciprocal visit to Egypt. Egyptian cab drivers refused to take fares from visiting Israelis, some of whom had not been there since the days of the British Palestine Mandate."

It is manifestly true and tragic that Sadat's deal(s) with Begin did nothing for the Palestinians. It was reprehensible that Israel did not take advantage of a historic opportunity to foster Palestinian self-determination and end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But none of that detracts from the fact that the Israeli-Egyptian peace has also saved untold numbers of lives on both sides of the border. In the IMVC universe, those lives do not seem to have any significance. Here, for example, is Alex Kane:

The Mubarak dictatorship is a core pillar of the U.S./Israeli order in the Middle East, an order that completely ignores the wishes and aspirations of

people on the ground. The U.S. and Israel are scared of the new order that is to come.

As As'ad Abu Khalil notes at his blog, "the Israeli strategy in the Middle East has been firmly set on the continuity of the Sadat-Mubarak dictatorship." Israel's peace agreement with Egypt in 1979 removed a military threat to Israel and secured millions of U.S. dollars and military support for the Egyptian dictatorship. The Mubarak regime got *carte blanche* for its repressive rule.

Everything Kane says is true; but, based on what he omits in this and other posts, he appears to believe that saving lives and stopping war is of little consequence. Yes, Israel made and then sustained a peace deal with a despotic government, because that was the government Israel had to deal with. It had no choice. Imagine what Kane and his ilk would have said about "Zionist hegemony" if Israel had encouraged the overthrow of Mubarak and called for free elections. One gets the impression that Kane and Weiss feel that as long as Palestinians are suffering, there is something untoward about Israelis wanting to live without a major military power threatening them from the southwest. In the universe I live in, peace, even peace with dictators, is better than war.

Yes, the Israelis are, as Kane notes, "scared of the new order that is to come." They are scared of what could happen if the sophisticated arms Egypt has been receiving from the U.S. all these years are in the hands of a regime that is overtly hostile to the Jewish state. The Israelis who are scared include post-Zionists, anti-Zionist supporters of the boycott, sanctions and divestment movement, and other activists against the occupation. They include many people who empathize with the Egyptian people's struggle and strongly support democratic values and democratic reform. But they must deal with the universe as it is. There, a deeply flawed arrangement with Egypt has left the Palestinian people in the lurch. It has helped to prop up a dictatorship. But it has probably prevented a major military conflagration that would have slaughtered Arabs and Jews alike. That may be a devil's bargain, but it is better than no bargain at all. ☆

— January 30, 2011

This slightly shortened essay first appeared on the Web site Realistic Dove (<http://www.realisticdove.org>).

Stephen Kinzer

Where Is the Tea Party Revolution On Foreign Policy?

Stephen Kinzer is an author and newspaper reporter. He is a veteran New York Times correspondent who has reported from more than 50 countries on five continents. His books include Overthrow and All the Shah's Men.

AMERICA'S LATEST POPULIST movement, which reaches back to revolutionary history by calling itself the "Tea Party," helped shape the remarkable results of last November's midterm election. Some dare to hope that candidates elected in that political uprising might help arrest America's alarming decline. Others see the uprising as no more than a cover for the corporate power that lay behind many so-called insurgent campaigns of that extraordinary political season.

One thing about Tea Party ideology is clear: it is almost entirely a reaction to the Obama administration's domestic policies. The decline of American greatness, however, is due at least as much to profoundly misguided foreign policies. Unless those policies are reevaluated and changed in some fundamental way, there will be little chance of reclaiming America's immense promise.

Where do the self-described insurgents stand on crucial questions of America's role in the world? It's hard to tell. Daunting global challenges face the United States, but Tea Party activists have no coherent approach to them.

When it comes to dealing with those challenges, the newly triumphant insurgents are of two minds. Some, such as Sarah Palin, seem to embrace what has become known as neo-con ideology: that the United States is the world's enforcer, and that to protect America's interests, the U.S. government needs to rattle sabers every day and wage war on those who defy it. Senator-elect Marco Rubio of Florida seemed to embrace this view with his chest-thumping proclamation that the United States is "the most exceptional country in the history of mankind." That is the opposite of insurgent thinking. It sounds like a depressing reaffirmation of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's famous assertion, "We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see fur-



"[T]he United States maintains more than 700 military bases around the world, peopled by more than a quarter-million soldiers... Is it urgent that the United States station 75,000 soldiers in Germany?" Military family housing upgrades at Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

Photo: John Rice, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

ther into the future." That view, endlessly echoed across the political spectrum, holds that Americans have been granted unique insight into how societies should be organized, and they have the right and duty to impose their political, social and economic values on others.

A few of the elder statesmen who helped inspire the Tea Party movement, such as Pat Buchanan and Ron Paul, take the opposite view. They argue that the world will not collapse if Bolivia and Sudan and Kyrgyzstan are left to deal with their own problems without tutelage from Washington. Even after last year's so-called political insurgency, however, theirs seem to be lonely voices in the hypermilitarist Tea Party wilderness.

America's global military reach cannot be considered in isolation from its daunting budget problems. The United States spends nearly as much on "defense" as the rest of the world combined. The Pentagon's 2010 budget is well over half a trillion dollars, not counting additional appropriations of

Too many of those self-proclaimed insurgents, like too many traditional Republicans and Democrats, accept self-destructive mantras of security policy that are based on the idea that the world is a vast territory made for the United States to control and exploit; that it needs to be managed; and that Americans must do the managing.

more than \$150 billion for what the Bush administration called the “global war on terror” and the Obama administration has rebranded as “overseas contingency operations.” Such expenditures will rise steadily as long as the United States continues its pursuit of “full spectrum dominance.” It is an endless spiral, based on the view that the United States must project power to every continent, control every ocean, rule the world’s skies, monopolize outer space, guarantee through military power its access to important resources, and spend endlessly to prepare for every imaginable future conflict.

To project this power, the United States maintains more than 700 military bases around the world, peopled by more than a quarter-million soldiers. Are they necessary to protect America? Is it urgent that the United States station 75,000 soldiers in Germany? Must it maintain 11 carrier strike groups, while no other country has even two? Are dozens of bases in Japan and Okinawa essential to its security? Do its vital interests require large-scale deployments of troops and weaponry in Turkey, New Zealand, Honduras, Spain, Thailand? Must it encircle perceived rivals such as Iran, China, and Russia with an intimidating ring of soldiers, jet fighters and nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles?

Militarism, left and right

There was a time when answers to those questions fell along the right/left divide in American politics. Rightists believed that no expense was too great if it promoted American global power; leftists wanted to cut military budgets. Like so much in American political life, this 20th-century divide has been slow to change as global realities change. Many still insist that “full spectrum dominance” remains essential to protecting American lives. Others — a lamentably small minority — suggest that the obsession with hegemony does not serve true security needs and is instead a cover for America’s insatiable lust for resources and the interests of arms makers at home — in essence, a lavish subsidy for powerful interests that bankroll the political campaigns of pliant lackeys in Congress.

Evidence of such interests rains down on Americans every day. Take this brief and seemingly innocuous note, recently published in *The New York Times*, about Rep. Howard McKeon, the incoming chairman of the House Armed Services Committee: “His district is home to important military contractors, including Northrop Grumman and General Atomics, maker of the Predator drone, which have donated generously to his campaigns.” Why have those companies

sent money and jobs to McKeon’s district and to the districts of so many other influential members of Congress, regardless of party? It is part of the legalized bribery that has become a foundation of America’s political system.

This sobering reality, which is recognized by most Americans and widely acknowledged in Washington, cries out for an angry, peasants-with-pitchforks insurgency. Might members of the Tea Party movement lead it? Prospects are not good. Too many of those self-proclaimed insurgents, like too many traditional Republicans and Democrats, accept self-destructive mantras of security policy that are based on the idea that the world is a vast territory made for the United States to control and exploit; that it needs to be managed; and that Americans must do the managing.

There is another view. It draws on the ancient and immutable pattern of the rise and fall of great powers and sees the United States embarking on the imperial overreach that usually marks the beginning of decline. In Washington, however, the pull of consensus is intense. In the inner councils of Republican and Democratic power, and at think tanks that consider themselves liberal or conservative, those who question the need for America’s global hegemony, or for endless wars in faraway lands, risk being labeled as ignorant, dangerous, or both. Today this consensus is bipartisan not simply because of the money that flows to both parties from corporations that profit from militarism, but also because of the pull of party politics. Most Democrats shrink from criticizing a president of their own party. Many Republicans equate guns with power and have never seen a war they didn’t like.

There have always been isolated dissenters from this consensus, dating back to Abraham Lincoln, whose opposition to the Mexican War contributed to his defeat in 1848 after a single term in the House of Representatives. Today such iconoclasts are stigmatized as being on the “extreme right” of Ron Paul or the “extreme left” of Dennis Kucinich. The fact that that is unlikely to change suggests that last year’s political revolution was not much of a revolution at all.

Unlikely insurgency

The 2010 election campaign was waged mainly on economic issues, not foreign policy. Yet if the new Congress wants to cut spending, where better to start than in Iraq and Afghanistan, where, according to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. government is now spending a mind-numbing \$10 billion every month? Beyond the financial drain of those wars, and the global military expenditures that prepare Americans to fight new ones, lies the stark fact

that they do little to enhance American security. On the contrary, America's reputation as the world's self-appointed enforcer undermines its security and creates new enemies every day.

Dissenters from the militarist consensus disagree among themselves about what the United States should do with the huge amounts of money it would save if it retreated from militarism. Those on one end of the political spectrum would use it to pay for education, infrastructure improvements, and other domestic programs. Those on the other end would return it to citizens through tax cuts. That would be a wonderful debate to have, but it is unlikely to emerge because the militarist consensus is so strong. The United States is a warlike nation and is likely to remain so even as its insistence on global hegemony weakens it economically and politically. This is the looming danger that threatens America's future. It is what Reinhold Niebuhr called "the irony of American history." The more powerful and better armed Americans

become, the weaker and more besieged they feel.

Public opinion surveys suggest that many Americans believe their country is in decline or heading in the wrong direction. Who could disagree? But the new legislators who have arrived in Washington seem no more open to a fundamental reordering of foreign and security policies than those they defeated. If any of the Tea Party insurgents who won election last year turns into a true insurgent on those issues, many will cheer. America is waiting for brave voices to challenge the militarist consensus. Some newly elected Republicans are ideally poised to make that challenge. None, however, seems ready to do so. On issues of global security and America's role in the world, they are likely to be just as mindlessly conventional as the Democrats they profess to loathe. ☆

— January 6, 2011

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The Hebrew Purim Ball at the Academy of Music, March 14 [1865]. Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. Library of Congress.

Merry Purim
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Patrick Henry

Who's Afraid of an Atomic Blast?

Patrick Henry is Cushing Eells Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Literature at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. His book, *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007), has just appeared in French as *La Montagne des Justes* (Editions Privat, 2010).

IN MEMORY OF DAVE HUNT (1951-2011)

TWO DAYS AFTER the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Albert Camus wrote in his newspaper, *Combat*: “Our technological civilization has just reached its greatest level of savagery.” A month later, in her September 1945 column in *The Catholic Worker*, Dorothy Day condemned President Truman for having ordered the two atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Ten years later, on June 15, 1955, Day was still among the earliest protesters against nuclear weapons when, outside City Hall in Manhattan, she, A. J. Muste, Ammon Hennacy and 26 others refused to take shelter during compulsory air-raid Civil Defense drills which she considered psychological preparations for nuclear war. Day and the others were arrested, held in jail overnight, found guilty and given suspended sentences.

This was the *Catholic Worker*'s first public act of civil disobedience and its protests continued for five years until the Civil Defense authorities ended these compulsory drills. At the initial June 15, 1955, protest, part of the disseminated *Catholic Worker* leaflet read as follows: “We make this demonstration, not only to voice our opposition to war, not only to refuse to participate in psychological warfare which this air raid drill is, but also as an act of public penance for having been the first people in the world to drop the atomic bomb, to make the hydrogen bomb...”

Fifty-five years later, reading about the Obama administration's recently released strategy for a nuclear strike immediately brings to mind Dorothy Day's protests against “re-



Dorothy Day, New York City, April 17, 1959. Photo: Jim Forest/flickr.com.

hearsals for death.”¹ The rehearsals haven't started yet, but officials say “they are moving aggressively to conduct drills, prepare communication guides and raise awareness among emergency planners.”

In 2007, Congress appropriated \$5.5 million for studies on “atomic disaster planning” which, *The New York Times* reports, have been “revealing.” Two such “revealing” findings are that “a bomb's flash would blind many drivers, causing accidents and complicate evacuation” and that “taking shelter [can make] a huge difference in survival rates.” Brooke Buddemeier, a Livermore National Laboratory health physi-

1 William J. Broad, “U.S. Rethinks Strategy for the Unthinkable,” *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2010.

cist, called the finding about sheltering “a game changer.”

What a waste of \$5.5 million! Anyone who had read John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* would have known about the blinding nature of the flash. Hersey describes what Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, S.J. saw when, the day after the nuclear explosion, he went to fetch tap water outside Asano Park: “...twenty men...all in exactly the same nightmarish state: their faces wholly burned, their eye-sockets hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks.” Readers of Hersey’s book, first published in *The New Yorker* in 1946, would also know that taking shelter had not been a “game changer” for thousands in Hiroshima where houses, churches, hospitals and other buildings came tumbling down; some flew through the air when the whirlwind uprooted trees and tossed houses and people in all directions.

Two hundred and twenty thousand people were killed immediately or shortly thereafter in the bombings of Hiroshima (140,000) and Nagasaki (80,000). By 1950, an estimated 340,000 had died as a result of the only two atomic attacks in history.

It is bureaucratic madness to trust in “emergency management,” “pre-event preparedness” and “citizen education,” as if there might not be some kind of unpredictability about a nuclear explosion in the 21st century when nuclear weapons are a hundred times more potent than they were in 1945. There were 150 doctors in Hiroshima. Sixty-five died immediately and most of the rest were wounded. Of the 1,780 nurses, 1,654 either died during the initial blast or were too badly hurt to work.

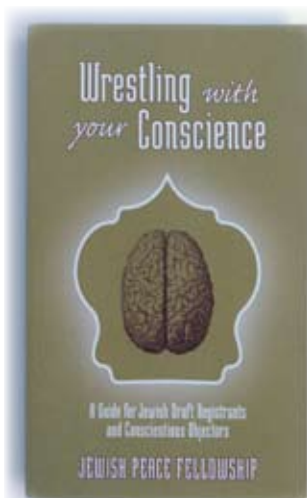
The basic thesis of the Obama administration’s report is that the cold war created an “unrealistic sense of fatalism about a terrorist nuclear attack” and that, based on “recent

scientific analyses,” a nuclear detonation is “more survivable than most people think...potentially survivable for thousands, especially with adequate shelter and education.”

Whether we are being prepared psychologically to believe that we can win a nuclear exchange or simply being told what to do if we are the victims of a nuclear attack, the level of delusion here is striking. In late 2002, in response to talk of an atomic terrorist attack, George W. Bush claimed that “History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act.” I hope that action will eventually encompass much more than telling citizens that friends don’t let friends drive during nuclear attacks and urging them to stay indoors, as if we were defending ourselves against a snow storm.

One cannot take cover from a nuclear weapon. Only by abolishing them can we make sure that we do not become their victims. Passing the New Start Treaty was a modest but necessary step. Now Congress, as a means of controlling nuclear proliferation, must ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which would outlaw all nuclear testing. The U.S. and Russia must also make serious reductions in tactical weapons (thereby eliminating so-called “unsafe” nuclear weapons) and in stored warheads, in addition to reaching an agreement on missile defense.

All of these proposals would help to eliminate fear, increase security and encourage nations to seek nonviolent methods of conflict resolution. Appropriately, Albert Camus’ August 8, 1945, newspaper piece ends with these words: “Peace is the only combat worth waging. This is no longer a plea, but an order that must rise from the people to their governments, the order to choose once and for all between hell and reason.” ✧



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