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Avoiding Accidental Nuclear War

By Jon Basil Utley
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One of the great pleasures in publishing and writing for *The American Conservative* is the civilized discourse, knowledge, and profundity of the comments sections. Our survival and reach today is quite astounding considering how we started as such a lonely voice in Washington's warmongering media wilderness. Yet there is still much more work to do. The magazine is still rare as a respected and credentialed voice questioning the Republican establishment.

A trillion-dollar-plus military and intelligence establishment has many, many ways to subsidize and promote its profitable and career-building agenda. As our new editor Robert Merry describes, most Americans don't support Washington's unending military interventions against ever-morphing enemies. Fifty-one percent think we are less safe today than we were before we started them. Only 11 percent think we are consequently safer. Yet, as *TAC* supporter Richard Young commented, "Unfortunately, recent scientific studies show that American public opinion has essentially ZERO impact on what our Government actually chooses to do." America is still an incompetent crusader as warned years ago in one of *TAC*'s great classics by James Pinkerton, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Imperialists."

Our wasteful military budget is overloaded with incredibly expensive aircraft carriers, F-35 fighters, and now another bomber. New and cheap swarm technology is the coming threat while we go on building weaponry for the same strategy as World War II. But our military-industrial complex is also very dangerous. Occasional small real wars and the constant hyping of threats are needed to justify high spending. But wars can easily get out of control. Most great wars come

about from misjudgments while today's cyber technology adds a lack of clarity about where attacks originate. The recent Washington Post headlines of fake news about supposed Russian hacking of a Vermont electric utility and possible access to America's electric grid is very typical of what now comes from agitators in the intelligence establishment to hype threats from Russia. The details are chillingly described in a Forbes.com article.

Establishment Washington media has its own agenda, promoting discord and (small) wars at every opportunity. It's just profitable for their business. Three years ago, when Obama called on Congress for authorization to first bomb Syria, he quickly discovered that most Americans opposed it. The administration asked for a very rare congressional vote—ultimately canceled—that would have disclosed little popular support for more wars, despite overwhelming support for attack on the the Sunday Beltway TV talk shows. As the Cato Institute's Chris Preble explained, 70 to 90 percent of Americans opposed bombing while 80 percent of the talking heads who expressed a position supported it.

It used to be said that decisions about war were too important to be left to generals. Today we should add that such decisions are too important to be left to think-tank intellectuals and TV talk-show personalities. A recent, terrifying *New Yorker* article describes "World War Three By Mistake":

Harsh political rhetoric, combined with the vulnerability of the nuclear command-and-control system, has made the risk of global catastrophe greater than ever…Nuclear weapons systems on both sides are aging and obsolete, the personnel often suffer from poor morale and poor training…And today's command and control systems must contend with new threats, malware, spyware, worms, viruses…and all the other modern tools of cyber warfare.

Surprisingly, U.S. ICBMs, the Minuteman III, are still kept on two-minute hair-trigger alert still seemingly run by old computers with floppy disks.

Think too of all the new enemies American wars have created in the Muslim World. For some hackers the ultimate dream would be setting off Russia and America to destroy each other!

I dwell on these subjects because I once saw a great city, East Berlin in 1952, flat as far as the eye could see. I know that such destruction can happen again, and that is why I have written in support of civil-defense programs.

It is fitting as *TAC* grows stronger to hear the howling of the Israeli lobby on Fox News defending its peace-busting settlements. Let's remember that 30 percent of the aggressive settlers in Gaza were Americans with an American passport in their back pocket. The Lobby, as I have written, is much more related to the military-industrial complex than to the interests of most Jews. In hours and hours of coverage on Fox and CNN, it was almost impossible to learn that most American Jews oppose the settlements and many supported the US vote abstention.

Not only J Street, a Jewish group promoting a two-state solution, supported the UN vote. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak wrote on Twitter that most of the world and Israel agreed with Secretary of State John Kerry. As the *New York Times*' Thomas Friedman wrote, "what a true

friend of Israel would do today is just what Obama and Kerry tried … tell our dear ally that it is driving drunk and needs to stop the settlements."

TAC has grown greatly this last year and for the very first time we have adequate funding to expand our staff and coverage. We still need to hire some PR to get our writers onto TV talk shows, do direct mail to grow our print edition, pay our writers better, and hold more of our successful conferences in cities other than Washington. The support of our readers has made all this possible and we look forward to an exciting 2017.