

Peace Porridge #38

Three Murderous Myths: An Exploration of War and Empire

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*Offered with prayers that Mother Earth will prosper
despite humanity's penchant for war and destruction.*

ABSTRACT

In this article we look at the proposed expansion to Iran of the war that the United States is waging in the Middle East.

We analyze three factors that are being put forward as arguments for expanding the war. These are: Iran's alleged denial of the Holocaust, its alleged desire to destroy Israel, and finally its alleged desire to acquire nuclear weapons. We expose the myths that underlie the claim that these factors are reasons for war and aggression. The underlying myths are: that the Holocaust was a uniquely horrendous event in human history, that certain countries have an inalienable Right to exist, and that nuclear proliferation will cause the world to become less secure and stable. We debunk these myths, showing that: the Holocaust was one of many equally horrendous events in human history, countries do not have inalienable Rights in the same sense that people do, and finally, a world in which nuclear weapons can be obtained by all is not necessarily any less safe or stable than a world in which a few powerful nations have an exclusive monopoly on nuclear weapons.

Then, we look at the empire which the United States has created, its history and its current situation. We conclude that the empire is in danger of collapse and offer the suggestion that the United States voluntarily dissolve its empire in a semi-orderly fashion before it collapses chaotically of its own accord. We offer the thesis that respect for and the ability to adapt to the environmental changes that have now become irreversible and inevitable is the key to survival in the future. Finally, we suggest that salvation will come only through eschewing empire, telling the truth and apologizing for past imperial behavior.

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I wish to thank those who have read previous versions of this paper, commented on them, or encouraged me to continue to write on this difficult subject. In particular, I wish to thank Mark Haim, Director of Mid-Missouri Peaceworks, not just for his invaluable criticism of an early draft of this paper, but also for his untiring work for peace and justice over the course of the decades that I have had the honor to work with him.

Needless to say, the opinions expressed herein and all errors and misrepresentations are mine and mine alone.

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INTRODUCTION

"To rely on the wisdom of the people in power is the worst thing you can do." --Howard Zinn

What happens when a war of imperial aggression and occupation goes badly? The sensible thing would be to pick up the pieces and go home, perhaps declaring victory on the way out or decrying the lack of support among the occupied peoples for the many blessings that the occupiers have tried to bestow upon them. Imperial hubris often rules out this option, usually with meaningless phrases like: "stay the course", "peace with honor" and "can't cut and run"; or dire predictions such as: if we leave, the "terrorists" will follow us home or if one country falls, others will fall like dominoes.

The worst option would seem to be to expand the war. The rationale usually has to do with neutralizing safe havens, inhibiting the ability to others to "intervene," securing necessary resources, denying the enemy vital resources, or, if the current war is unwinnable, finding a war that might be won.

The classic case might be Cambodia. By 1970 it was clear that the United States had lost the Vietnam War; but Richard Nixon and his advisors decided that if they invaded neutral Cambodia, they might somehow win the unwinnable war in Vietnam. The result was further losses for the US; and for Cambodia, one of the longest most brutal bloodbaths of the second half of the 20th century.

At the time of writing, the US war of aggression against Iraq is going badly. Even after the 1991 Gulf War which destroyed much of Iraq's civilian infrastructure and the following 13 years of brutal debilitating sanctions; the invasion and occupation have not been able to destroy the Iraqi will or ability to fight back. Four years into the occupation, the US has totally failed to pacify Iraq and appears extremely unlikely to succeed in the future. Amidst constant threats to expand the war to Iraq's neighbors, in 2006, US ally, Israel, invaded Lebanon inflicting extensive damage before being forced to withdraw. Now the aggressors turn their hopes eastward to neighboring Iran to settle old scores, nip

nuclear weapons development in the bud, prevent Iran from "meddling" in Iraq's affairs of occupation, strike a blow against "Islamic Fundamentalism," save Israel from being "wiped off the map," and avenge the honor of the Jewish Holocaust victims, a portion of which Iran's president is alleged **(1)** to have said may never have existed.

A war with Iran might possibly be a far greater disaster than Iraq. It would be extremely unlikely to turn the tide in Iraq, and would probably make matters there even worse. While it might be limited at the outset to air strikes and bombings, it would be unlikely to remain that way, given Iran's strategic position controlling the Straights of Hormuz and the presence of large numbers of US troops in neighboring Iraq. Yet, an attack on Iran is being discussed seriously, and might actually happen.

In this paper, I take a look at three premises upon which the case for a US attack on Iran has been based. They are: the alleged denial of the Holocaust by members of the Iranian leadership, particular Iranian President, Mahmood Ahmadinejad; the alleged desire of the same Iranian leadership to eliminate the State of Israel; and Iran's alleged nuclear weapons development program. Other arguments that have been put forward as reasons for attacking Iran will not be discussed here.

On the face of it, none of these three premises would seem to be reasons to go to war. The first is a matter of historical knowledge and interpretation which would hardly suffice as a *casus belli*. The second, the desire of national leaders of one state to destroy another is so pervasive that if acted upon, the world would be in a constant state of upheaval. The third, an alleged program to develop weapon systems that at least nine states already have deployed can hardly be considered a cause for war either.

The reason the United States has been to a degree successful in touting these premises as reasons to go to war is that to each there is a very powerful underlying myth. Here, I use the word "myth" not as a synonym for fiction or half-truth, but as a belief which is based on historical events and provides a people with a worldview which can be, and often is, far more powerful than historical truth - so powerful that societies have gone to war for the preservation of their myths and the worldview which they embody. Myth, however, is not fact, nor is it history.

The myth underlying the alleged denial of the Holocaust by members of the Iranian leadership is that among events of mass human extermination **(2)**, the Holocaust is uniquely horrendous and was perpetrated by uniquely evil leaders. The argument for war then becomes that any national leader who questions the current wisdom concerning the Holocaust is capable of recreating it, and that such a leader must be removed from power at any cost.

The myth underlying the Iranian leadership's alleged desire to eliminate the State of Israel is that some countries have an innate "Right to exist" no matter how they behave or what atrocities they commit. Here the argument for war becomes that since President Ahmadinejad and other Iranian leaders want to "wipe Israel off the map," they must be removed from power in order to prevent them from doing so.

The myth underlying Iran's alleged program of nuclear weapons development is that the world will become a more dangerous place if Iran acquires nuclear weapons. The argument for war then becomes that if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, it will use them or at least blackmail the world with the threat of using them. Therefore, Iran must be prevented from developing nuclear weapons, by war if necessary.

Together, the three myths give rise to the belief that any country that questions the current wisdom concerning the Holocaust and questions Israel's Right to exist would try to wipe Israel off the map by creating a nuclear holocaust, if it is permitted to obtain nuclear weapons. **(3)**

In this paper, I will debunk these three myths.

In **Section I**, I will show that the world has experienced many episodes of mass human extermination in recent history and that there is no reason to consider the Holocaust to be uniquely horrendous among them; nor is there a reason to view its perpetrators as uniquely evil or uniquely aberrant individuals.

In **Section II**, I will argue that no country has an absolute Right to exist and that this is simply a meaningless slogan like "support the troops" to be used as convenient. Indeed, it is often the great and powerful who seek to decree which countries have a Right to exist and under what conditions they may exercise that Right.

In **Section III**, I will look at the history of nuclear weapons, and drawing on historical experience, I will argue that there is absolutely no reason to believe that a world in which nuclear weapons belong to an exclusive "club" of powerful nations is any safer or more stable than a world in which nuclear weapons can be obtained by all. Indeed, it may well be less so. Nuclear proliferation may, in fact, be a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament.

In **Section IV**, I offer some related thoughts on empire and the future. I suggest that the United States would be wise to voluntarily dissolve its empire now rather than wait for it to collapse of its own accord. This paper concludes in **Section V** with a brief summary.

I. THE HOLOCAUST REVISITED

"Historical events are infinitely variable and their interpretations are a constantly shifting process. There are no certainties to be found in the past."
--Gerda Lerner

"History is the present. That's why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth."
--E.L. Doctorow

"History does not repeat itself, but it delights in patterns and

symmetries."

--Stephen Kinzer

In this section we first examine Iran's relation to the Holocaust. Then we look at a number of historic human mass extermination events and place them in perspective, debunking the myth that the Holocaust is uniquely horrendous amongst them.

Iran and the Holocaust

The **International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust (4)** held recently in Iran (widely characterized as a "Holocaust denier's Conference" in the West) and statements made by Iran's President, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, purported to characterize the Holocaust as a "myth" fuel the momentum toward expanding the Middle East War to Iran. The United States, which 25 years ago aided Iraq under Saddam Hussein in ever so many ways to kill one half million Iranians condemned the conference. The State Department remarked that it was "*just flabbergasting that they continue ... to deny that six million-plus people were killed in the Holocaust.*" **(5)** Tony Blair, who shares the responsibility with his US counterparts for the death of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Iraqis called the conference "*shocking beyond belief.*"

Those in the United States who desire war cite this as a reason for war and regime change.

A large segment, probably a large majority, of those who oppose war against Iran, see this as a reason for changing Iran's form of government. They would just prefer regime change in Tehran to be a result of international sanctions or a (not necessarily peaceful) internal revolution rather than a war.

For example, a statement entitled, **Iran: Neither U.S. Aggression Nor Theocratic Repression, (6)** signed by Noam Chomsky, Michael Albert, Howard Zinn and over one thousand others, states, "*We too would like to see a regime change in Tehran, but one brought about by the Iranian people themselves, not by Washington.*" One of the reasons given is that "*President Ahmadinejad is a Holocaust denier who has called for the elimination of Israel.*" **(7)**

Clearly, if there is wide agreement in the United States that Iran's government must change, then war becomes extremely likely. Five years ago almost the entire anti-war movement found it necessary to criticize Saddam Hussein as a "*brutal dictator who gassed his own people.*" (They still do! even after his execution.) This played right into the hands of those who longed for a military solution. The question became how to get rid of Saddam; not how to end the 13 year old war against Iraq which was fast turning from sanctions and bombings toward invasion and occupation. Clearly, a return of Saddam (even after his execution) would be a vast improvement over what now passes for government in Iraq.

The anti-war movement appears to be making the same mistake again, this time with respect to Iran, with a strong possibility of achieving similar results. This time it is the

Iranian President's alleged Holocaust denial instead of the Iraqi President's gassing his own people. (8)

What really puzzles me about this controversy over Iran and the Holocaust is this: Why would Westerners make such an issue over what Iranians might think about what Europeans did to each other over 60 years ago? How many in the US know the first thing about what Europeans did to Iran during World War II? Without taking a poll, I would venture to guess at most two percent.

Until August 1941, Iran was neutral (like the European countries Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain); but unlike these European countries, it was invaded simultaneously by Britain and Russia. (9) The invading powers forced head of state Reza Khan to abdicate in favor of his son and sent him into exile. Iran's territory was used as a conduit to send war materiel to Russia without just compensation to the Iranian people. In 1943 Iran's puppet government declared war on Germany. From 1941 to 1979, except for a brief post-war interlude, Reza Khan's son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (usually referred to in the US as The Shah) ruled Iran as a puppet for the United States and Great Britain. His secret police, SAVAK, murdered thousands.

And we might also compare the post war experiences of European Jewry and Iran:

After World War II, the West gave surviving European Jewry compensation: a large chunk of Palestine; (10) complete with an indigenous population to be abused and reduced to the lowest colonial status; not to mention money, the latest in military weaponry, international recognition, and the wherewithal to conquer militarily the rest of Palestine and threaten the entire region. (11)

Iran remained a dependency of Great Britain which continued to extract Iranian oil without just compensation to the Iranian people. After establishing a democracy during the Post-War period and nationalizing its oil resources in 1951, Iran became the first country in the world to have its democratically elected president overthrown in a CIA coup. Iran became a neo-colonial dependency of the United States under the puppet regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This continued until 1979 when the Iranians rose up and overthrew the Pahlavi regime and booted out its Western benefactors.

So, should we be surprised if Iranians recall the 1940's and 50's as a time of invasion, humiliation, regime change, and continued Western domination rather than a time in which Europeans killed each other? Should we be surprised if the strongest memories of the post war period in Iran include their betrayal by the United States which was perceived until the 1953 CIA coup as a friend of the Iranian people?

In short, our harping on President Ahmadinejad's alleged Holocaust denial is racist and Eurocentric. It presumes the overriding importance of the history of Europe and North America and denies what Asia and other parts of the world have suffered at the hands of European and US imperialism.

If we wish to be even handed, let's talk about the British/Russian invasion of Iran as well as the Holocaust. Let's talk at least as much about the CIA coup that overthrew Iran's democratically elected president, Mohammad Mossadegh, as we talk about Israel's so-called Right to exist. Let's learn at least as much of the history of other peoples as we expect them to know of ours. (12)

Ten mass extermination events (in accordance with our customs)

"I had supposed that most people liked money better than anything else, but I discovered that they liked destruction even better." --Bertrand Russell

To put the Holocaust into perspective, I list below ten historical instances (including the Holocaust) in which large numbers of humans were deliberately exterminated by other humans. This list is selective. I offer my apologies for the many many egregious omissions; and also for reducing each of these horrendous events to a single paragraph.

The Chatham Islands: About 2,000 Moriori lived as peaceful Stone Age hunter-gatherers on the Chatham Islands until 1835, when two boats arrived carrying 900 Maori from northern New Zealand armed with guns, clubs and axes. In the course of a few days they killed hundreds. The rest were enslaved, and then killed at whim over the next few years. As one Maori put it, *"Not one escaped. Some ran away from us, these we killed, and others we killed - but what of that? It was in accordance with our customs."* (13) Today, I would consider such honesty from world leaders to be a breath of fresh air.

The Americas: In 1492, Cristoforo Colombo sailed from Spain to the Caribbean which was home to hundreds of thousand of Taínos. (14) Within a few decades, through disease, forced labor, and outright massacre, the Spaniards had decimated the Taino population. Thus began what Jared Diamond refers to as *"the largest population replacement of 13,000 years."* In North America the story was much the same. Through disease, massacre, deportation, and starvation, the population of pre-Columbian North Americans was reduced from 10 or 15 million to less than 1 million. Survivors were herded onto reservations, generally to live in poverty on the most marginal land available.

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: Over the course of around 350 years, some tens of million of Sub-Saharan Africans were forced into slavery and transported by Europeans to the Americas under horrendous conditions. Two out of every three Africans did not survive to become slaves in the new world. This amounts to a death toll of 20 to 30 million. The 10 or 15 million survivors and their offspring generally lived out their lives under forced slave labor conditions in the Americas.

The Tasmanian Extermination: The Island of Tasmania was home to a few thousand Stone Age inhabitants when the first British settlers arrived in 1803. In 1876 the last full blood Tasmanian died. In between the Tasmanians were forced into slave labor, raped, tortured, castrated, mutilated, herded into concentration camps and hunted down and killed for bounty. The skin of the last surviving Tasmanian male is said to have been made into a tobacco pouch by a member of the Royal Society of Tasmania.

The Armenian Extermination: Between 1914 and 1917, an estimated 1 to 1.5 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were killed. Armenians are European and predominately Christian. Armenians were forcibly deported and placed in concentration camps. Besides direct murder, methods of killing included mass burning, poisoning and drowning. In planning the extermination of the Jews, Hitler is purported to have remarked, "*Who remembers the Armenians?*"

The Yellow River Flood: In March 1938, the Nationalist Chinese army was retreating across central China from the advancing Japanese army. In order to slow the advance of the Japanese, the Chinese army breached the dikes on the Yellow River while the river was at flood stage. No warning of the impending flood was given to the Chinese population. The death toll is usually placed between one half and one million, although I have heard estimates of several million. To my knowledge this is far and away the record death toll from a single intentional man-made incident.

The Holocaust: Europe has a long history of violence and bigotry against Jews, (15) and ethnic and religious massacres dating back at least to the early Christian Era, and continuing today. (The latest massacres being the "ethnic cleansings" of the Balkans after the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia dissolved under a policy of destabilization by the great Western powers.) (16) The Holocaust refers to the period, 1933 to 1945, during which the Nazis exterminated some ten million people, six million of whom were Jewish. The vast majority of Holocaust victims were still alive in 1942, shortly after the entrance of the Soviet Union and the United States into World War II, transforming two regional conflicts into a global war. Of particular note here are the use of gas chambers, crematoria, and death camps and the State policy of "scientifically" eliminating every Jew from occupied Europe. Also of note is the complicity of the Allied powers, especially the United States, in the Holocaust. (17)

Palestine: In 1947 the United Nations created a plan to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs giving the Jews who made up one third of the population 55% of the land. The following year, a militarily superior Jewish paramilitary force took over 78% of the land, declared itself a state and in the process killed thousands of Palestinians and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Israel later conquered the remaining 22% along with other Arab lands. Palestine, but not the Palestinian people, was "wiped off the map." As Ron David notes, "*The great democracies of the West had actually given away Palestine without so much as consulting the Palestinians!*"

Iraq: In the wake of Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, The United States assembled a virtually total world-wide coalition against Iraq. In 1991, the US attacked and destroyed Iraq's civilian infrastructure, including electricity generation and water and sewage treatment. Virtually complete economic sanctions and continued bombing kept Iraq from effectively rebuilding its infrastructure. Children died at an increased rate of 5,000 per month from preventable causes for 13 years. (18) In 2003, the US invaded, plunging the country into utter chaos with no effective government. Notable here is the complicity of the United Nations and virtually the entire world in the destruction of Iraqi society and

the murder of well over a million Iraqis.

Rwanda: The Rwandan massacre of 1994 is notable for the size of the death toll (about one million) and the timeframe (about one hundred days). While generally attributed in the Western press to ethnic hatred, other factors include the legacy of European colonialism, international power politics, and the failure of the outside world to act to prevent the massacre. But most important was a growing population and a resource base that could not keep pace with the population increase. As John Gray advises, "*Forget the ideological conflicts of the twentieth century. Read Malthus instead.*"

Putting mass extermination in perspective

The above ten mass exterminations were all cases where a large number of people were clearly and deliberately killed by other people. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish deliberate killing from causing unintended death (what we might call today "collateral damage") or to distinguish between man-made disasters and natural disasters. For example, the disaster that befell New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina could easily be viewed as a consequence of any or all of the following: the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activity, the destruction of wetlands due to human greed and population pressure, the human folly of living on land that is essentially below water level, and bureaucratic bungling in not constructing adequate levees and dikes or providing for the safe evacuation of the City.

Consider the following:

Famine: An estimated 20 to 30 million died in a three year famine in China from 1959 to 1961. The major factors appear to have been natural disasters, bureaucratic mismanagement, and political isolation from most of the world. Africa, in particular, has experienced many famines in the last half century. Some areas, such as Somalia, Darfur and Niger are in the midst of preventable famines right now. As human population increases, and our environment becomes less hospitable, largely due to human activity, one would expect to see an increase in the prevalence and intensity of famines.

War: World War II produced by far the largest death toll of any war to date - over 60 million. Over 50% of the dead were civilians. Over 50% were citizens of the Soviet Union or China. Jewish Holocaust victims made up about 10% of the death toll. **(19)** The world continues to be at war, and certainly the potential for an even greater bloodbath not only exists, but becomes increasingly likely as large parts of the world degenerate into chaos and anarchy, and technology provides readily available and increasingly efficient means of mass murder.

Pestilence: Over 300 million died from smallpox in the 20th century alone before its eradication in the 1970's. (Due to its continued existence in government and military laboratories, the eradication of smallpox should not be considered complete.) **(20)** Bubonic plague killed an estimated 75 million over a four year period in the 14th century reducing the population of Europe by at least one third. AIDS has claimed over 37

million lives since its discovery around 1980. (Some believe the HIV virus may be the result of biological weapons research.) **(21)** Mutating microbes, emerging diseases, and acquired microbial resistance to antibiotics provide the possibility of even more devastating diseases in the future.

Indeed, as the human population increases and the ability of our planet to support large complex societies decreases, one ought to expect increases in the frequency and severity of all types of human mass extermination events, be they man-made or natural, be they deliberate or unintentional, or be they famine, war or pestilence.

Why is this massacre different from all other massacres?

"Europe's destruction of the 'inferior races' of four continents prepared the ground for Hitler's destruction of six million Jews in Europe."

--Sven Lindqvist

The vast preponderance of evidence should force us to agree with John Gray that, "*Genocide is as human as art or prayer.*" Gray also remarks that "*Since 1950 there have been nearly twenty genocides; at least three of them had over a million victims (in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Rwanda).*" To these three, we could certainly add at least two more: Vietnam and Iraq (if we choose not to quibble over the definition of genocide).

Looking over the above list of ten mass exterminations, it is easy to see that no two are exactly alike. Each is unique in its own way. But all or most have certain factors in common: All are horrendous and unnecessary. All have happened in recent history and are well enough documented that there should be little question of the broad outlines of these events. Most could easily have been prevented by "non-participants" who chose not to get involved. Most involve racism and bigotry. Most involve the mighty and powerful massacring the defenseless or nearly defenseless, usually with considerable pride in their accomplishment. Some are episodes in wars that have resulted in far greater death and destruction.

The Holocaust does not appear to stand out particularly in this list. On an absolute scale, the death toll is neither the largest nor the smallest. On a relative scale, it resulted in neither the greatest nor the least percentage of deaths among the target population. On a time scale, it is neither the longest nor the shortest; neither the first nor the last. **(22)**

Perhaps, the most horrendous aspect of the Holocaust is the senseless nature of the massacre. The killings appear to have no purpose, other than death itself. But is this really unique? Other than death itself, of what purpose the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when the Japanese had been trying for weeks to surrender? Other than death itself, of what purpose dropping phosphorous and cluster bombs on Lebanon's schools, orphanages and hospitals? Other than death itself, of what purpose denying Iraq clean water and sewage treatment in full knowledge that children would die in huge numbers from water-borne disease? Certainly, some might argue a purpose to these acts beyond death itself, but didn't the Nazis also argue a higher purpose to their acts of

extermination?

I think it is natural for a group to view its collective trauma as being uniquely horrendous. However, as George Monbiot notes, "*The more powerful a nation becomes, the more it asserts its victimhood.*" Thus in Israel, the Holocaust is considered justification for the commission of horrendous and barbaric acts against Palestinians, Lebanese and other peoples, none of whom had anything to do with the Holocaust. Similarly, in the United States, the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center is considered justification for horrendous and barbaric acts perpetrated against the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq, in spite of the fact that no Afghan or Iraqi was involved in these attacks.

There is in my opinion a need to revise our view of the Holocaust - not that it killed any fewer people or that it was any less horrendous and barbaric than we currently view it. We need to revise our belief that the Holocaust was an aberration, that it was a singularly unique event in human history caused by singularly psychopathic individuals. (23) And above all, we need to revise our view that the Holocaust justifies the further commission of horrendous and barbaric acts by those who claim to speak for the descendants of the survivors of the Holocaust.

Until we do this, we will continue to create holocaust after holocaust with ever increasing frequency, each one as horrendous as the previous one.

II. ON THE RIGHT OF COUNTRIES TO EXIST

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

--Thomas Jefferson et al.

In this section we contrast the Rights of individuals with the Rights of countries. We argue that countries don't have Rights in the sense that people do, and that proclaiming the Right of a country to exist often becomes an excuse to deny the Rights of individuals. We then place the conflict among the current inhabitants of Palestine in perspective and offer some thoughts on the future of that area.

People's rights or State's rights

Iran's President Ahmadinejad has also drawn criticism from both pro-war and anti-war groups for his alleged threat to "wipe Israel off the map." Again, the accuracy of this translation is questionable. Middle East expert Juan Cole states, "*Ahmadinejad did not say he was going to wipe Israel off the map because no such idiom exists in Persian.*" Cole's translation is: "*The Imam said that this regime occupying Jerusalem (een rezhim-e ishghalgar-e qods) must [vanish from] the page of time (bayad az safheh-ye ruzgar mahv shavad).*" According to the Cole translation, Ahmadinejad has simply called for regime change, not elimination. This should hardly raise an eyebrow in a country like the United

States that has been responsible for so much regime change in so many countries with such devastating results for so many people.

Personally, I'm much more concerned about certain *unalienable Rights* of individuals such as the *Right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness* than about any so-called Right of countries to exist. I'm not sure what it means for a country to have a "Right to exist." (24) I find the phrase as meaningless as the slogan "support the troops."

Did Hawaii have a Right to exist as a country before it was taken over in a bloodless coup by a few wealthy sugar magnates from the United States with the help of the US Navy; and later annexed into the United States. What about the Iroquois, the Lakota, the Navaho? Didn't they have a Right to exist as independent states too? Did anyone invoke Yugoslavia's Right to exist when it disintegrated into chaos and ethnic strife under the policy of destabilization perpetrated by the great Western powers? Did China have a Right to exist during the 23 years (1949 to 1972) that the United States denied its existence? What about Palestine which was literally "wiped off the map" in 1948? (If you don't believe me, pick up a map and try to find it.)

We in the United States who fought a bitter war for four long years to prove that the Confederate States of America had no Right to exist should certainly know better.

The question that ought to be asked is, "Exist as what?" In 1941 Britain and the Soviet Union decided that Iran had no right to exist as a neutral country, and invaded it, installing a puppet regime. In 1953, the US decided that Iran had no right to exist as a democracy that sought to control its own petroleum resources, and replaced the elected government with a dictatorship. In 1990 the UN, under the prodding of the US, decided that the Right to exist of Kuwait, a country created by British imperialism after World War I, trumped the unalienable Right of millions of Iraqis to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness, and gave its blessings to the complete destruction of Iraqi society.

There has never been any question about the institutionalized racism inherent in Israeli society. Israel has always been a state run by ethnic Jews for the benefit of ethnic Jews. The question ought to be phrased, "Does Israel have a Right to exist as a country where racism is institutionalized?" This same question was asked in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s; and in South Africa in the 1980's. In both cases, after a long difficult struggle, the question was answered: No.

The ownership of Palestine in perspective

One of the more important contributions of Jared Diamond's **Guns, Germs and Steel** is to put in perspective questions like the struggle between Jews and Arabs over Palestine. Diamond traces the major population movements of the last 13,000 years such as the European invasions of the Americas, Australia, and South Africa, the South Chinese invasion of the Pacific Islands, and the Bantu invasion of equatorial Africa. By comparison, the Jewish Diaspora and the invasion of Palestine by European Jews (25) are small indeed, although Diamond devotes one half page to the Semitic invasion of the

Middle East and North Africa.

Such invasions can end in the destruction or exile of one or the other groups of people, some form of assimilation, or the two cultures living side by side in some form of (not necessarily peaceful or harmonious) equilibrium.

In the case of Palestine, I feel it is quite clear that neither group has the capability of imposing a "final solution" by totally destroying or exiling the other, in spite of the desires of some members of both groups to do so.

My preference would be to see the evolution of an equilibrium based upon the unalienable Right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness of all peoples currently residing in Palestine including those who have been exiled within the past 60 years and their descendants. I do not see the so-called "two state solution" providing this equilibrium. Two state solutions have not succeeded in Germany, Korea, Vietnam nor South Asia. In this regard, I see no essential difference between Palestine and these other areas where two state solutions have failed.

But, my opinions are essentially irrelevant. I don't live there. Furthermore, I believe that additional meddling from the United States and Europe, which bear the ultimate responsibility for the current impasse, will only serve to make matters worse.

Related thoughts on the future of Palestine

Given that racism, including anti-Jewish bigotry, has a long and terrible history in both the United States and Europe, it is easy to wonder at the consistent support that Israel receives in both the US and Europe. Given the imperatives of empire, this becomes understandable. The US and Israel (and to a large extent the European powers too) have been trapped for decades in the folie à deux that together they can continue to dominate the Middle East with its vast petroleum resources.

As with all such madness, reality has a habit of intruding. In this case, reality intruded as the failures of the recent invasions of Iraq and Lebanon.

The US is already experiencing a shift in sentiment. The public is beginning to blame Jews for the failure of the US Middle East policy. (No, of course it couldn't possibly be our own fault.) As the failure of our Middle East policy becomes more and more difficult to deny, I would expect to see a sharp resurgence of anti-Jewish bigotry in the US.

Israel may react differently. As the power and unconditional backing of its major benefactor evaporates, Israel may decide that the best course is not only to make peace with its neighbors, but to enter into some form of economic and military cooperation with them.

This would be the worst nightmare for the US and Europe: a Middle East at peace with itself making its own decisions about its petroleum resources and backed up by the

world's fourth mightiest military power with (at least) 200 nuclear warheads. Perhaps this is why some refer to the relationship between the US and Israel as the "tail wagging the dog." (There would be more than a little poetic justice in this. See endnotes (17) and (19).)

III. ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

*"We'll try to stay serene and calm
When Alabama gets the bomb.
Who's next?"* --Tom Lehrer

In this section we look at the widely accepted belief that a world in which nuclear weapons belong to an exclusive "club" of "responsible" nations is safer and more stable than a world in which nuclear weaponry is available to all. We conclude that this is a myth. In fact, nuclear proliferation may well be a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament.

We begin with a brief history of nuclear weapons and then look at symmetric and asymmetric warfare and show that symmetric wars are far more likely to be prosecuted with some restraints than asymmetric wars. We conclude that although nuclear proliferation is not without dangers, it will continue as long as there are powerful countries that use their exclusive possession of nuclear weapons to maintain a privileged position. We suggest that it is far more likely that nuclear weapons will be used in an asymmetric situation than in a symmetric one.

A brief history of nuclear weaponry

The age of nuclear weapons began in the summer of 1945 when the US dropped two nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing some 200,000 people, mostly civilians. This was simply a continuation of a standing Allied policy of killing huge numbers of civilians through the saturation bombing of German and Japanese cities: Hamburg, 50,000; Dresden, 100,000; and Tokyo, 100,000.

Within a few years the USSR became a nuclear weapons state. The entrance of the USSR into the nuclear club was met in the US with calls for preemptive nuclear strikes against the USSR.

In order: Britain, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and recently North Korea joined the nuclear club. China's entry into the nuclear club was also met in the US with calls for a preemptive nuclear strike, as was North Korea's.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the US and USSR were on the verge of nuclear war. The standoff was resolved when the USSR removed its nuclear weapons from Cuba. After the crisis, there was basic agreement between the two superpowers that a nuclear war would destroy both nations and that they would carry out their rivalry in ways short of nuclear confrontation. This agreement lasted almost 30 years until the demise of the

Soviet Union, in spite of a continued arms race and attempts by the United States to obtain a position in which it, alone, could survive nuclear war; most notably the "Star Wars" program of the Reagan Years.

During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and perhaps during the 1967 War too, it is thought that Israel was preparing to use nuclear weapons against Egypt and Syria (both non-nuclear weapons states). In 1981 Israel bombed and destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak which was being built under UN supervision. This was the first and, so far, only attack on a nuclear reactor. It is also thought that Israel was preparing to use nuclear weapons against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War. Israel remains the only nuclear weapons state in the Middle East. Although they have not publicly confirmed or denied that they possess nuclear weapons, all credible sources place their nuclear arsenal at least at 200 warheads.

After it became clear that the United States could not win the Vietnam War by other means, it threatened both Vietnam and China with nuclear strikes. These threatened attacks may have occurred, had it not been for the Soviet Union's vast nuclear arsenal. Toward the end of the Nixon era, there was great concern that Richard Nixon was insane and would, in his insanity, unleash nuclear holocaust upon the world. It is purported that the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to ignore any order from their Commander-in-Chief to fire nuclear weapons.

In 1970, the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, which had been ratified by the first five nuclear powers and many non-nuclear weapon states, entered into force. In ratifying the NNPT, the nuclear powers agreed to work in good faith toward nuclear disarmament and the non-nuclear powers were promised the use of civilian nuclear technology in exchange for not seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. Far from disarming, the arsenals of the nuclear powers have increased many fold since then. In refusing to effectively sanction Israel for the destruction of the Osirak plant, the nuclear powers basically reneged on their promise of providing civilian nuclear technology to the non-nuclear signatories to the treaty.

First India and later Pakistan developed nuclear weapons. On several occasions they have come close to a nuclear exchange.

Some states, notably South Africa, South Korea, and some of the former Republics of the USSR have disbanded nuclear weapons programs or given up nuclear weapons in their possession.

The breakup of the USSR and the ensuing chaos left a lot of nuclear weapons material unaccounted for. Some of this material may have ended up in the hands of paramilitary groups or non-nuclear weapon states. Likewise, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the ensuing chaos left nuclear material that was under UN supervision unsecured and unaccounted for.

Depleted uranium (DU or U238) is a by-product of the nuclear weapons industry and is

both a radiological and chemical poison. Depleted uranium is persistent in the environment for billions of years and causes a variety of health problems: cancers, birth defects, kidney disease, and developmental disorders. Because of its density, roughly twice that of lead, depleted uranium is valued militarily as both a penetrator and an armor. DU weapons were probably first used by Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and later in Palestine and Lebanon. The US and its allies have used DU weapons in Afghanistan, the former Yugoslav Republics, and most extensively in Iraq.

In 2003, North Korea pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in 2006 tested a nuclear device with a yield thought to be less than one kiloton, amid cries of foul play from all the large nuclear weapon states. (The US bomb that devastated Hiroshima had a 15 kiloton yield.) It's interesting to note that of George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea): Iraq was invaded and occupied under the excuse that it was developing nuclear weapons (a false accusation). Iran has been threatened with imminent attack for developing a dual use nuclear program that could sometime in the future lead to its becoming a nuclear weapons state. North Korea, which now has a very small nuclear capability, does not seem to be under serious consideration as a military target at this time.

The US is currently attempting to develop a new generation of small "battlefield usable" nuclear weapons, primarily, it is thought, as Earth-penetrators or "bunker-busters." (26) It has been suggested that such a weapon could be used effectively, for example, against hideouts in the Tora Bora caves in Afghanistan or against Iran's alleged underground nuclear weapon research and development facilities. Since the use of such a weapon against a nuclear weapons state could easily result in a full scale nuclear exchange, its use would most likely be against non-nuclear weapons states.

A responsible club of nations?

From the brief history above, it would be difficult to categorize the nuclear weapons club as a club of responsible nations (27). Indeed, the club's leader and charter member, the United States, has acted on many occasions with wanton disregard for the future of the human race, blustering and threatening like any playground bully.

It should be noted that an era of partial responsibility followed the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the achievement, while far from parity, of a credible nuclear deterrent by the Soviet Union, and the ascendancy of China to nuclear weapons status with an ability to inflict unacceptable damage on other countries.

We might be tempted here to reason that it was fortunate for most of the world that nuclear weapons proliferated to the Soviet Union and China. We needn't think it was a freak accident, or had anything to do with "traitors" in the US government. Technology proliferates. Attempts to retain exclusive control of a technology have always failed. Often, just the certainty that a feat is doable, is enough to prod one into accomplishing it.

Symmetric and Asymmetric War

"One of the dirty little ironies of war is that it matters less who wins the war than where it was fought." --Ron David

We now look at modern warfare and how further nuclear proliferation is likely to affect warfare in the future.

There are many ways of classifying wars. For the purpose of this section, I will classify them on a symmetric/asymmetric axis. Symmetric wars are wars in which the belligerents are more or less evenly matched. Think of World War I (up until the US entry) with the European behemoths fighting for years in trenches with neither side ever gaining a significant advantage. Asymmetric wars are wars where there is a vast gap between the military capabilities of the contestants. Think of 19th century Tasmania, with a few thousand primitive Stone Age inhabitants arrayed against the entire British Empire.

An important distinction is that in symmetric wars the ability of the belligerents to lay waste to each other's territory and murder each other's civilian population is more or less equivalent. Such wars are often fought according to some set of "rules" in which the belligerent powers "agree" not to commit certain acts or use certain weapons, in full knowledge that the other side could respond in kind.

In asymmetric wars, typically the ability of one side to lay waste the other's territory and murder its civilian inhabitants is vastly superior. For example, the Tasmanians were totally incapable of even imagining bringing war to the British Isles. Such wars are rarely fought according to any set of rules. Atrocities committed by the stronger side are always justified, often with phrases such as "defending civilization", "spreading democracy," "Christianizing the heathen," or "assuming the white man's burden." Typically, there is a strong racist component to such wars. The militarily stronger side disdains the weaker as racially inferior, simply because it is militarily inferior. As Sven Lindqvist notes:

"The laws of war protect enemies of the same race, class, and culture. The laws of war leave the foreign and alien without protection. When is one allowed to wage war against savages and barbarians? Answer: always. What is permissible in wars against savages and barbarians? Answer: anything."

and also:

"Technical superiority provides a natural right to annihilate the enemy even when he is defenseless."

Sand Creek (massacre of hundreds of Cheyenne, mostly women, children and elderly who had placed themselves under the protection of the US Army), Wounded Knee (massacre of hundreds of unarmed Lakota), My Lai (massacre of hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians mostly women, children and elderly), and Amiriyah (massacre of hundreds of Iraqi civilians mostly women and children, in their bomb shelter) are names

of just a few places where the US military has committed unspeakable atrocities against totally defenseless people.

Acts of defense by the weaker side in an asymmetric war are called terrorism. Resistance fighters are terrorists, or now, illegal combatants, as if they had no right to defend themselves.

This is not to say that the stronger side always wins. The wars of independence in the second half of the 20th century in Algeria, Kenya, Vietnam, Afghanistan and elsewhere, not to mention the 18th Century War of Independence waged by Britain's North American colonies, give full testimony to this. But, it is important to note that these wars were fought in the colonies, not on the imperial power's home turf.

Even in their victories, the colonials saw their land devastated and their children murdered. Losses to the imperial powers were generally limited to invading and occupying personnel. And these losses were considered justification for the most barbarous acts of retribution, such as the My Lai massacre.

And, in cases where a weaker power might succeed in attacking the homeland of the stronger, this is generally considered to justify anything the imperial power might choose to do in revenge. For example, the destruction of the World Trade Center and the killing of fewer than 3,000 people has been considered in the United States as full justification for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the killing of hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of civilians.

In sum: at one end of the spectrum is the British conquest of Tasmania and the wars of the 16th through 19th century against the descendants of pre-Columbian Americans. These wars were so asymmetric that they ended in the total or near total elimination of the defeated peoples. On the other end is perhaps the European wars of the Reformation and Counter Reformation which continued for generations until Europe was exhausted, at least for a time. The full spectrum includes wars such as the Nicaraguan Contra War in which the Nicaraguans agreed at the polls to accept US dominance in exchange for an end to the Contra War and some unfulfilled promises, and the Vietnam War in which the Vietnamese won their independence at the cost of millions dead and their land poisoned with dioxin and sowed with land mines and unexploded cluster bombs.

It should be noted that wars that begin symmetric can later turn asymmetric, with a change in outlook and tactics. Consider for example World War II in which after the Allied Powers achieved total air superiority, they saturation bombed cities at will killing (at least) 50,000 in Hamburg, 100,000 in Dresden, 100,000 in Tokyo, 120,000 in Hiroshima, and 60,000 in Nagasaki, mostly civilians. As Lindqvist notes, "*Eighty percent of all of the bombs of the war were dropped during the last ten months.*"

Nuclear Proliferation Revisited

If we look at nuclear non-proliferation as maintaining an asymmetry that effectively

prevents the non-nuclear side from inflicting unacceptable damage to the homeland of the nuclear side, the stress laid on nuclear non-proliferation begins to make sense.

Empire and domination require asymmetry. No one chooses voluntarily to be dominated by a foreign power. The many successful and unsuccessful wars of resistance to imperial domination are testimony to this. So too is the often suicidal resistance which is usually called terrorism by those who seek imperial domination of others.

Iran would probably be able to withstand any attack from the United States and Israel, short of a full-scale nuclear attack; but the consequences to Iran would be tremendous, with Iran probably unable to inflict unacceptable damage on the homeland of either country. The acquisition by Iran of even a small nuclear capability would be likely to change that. Nuclear weapons proliferation could lead to a more symmetric situation in the Middle East, just as the proliferation of nuclear weapons to China, and now North Korea has led to a more symmetric situation in the Far East. Achievement of parity or engaging in an arms race is not at issue here. All that is required is the ability to inflict unacceptable damage as a deterrent to a potential attacker. **(28)**

There is a price to be paid for empire and dominion. When the price becomes too steep, people will eschew empire. After 10 years, billions of dollars, and the death of 58,000 troops, the United States decided the price of subduing Vietnam was too steep and brought its soldiers home, leaving the Vietnamese to rebuild their society as best they could. How much quicker would this war have ended if Vietnam had developed the capability for a credible counter-attack on the US homeland. Indeed, if Vietnam had had nuclear weapons and the capability of delivering them at the onset, the war would probably never have happened at all.

Nuclear proliferation will continue, regardless. But it is an imperative of empire to delay this proliferation as long as possible, giving empire the breathing room to develop a new set of weapons that might render today's nuclear weapons obsolete (such as the ability to place projectiles in orbit that could accurately devastate any point on Earth, or the ability to unleash a plague that would selectively attack only certain genotypes). At this point in time, with nuclear weapons comes the ability to inflict unacceptable damage. It is impossible to maintain imperial domination over those who are capable of inflicting unacceptable damage on you.

The dangers of nuclear proliferation

Clearly nuclear proliferation doesn't come without dangers. Equipment that controls the launch or detonation of nuclear bombs can malfunction or fail. Early warning systems can mistake natural events for a nuclear attack. The humans who control these weapons are not only failable, but subject to the insanity, malevolence, or desire for revenge that could cause one to launch or detonate a nuclear weapon. And those in control of these weapons might simply decide that the danger in using them is outweighed by the danger in not using them.

In the 60 years since the end of World War II, all of these have come close to happening. One would expect that the more actors with nuclear weapons, the more likely that one would be detonated for any of the reasons above. In addition, with nuclear proliferation comes the increasing possibility that some actor will detonate a bomb under the belief that he can "get away with it" - that the act will not be traced back to the actor.

Clearly, one ought not to minimize these dangers. However, I would argue that, at least under existing conditions, nuclear proliferation is a given. Instead of trying in vain to hold back the tide, we might consider working to harness its power. In doing so we might be able to map out a strategy for skirting these pitfalls, one that may eventually lead to nuclear disarmament.

The road toward nuclear disarmament

"Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control." --Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Article VI
(Entered into force March 5, 1970)

A look at the history of nuclear weapons treaties shows that, with one exception, they did not challenge the right of the superpowers to maintain and use their vast nuclear arsenals. The one exception, **Article VI** of the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty** has been totally ignored by the nuclear powers. All five nuclear weapons states that are signatories of the NNPT are in violation of article VI and have been for decades.

The **Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer** showed that when the entire world perceives a particular technology to be destructive, and perceives that a global restriction on the use of that technology would not place one country at a disadvantage relative to others, the world can indeed work together for the common Good to restrict the use of such destructive technologies.

The failure to date of the **Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change** is testimony that as long as the leaders of a powerful nation perceive that a restriction of a destructive technology would put them at a disadvantage with respect to other nations; they will refuse to implement the restriction. In this case, the government of the United States has, to date, refused to ratify the protocol.

Nuclear disarmament can come about only when the nuclear powers perceive it to be to their ultimate advantage, or at least not to their disadvantage with respect to other countries. It is unlikely that the US or Israel will perceive this as long as their privileged position in the world rests upon military superiority, including nuclear weapon superiority.

Indeed, as long as nuclear weapons remain a monopoly of a few countries, the temptation to use or threaten to use them remains high. When all countries have or can acquire nuclear weapons if they desire, this temptation is far less. While there is certainly no guarantee that these weapons will not be used as long as they exist, with increased symmetry comes increased stability. Indeed, when having nuclear weapons no longer imparts an advantage perceived to be large enough to offset the danger of nuclear war, then even the United States, the lone superpower, might seriously consider global nuclear disarmament. Thus, nuclear proliferation may be viewed as a step toward nuclear disarmament.

Those in the anti-war movement who oppose both the United States threatening Iran, particularly with nuclear weapons; and Iran acquiring nuclear weapons are missing this point. In today's climate, any country that values independence and perceives itself as being threatened by a nuclear weapons state would be foolish not to seek some credible means of deterring an attack. By denying this point, one works to perpetuate an asymmetric world in which a few powerful countries with nuclear weapons will continue to use them to bully those countries which have none. Efforts to end nuclear bullying will do far more to prevent nuclear proliferation than railing against non-nuclear states which might seek to obtain nuclear weapons.

Some might think that it is possible to move directly from a world where nuclear weapons belong to an exclusive club of nations to global nuclear disarmament. I applaud such efforts and pray for their success, provided that they don't include nonsense about attacking, sanctioning or otherwise coercing non-nuclear weapon states for alleged nuclear ambitions. Still, I find it very dubious that over 60 years into the nuclear era, these efforts will suddenly bear fruit.

IV. SOME RELATED THOUGHTS ON EMPIRE AND THE FUTURE

*"And on the pedestal these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains: round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away."
--Percy Bysshe Shelley*

In the previous three sections, we have looked at three myths that underlie arguments for expanding the Middle East War to Iran. These myths are: The Holocaust is a uniquely horrendous event in human history and was perpetrated by uniquely evil leaders. Certain countries, particularly Israel, have an innate Right to exist. And the world will become a more dangerous place if nuclear weapons proliferate, particularly to Iran. These are myths, not in the sense of outright lies, but in the sense of powerful beliefs that while based on historical events, are neither fact nor history.

We now ask where these myths might lead us if left unchallenged. Clearly, their purpose is to promote an imperial war. But, this does not necessarily mean that they will result in a stronger empire. Indeed, they are quite likely to have the opposite effect.

In this section we look at empire, and conclude that it would be far better for the United States to voluntarily give up its imperial aspirations now than to wait until its empire disintegrates of its own accord.

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the US became the lone superpower, the question that ought to have been discussed in the US was: Now that we have unprecedented power to shape the world, what kind of world do we wish to create, and how should we go about trying to create it? Two of the many possible options would have been:

Option 1: We could seek to dominate the entire world through our unparalleled military and economic might.

Option 2: We could seek to create a more just egalitarian world in which military spending would be reduced and redirected toward programs of social improvement such as public health, education and environmental well-being, from which the entire planet would benefit.

Clearly, if this had been discussed openly and thoroughly and put to a plebiscite in this form, the people would have chosen Option 2. And if the United States had been a true democracy this is exactly what would have happened. However the rich and powerful who control US society and both major US political parties chose Option 1. Within a few years, Iraq's infrastructure was destroyed leading to massive death and misery, Yugoslavia was destabilized and crumbled amid ethnic turmoil and violence, and scenes of former cold war rivalry such as Afghanistan and Somalia were forgotten and allowed to disintegrate into chaos and warlordism.

This should not have been unexpected. Empire building during the Cold War was accomplished under the guise of fighting Communism. There was never any real public discussion of whether we wanted to follow the road to global empire and what the consequences of such a decision might be. For example, the overthrow of Iran's democracy was done covertly and justified later with pronouncements about fighting Communism.

Essentially, US policy since the fall of the Berlin Wall has been a continuation of a century of global empire building that began with the overthrow of the legitimate government of Hawaii in 1893. But since 1989 there have been no strong rival empires to contend with.

Empire and the military

A necessary condition for empire is overwhelming military superiority. No one chooses to be under foreign domination voluntarily.

In the 16th through 18th centuries, as Jared Diamond points out, it was factors like metal weapons, mounted cavalry, and diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis and measles that allowed Europeans to so easily conquer the Americas and Australia. In the 19th century it was the gunboat and the machine gun that allowed the British to kill 10,000 Mahdi soldiers at Omdurman while sustaining a loss of only 48 of their own. In the 20th century, it became the airplane, the tank, the bomb, and poison gas that gave military superiority and empire to the Europeans.

But, the natural tendency of all technologies, including military technology, is to proliferate. Acquiring a technology that has already been developed is faster, easier and cheaper than developing new technologies; and, in general, defense does not require even an approximation of military parity with an attacker.

Thus, it is an imperative of empire to constantly develop new and more powerful weaponry.

Arms races are expensive. The costs of developing new weapons can be tremendous. Often a new weapon does not prove to be as useful as originally envisioned, and research and development costs are wasted. An empire can easily bankrupt itself in its quest for continued military superiority.

It can be tempting to search for the "magic bullet:" the weapon that will not only yield ultimate superiority, but will not proliferate into the hands of others. The search for the magic bullet might be likened to the search for the Holy Grail. It is not likely to be found, and even if it is, it is unlikely to have the qualities that the searchers envision.

Today, empire is running out of new weapons. And those that have been developed recently do not seem to give empire the edge that came with steel swords, rifles, machine guns, airplanes, and poison gas.

The United States, with its cruise missiles, smart bombs, daisy cutters and other advanced military hardware was supposed to "shock & awe" the Iraqis into laying down their arms and welcoming the invaders. While the invasion was successful in an immediate sense (although the Iraqis put up a stiffer resistance than expected), the Iraqis were neither shocked nor awed for long and have been successfully resisting the occupation, even at a tremendous cost to themselves and their society.

Imperial collapse

"History warns us that when once-powerful societies collapse, they tend to do so quickly and unexpectedly." --Jared Diamond

The US finds itself in a classic imperialist dilemma - a dilemma at which every empire

perhaps arrives sooner or later. To maintain empire requires military superiority; but the more resources that go toward maintaining military superiority; the more civilian infrastructure (health, education, industry, etc.), the environment, and human resources are neglected; and these constitute the foundation on which empire stands. Clearly, this cannot continue.

Here are ten developments in the US which I would argue are, to a large degree, both a consequence of empire, and factors which could lead to the collapse of empire.

1. Education is probably the most important aspect of a society's infrastructure. US children consistently lag behind their counterparts from other industrialized countries, particularly in crucial areas like Math and Science. In the past the US has made up for this "brain deficit" by attracting many of the brightest from other countries. However, as empire crumbles, this becomes more and more difficult.
2. To justify empire and military adventures, it becomes necessary to distort or ignore historical and social realities. US children are learning less and less of the world they live in and more and more myth and propaganda. A major US industry is the production of the basest form of entertainment and propaganda (television). **(29)** This not only destroys minds, but bodies too. 13% of US children are clinically obese.
3. While the best and brightest minds go into military or military support fields, US civilian industry is starved for qualified workers and its civilian infrastructure lags behind that of other countries.
4. Second only to education is perhaps healthcare. The US healthcare system is among the worst and most costly of any industrialized nation. Millions simply cannot afford basic health care or health insurance.
5. The US population is aging. The countries we seek to dominate generally have higher birthrates and younger populations. Younger populations tend to be more resilient and better able to adapt to adverse conditions. The higher birthrate and younger population militate toward acquired immunity and genetic resistance to persistent environmental pollutants and emerging or opportunistic diseases.
6. Much US industry has been exported to countries where production costs are cheaper. The US runs a large fiscal deficit to buy from other countries what used to be produced domestically. Meanwhile, much of the US population lives a wasteful, unsustainable life style, which creates a less healthy and less well educated population. This is supported by deficit spending, outright theft, and the willingness of other countries to reinvest much of their trade surplus back in the United States. As empire crumbles, these countries will become less and less willing to finance the US deficit.
7. The US trade deficit would be even more enormous were it not for the arms trade. The US sells arms and military technology to the world, so it must remain in an arms race with itself in order to maintain military superiority.

8. The US military and the industries that support it are by far the world's largest polluters. A consequence of this huge military infrastructure is tremendous unremediated environmental pollution. Not only does the military destroy the environment but it steals resources that should go into environmental protection and remediation. Long term environmental well-being is sacrificed for short term military expediency.

9. For most of its history, the US has relied on a citizen army. But now, it has a large standing professional military which seems to be transforming itself more and more into a mercenary army. It is well known that mercenary soldiers do not have the loyalty or the willingness to sacrifice that citizen-soldiers possess. More and more, the military and military support industries seem to be moving beyond civilian control.

10. Probably the worst consequence of empire is moral degeneration. While moral degeneration is widely discussed in the US, rarely are imperial aspirations discussed as a cause of moral degeneration. As the difficulties in maintaining empire become greater and greater, the US leadership resorts more and more to methods of questionable morality, such as torture, terror, imprisonment without charge or trial, and bigotry toward those groups perceived as causing its predicament. Meanwhile, US leaders become more and more elitist, corrupt, self-serving and divorced from reality and the people they are supposed to serve.

These factors would all seem to point toward the imminent collapse of US Empire and society. I believe that the people of the United States would do well to voluntarily disband their empire now in a semi-orderly fashion, rather than wait for it to disintegrate into the chaos that engulfed the former Soviet Union upon the collapse of their empire.

(30)

Empire and the environment

As readers who are familiar with Jared Diamond's Pulitzer Prize winning masterpiece, **Guns, Germs, and Steel**, might have noted, the previous section discusses Diamond's three proximate factors, where guns stand for military hardware and organization; germs, for resistance to disease; and steel, for civilian infrastructure and organization. As can be seen the US no longer holds an advantage with respect to two parts of the triad, germs and steel. In order to maintain a lead in the third part of the triad, guns, which is of questionable advantage without the other two, the US is in the process of falling even further behind in other crucial areas.

Diamond points out that ultimately it is the environment, and not gun, germs or steel, that shapes human societies and the interactions among them.

Due to human activity, our planetary environment is changing. We have probably passed the point of no return. Even if the human race were to end its environmentally destructive activities today, we would still be seeing major climatic and environmental changes over much of the 21st Century.

While there may well be some winners, it is fairly clear that with reference to the ability of the Earth to support large complex human societies, most localities will be losers. Can we predict the winners and losers? I would not even try, except in some very general terms. Smaller simpler societies might prove more adaptable than large complex societies. Societies with a high dependence on a particular technology might prove especially vulnerable to changing conditions. Cohesive egalitarian societies might prove more adaptable than societies that are fragmented or elitist. Finally, those societies that preserve and enhance their current environment to whatever extent possible, while rationally adjusting to the environmental changes that are now irreversible and inevitable, might prove to be the societies that will fare best in the future.

What can be done?

The United States now has by far the mightiest military that has ever existed upon this planet, but it seems powerless to accomplish anything but destruction, including its own. It would appear that as a society, we are racing headlong down a dead-end street.

But what can be done? Can we not change course and at least partially undo the damage that has been done?

I believe the key is to recognize that when we opted for empire: when we sought first to displace pre-Colombian Americans, then to enslave sub-Saharan Africans, and later to dominate other parts of the Americas, and finally the entire World; we started down a road that eventually could lead only to our own destruction. Unless we recognize this aspect of our society, consciously decide that we do not want to live any longer in a society that is built upon the domination of other peoples, and are willing to make the necessary societal adjustments; I do not think we can avoid disaster. (31)

Policy changes that seek a kinder, more gentle imperialism are of no help. One of the most pernicious arguments against the war in Iraq is that we should be concentrating our troops on subduing "terrorists" in Afghanistan. One of the most insidious solutions is to pull our troops back to Kuwait and Turkey where they can control Iraq through bombing and sanctions without danger to themselves. The argument that we should employ "diplomacy" rather than bombs to maintain our privileged position is almost as useless. As long as we continue to threaten, we merely practice "gunboat diplomacy" which is hardly diplomacy at all. Such diplomacy invariably ends up in failure, war, or very likely both.

In Iraq and Afghanistan we must admit that the invasions and occupations were unleashed in the name of empire and domination and that they are wrong - not an unfortunate mistake or a miscalculation, but an integral part of empire building that is wrong from beginning to end.

We must admit that Palestine was never ours to give away. We must stop supplying arms to the region, particularly to Israel, and allow the peoples in the region to work out their

own solutions.

We must admit that 54 years ago when we overthrew the Iranian government, we did wrong. Unleashing the eight year Iran-Iraq War upon the region was also wrong, as are today's saber-rattling and threats against Iran.

In all cases, we must simply tell the truth, admit what we have done and apologize for all the death and misery that we have caused through our quest for empire. Above all, we must resolve to never seek empire again. **(32)**

Only by admitting guilt and apologizing for past behavior can we begin to work for a just and equitable future. As always, it is we, the people, who must take the lead, where our leaders refuse. If the people lead, politicians, diplomats, generals and corporate officers will have no choice but to follow.

So it's really quite simple. Just say no to empire and domination. It will not only save our minds and bodies, but our souls, our future, and our children too.

V. CONCLUSION

We have discussed three premises which have been put forward as arguments for expanding the Middle East War to Iran. We have exposed the underlying myths behind these premises and debunked them. The three myths are: The Holocaust is a uniquely horrendous event in human history and was perpetrated by uniquely evil leaders. Certain countries, particular Israel, have an innate Right to exist. And the world will become a more dangerous place if nuclear weapons proliferate, particularly to Iran. These are myths, not in the sense of outright lies, but in the sense of powerful beliefs that while based on historical events, are neither fact nor history.

Then we discussed empire and showed that global empire building has been a US policy for over a century, but that our empire is now in deep trouble and in danger of collapse. We suggested that the United States would do well to voluntarily dissolve its empire in a semi-orderly fashion before it collapses chaotically of its own accord.

It is my prayer that this paper will contribute to some rational discussion of what path we would like to see our society follow. It is my prayer that we will, as a society, begin to discuss seriously what our future goals ought to be and practical means for attaining them. It is my prayer that we can move beyond viewing empire and military preeminence as a worthy goal to be sought.

For this to occur, we must stop looking back to a past where the United States was the world's preeminent military and economic powerhouse, "*the indispensable nation*," as one former Secretary of State put it. **(33)** Instead we must try to "*see further into the future*," into a world that is becoming increasingly chaotic, unpredictable and unknowable - a brave new world, full of awe and mystery, waiting for those who are

ready and willing to embrace it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

(1) I use the word *alleged* because I neither read nor understand spoken Farsi and I do not trust the western media to translate and report accurately. Even assuming correct translations and reporting, statements such as "*They have created a myth today that they call the massacre of Jews and they consider it a principle above God, religions and the prophets.*" are open to many interpretations.

(2) I will use the phrase "mass extermination" or simply "massacre" or "holocaust" (with a small 'h') rather than the more common "genocide" which has a quasi-legal definition over which I do not wish to quibble. Holocaust (with a capital 'H') refers to the Nazi human extermination program of 1933 to 1945.

(3) Consider, for example, the following quotes from the article, **Iran's Obsession with the Jews - Denying the Holocaust, desiring another one**, by Matthias Kuntzel (translated from German by Michael Bugajer and John Rosenthal) appearing in the Weekly Standard, Feb. 19, 2007: "[E]very denial of the Holocaust contains an appeal to repeat it," "*It is precisely this suicidal outlook that distinguishes the Iranian nuclear weapons program from those of all other countries and makes it uniquely dangerous,*" and "*If Iran is not put under pressure without delay and forced to choose between changing course and suffering devastating economic sanctions, the only remaining alternatives will be a bad one--the military option--and a dreadful one--the Iranian bomb.*"

(4) In response to the publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in the Western press, The Iranian newspaper, Hamshahri, sponsored a Holocaust Cartoons Contest. In response to the many racist statements about Islam emanating from the United States and Europe, Iran hosted a conference on the Holocaust and invited some renown Western racists such as white-supremacist David Duke, a former Louisiana State Representative and Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. I find this all very reminiscent of pre-adolescent boys playing a game of "one-up-man-ship." While I have come to expect this kind of behavior in the West, I find it sad that Iran would also stoop to this level. If anything good is to come out of this, it is that some in the West may now understand that insulting what others consider sacred in the name of "freedom of speech" or "scientific inquiry" is a game that others can play too.

(5) Assuming that this statement by the US State Department refers to the estimated six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, it amounts to a *denial* of the estimated four million non-Jewish Holocaust victims: Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles, Russians, Trade Unionists, Communists and others. Personally, I find it revealing that those who rail most strongly against

Holocaust denial, tend to place the Holocaust death toll at six million (Jews) rather than ten million (people).

(6) Posted at <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?itemid=10289> at time of writing.

(7) The rationale for desiring regime change is not limited to the Holocaust and the State of Israel. It also includes the purported lack of respect for the Civil Rights of certain groups, lack of free elections, and lack of separation between governmental and religious institutions. While those of us steeped in Western secular humanism might decry Iran's form of government, we should remember that secular humanism has totally failed the vast majority of humanity in spite of centuries of Western domination.

Western humanism has also failed the people of the West. It did not prevent two world wars, European colonialism, nuclear weapons development, or the rise to power of George W. Bush and the neo-Conservatives and their wars of aggression against Iraq and Afghanistan. (See John Gray's **Straw Dogs** for a rather unique critique of Western thought including secular humanism.) While some might argue that Western secular humanism has never really been given a chance, the onus is certainly upon those who believe that it should form a model for the entire world to at least make it work in their own region before demanding that the rest of the world adopt it as a model.

The Iranian people arguably had a far greater choice of candidates and a fairer presidential election in 2005, (in spite of the disqualification of many candidates by the Guardian Council) than the people of the United States had in 2004 in a political system dominated by two parties, both controlled by similar corporate and other special interest money.

(8) Saddam Hussein was clearly a dictator and clearly used poison gas both internally against Iraq's Kurdish minority and externally against Iran. But what did that have to do with ending the sanctions that were killing 5,000 children a month, or preventing the US invasion and occupation that is causing even more death and destruction? The CIA was involved in bringing Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party to power in Iraq. The Western powers provided Iraq with the precursors and technology to make poison gas, as well as other war materiel, technology and intelligence, and encouraged Saddam Hussein to start the Iran-Iraq war. It is unlikely that any of this would have happened without the support and encouragement of the United States.

In the case of Iran, what does a difference of opinion concerning what happened in Europe over 60 years ago have to do with starting a war against Iran today? Why is this even an issue? Some believe that if they don't discuss Mahmood Ahmadinejad's alleged Holocaust denial they will lack "credibility." But, if Noam Chomsky and Robert Fisk don't have the credibility to appear regularly on the mass media, along with all the know-nothing diplomats, politicians, journalists and retired generals, what chance has someone like myself to achieve "credibility?" If others wish to make an issue of the Holocaust, I will respond, as I am doing now; but I see no reason to bring up this issue (or any other issue not related to war with Iran) if my purpose is to prevent my government from starting a war with Iran. George Lakoff refers to this as "framing the issue." If we want to prevent a war with Iran, we must not allow those who desire war to frame the issue in terms of Holocaust denial.

(9) One might argue that Iran had been "tilting" toward Germany and there was fear that it would continue to do so. One might also argue that the Persian Corridor was a military necessity as the Nazi Wehrmacht was advancing toward the oil-rich regions of Asia. These arguments do not address the point that Iran had been under British domination for years, and that Reza Khan was seeking to "modernize" Iran and throw off the European yoke. Perhaps, Reza Khan would have agreed to join the Allied war effort if Britain had offered 50% control in the Iranian petroleum which the British had been exploiting for over 30 years. We'll never know. The

outcome of the invasion was never in doubt. After 24 days, Iran was under total Allied military occupation. When The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was nationalized in 1951, the British rejected an offer of 50% control. After the 1953 CIA coup, Britain had to be content with a 40% interest in a consortium of Western oil companies. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Britain was left with nothing.

(10) I use the term Palestine to mean (roughly) the area that comprised the British Mandate of Palestine after Trans-Jordan was split off from Palestine. This area includes the current State of Israel and the areas that Israel occupies that are generally referred to as the West Bank and Gaza. Before the British Mandate, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. Being a British Mandate meant that the area was not called a colony even though the British treated it like one.

(11) The Western powers would hardly have considered giving a piece of their own land to the Jews to compensate them for centuries of racism and terror, which includes the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms, the Holocaust and much more. It's so much easier to give away someone else's property as compensation for your own wrong-doing. Perhaps this is why Ahmadinejad's statement, "*If you have burned the Jews, why don't you give a piece of Europe, the United States, Canada or Alaska to Israel.*" has met with such violent denunciation in Europe and North America.

(12) Everywhere I have traveled, I have been impressed that ordinary people know so much more about the world including the United States than the vast majority of my compatriots do.

(13) Quoted by Jared Diamond in **Guns, Germs and Steel**, p54

(14) I try to avoid the use of phrases that are geographically or genetically inaccurate, no matter how widely they happen to be accepted. Thus I prefer to use tribal names such as Taíno or Lakota for the descendants of pre-Colombian Americans rather than the more common "Indians" or "American Indians." I also avoid using the phrase "Native American" which should refer to anyone born anywhere in the Americas, or the word "American" to refer exclusively to one who is a citizen of or was born in the United States of America, or for that matter "America" to refer to the United States of America.

(15) I avoid the use of the phrases "anti-Semitic" or "anti-Semitism" as racially inaccurate. The phrase came about because Europeans, including Jewish Europeans, incorrectly considered Jews as a "race," and European bigotry was directed not just at the Jewish religion but at anyone who was ethnically Jewish or a descendant of an ethnic Jew. Hence, the term "anti-Semitism" came to mean bigotry directed at Jews, including non-religious ethnic Jews. Semitic peoples probably originated in what is now Ethiopia where 12 of today's 19 extant Semitic languages are confined, and spread from there into the Middle East and North Africa (**Guns, Germs and Steel**, p383). Today, Arabs are by far the largest group of Semites. To what extent Ashkenazi Jews (Jews who trace their ancestry to Eastern and Central Europe) are racially Semitic is an open question.

(16) For example, the **Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act** of 1991 required that "*none of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available pursuant to this Act shall be obligated or expended to provide any direct assistance to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ...*" (See appendix to **NATO in the Balkans**, International Action Center)

(17) US complicity in the Holocaust continued until the very end of the War and beyond. For

example: from the Spring of 1944 onward, US bombers were capable of striking Auschwitz from bases in Italy. While factories in Auschwitz were bombed, the gas chambers continued to function almost until the arrival of Soviet troops in January 1945. The lives of one million mostly Jewish Holocaust victims could probably have been saved simply by bombing the gas chambers at Auschwitz in the spring of 1944. After the War, Jewish Holocaust survivors were left to languish in Displaced Person Camps for years because the US (and other countries) refused to allow them to immigrate (while demanding their admission to Palestine).

(18) Thomas Nagy in **The Secret Behind the Sanctions - How the U.S. Intentionally Destroyed Iraq's Water Supply** published in the September 2001 **Progressive** documents that military planners knew beforehand how devastating sanctions and the destruction of Iraq's water purification system would be to Iraqi children. The UNICEF report, **Results of the 1999 Iraq Child and Maternal Mortality Survey**, documents that sanctions had that desired effect, the death of over one half million Iraqi children. This UNICEF report is particularly enlightening because it is basically a confession of deliberate mass murder. Even after publication of this murder confession, UN sanctions continued for almost four years, up until the US invasion. And some people wonder why Iraqi resistance fighters target UN and other foreign humanitarian workers.

(19) I find it helpful to view the Holocaust in the context of World War II. As Lindqvist notes, *"What Hitler wished to create when he sought Lebensraum in the east was a continental equivalent of the British Empire."* In many ways the Holocaust started out as a program of "ethnic cleansing" somewhat similar to the forced removal of the descendants of pre-Columbian Americans from much of the United States. Jews were beaten, brutalized, imprisoned, tortured, murdered and encouraged to leave. Unfortunately, most had nowhere to go since countries like the United States didn't want them and wouldn't take them. Quoting Ron David: *"Why didn't influential Jews persuade the U.S. to open its doors to save Jews from the camps? Because - as horrible as it is to admit - Zionists cared more about creating a Jewish state in Palestine than they did about saving Jews from Hitler."*

Around 1942 ethnic cleansing morphed into extermination. As the goal of a Germanic empire grew more and more improbable, the means toward empire, the extermination of Jews and other non-Germanic peoples, became an end in itself. The vast majority of Holocaust victims were murdered while the Nazi armies were in full retreat across Eastern Europe.

We may be on the verge of a similar situation in the United States. As the goal of world domination becomes more and more elusive, the "War on Terror," which was originally a means toward world domination, seems to be turning into an end in itself. The United States now openly runs concentration camps, tortures its victims, and selectively denies its victims even the most basic legal protection such as Habeas Corpus. How far this will go remains to be seen.

(20) There seems to be little understanding of the magnitude of the potential disaster. Among pre-Columbian Americans who had neither natural nor acquired immunity to smallpox, this disease was often 90 percent fatal. With the exception of some military personnel and emergency workers, the population at large is neither vaccinated nor exposed to smallpox. Thus, those who control these laboratories have a tremendous power to kill extremely large numbers of people, anonymously.

(21) Consider the following testimony of US Army biological warfare expert, Dr. Donald MacArthur, in 1970 before a congressional appropriations sub-committee: *"Within the next 5 to 10 years, it would probably be possible to make a new infective micro-organism which could differ in certain important aspects from any known disease-causing organisms. Most important of these is that it might be refractory to the immunological and therapeutic processes upon which*

we depend to maintain our relative freedom from infectious diseases." Congress funded this program to the tune of \$10 million.

(22) I have given a lot of thought to "rating" the above ten mass exterminations. I cannot do it. I cannot even decide according to what criteria I am trying to rate these events. Perhaps, there are events that cannot be rated on a scale of one to ten. Perhaps, there are events that go beyond the human ability to linearize.

(23) This could be gleaned from the fact that every place the US wants to invade has a leader who is the spittin' image of Hitler. The list includes Manuel Noriega, Osama bin Laden, Slobodan Milosovich, Saddam Hussein, the late Somali tribal leader Mohammad Aideed, and now Mahmood Ahmadinejad.

(24) A similar fiction is that corporations have the same rights as people (but none of the responsibilities). This fiction has placed corporate greed above the rights of individuals; just as the fiction that some countries have an inalienable Right to exist has placed the needs of governments and ruling elites above the rights of individuals.

(25) Some will claim that the invasion of Palestine by European Jews is different from the European invasion of the Americas because the ancestors of the European Jews lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago. This is, of course, utter nonsense. How many of the European Jews who immigrated to Palestine in the first half of the 20th century could trace their family trees back 2,000 years? Hadn't the ancestors of most of the 780,000 Palestinians who were forcibly exiled in 1948 lived in Palestine for at least 2,000 years? By what right other than the right of superior military force were they driven off their land? By this twist of logic, since the human race almost certainly originated in Africa, any of us could go to Africa with a gun, drive off the current inhabitants, and claim the land as our own. Even the European colonialists who have sought to claim Africa for their own since the 15th century didn't resort to this twisted rationale.

Equally nonsensical is the notion that God gave Palestine to the Jews. First, this belief is not accepted by most people in the world. Even among those who accept Jewish scripture as the Word of God, there is disagreement on how and whether it applies to modern times. Again, by this twist of logic, any of us could brandish a gun and a book purported to be written by God giving to us our neighbor's house, and throw our neighbor out in the street.

(26) See **Low-Yield Earth-Penetrating Nuclear Weapons** by Robert W. Nelson, **Journal of the Federation of American Scientists**, Jan./Feb. 2001, for a good overview of these weapons.

(27) If one were to choose a "least irresponsible" member of the nuclear weapons club, one would certainly have to choose China.

(28) This dialectic is also reflected in the "gun control" issue. Those who believe that their government is essentially benign and capable of being a fair, impartial, and effective arbiter of disputes tend to believe in restricting the rights of citizens to own or carry weapons. On the other hand, those who believe that government is a necessary evil, and must, along with other evils, be kept under control by armed righteous citizens, tend to believe in the unrestricted right of citizens to own and carry weapons. While on a national level I can see reasonable arguments in support of both views; at the international level today, clearly might makes right and there is no effective arbiter (the United Nations notwithstanding) of disputes among nations. Thus, it would seem that arguments in favor of a nation's Right to "own and carry" nuclear weapons ought to prevail at the international level.

When I ran for congress in 2000, I would answer gun control questions by saying that I

would work to take nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of our government, and all other governments. This answer did not endear me to voters on either side of the gun control issue.

(29) Ron David notes that, "*A poll taken during the Persian Gulf Crisis showed (I swear) that the MORE you watch TV, the LESS you knew about the Persian Gulf!*" (emphasis in the original) **Arabs & Israel for Beginners** p5.

(30) People used to remark at how suddenly and unexpectedly the Soviet Union collapsed. Our collapse could come even more suddenly and (to some) unexpectedly. After all, of what use is a second superpower except to provide a check upon the first. A lone superpower is of no use at all. Perhaps, the biggest imperial miscalculation of all was the destabilization of the Soviet Union.

(31) Up until the invasion of Iraq four years ago, I had felt that we in the United States were different from all those other imperialists like the Romans, the British and the Soviets. I felt that we were capable of learning from our mistakes, that we could voluntarily turn our backs on empire before it was too late. I think we may have come quite close to starting down that path when millions poured into the streets and almost stopped our imperialist leaders from invading Iraq. As US troops poured into Iraq and the US peace movement melted quietly away into the shadows, I came to the depressing realization that we, like all the great empires before us, were just going to have to learn the hard way. I hope that time will prove me wrong.

(32) This suggestion echoes Ron David's closing remark in **Arabs & Israel For Beginners**: "*So what do I want? I want a few famous American Jews, especially ones I respect ... to stand up and say, 'Let's quit lying to the world - and to ourselves. We stole Palestine.' ... Let's at least start by telling the truth.*" Sadly, telling the truth and apologizing seem to be very difficult, especially for the powerful. Indeed, the difficulty in apologizing seems to increase astronomically with power.

(33) Madeleine Albright, "*[W]e are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future.*"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Below I list some of the major sources that inspired me in writing this article. I offer my apologies for all of the important writings that I am leaving out.

Guns, Germs, and Steel - The Fates of Human Societies by Jared Diamond. Certainly one of the most important books of the 20th century. Traces the broad outlines of 13,000 years of human history and provides a framework for discussing interactions among human societies: past, present and future. **Collapse** and **The Third Chimpanzee**, also by Jared Diamond, are well worth reading too.

Arabs & Israel for Beginners by Ron David. The *best* book by far on Palestine and Israel: a short, concise, complete, accurate and humorous treatment. Each time I reread it, I arrive at new and important insights. See also Ron David's website - www.rondavid.net.

A History of Bombing by Sven Lindqvist. Far more than an historical narrative. This account is passionate, personal, complete and historically accurate. From beginning to end, this book held me spellbound.

Exterminate All the Brutes - One Man's Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide by Sven Lindqvist. An inquiry into European colonialism, racism and genocide, particularly in Africa, based in part upon Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

Straw Dogs - Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals by John Gray. Inquiries into what it means to be human; and the past, present and future of the human race.

Overthrow - America's Century of Regime Change From Hawaii To Iraq by Stephen Kinzer. Synthesizes, analyzes, and distills the common threads in the overthrow of fourteen governments by the United States in its march toward global empire.

All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror by Stephen Kinzer. A detailed exploration and analysis of the 1953 CIA coup that toppled the Mossadegh government in Iran.

While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy by Arthur D. Morse. A well documented historical narrative of how the United States ignored and contributed to the plight of European Jews from 1942 until the end of the war.

Full Spectrum Disorder - The Military in the New American Century by Stan Goff. Amazing insights into the world of US Special Forces written by an insider with Special Forces experience from Vietnam to Haiti.

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