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**Nebraska Report**
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What ‘350’ Means

The temperature was an unseasonably warm eight degrees above normal for the tenth of October when 150 people showed up at Memorial Park in Omaha to “Take a Stand Against Global Warming.” Sponsored by the climate action group, 350.org, the ‘10/10/10’ gathering at Memorial Park was one of 7,347 such events in 188 different countries around the globe—making this worldwide demonstration the single largest political event in human history.

Holding the flags of the world’s nations (because global warming is a ‘global’ problem requiring a global solution), the activists formed a giant ‘350’ and stood in formation for an aerial photo at exactly 3:50 p.m. in the afternoon. Out of thousands of pictures from events worldwide, our Memorial Park photo was singled out and posted on the 350.org website under the heading “Uniting the world in Omaha, Nebraska”—and literally seen around the globe. (To view the photo in color, google: Uniting the world in Omaha, Nebraska. Or visit www.350.org)

In the end, however, our ability to limit the catastrophic effects of global warming will boil down to numbers: 350 specifically.

According to climate scientists, 350 parts per million is the maximum level of carbon dioxide we dare pump into the atmosphere if we’re to preserve the climatic conditions necessary for civilization to survive. And right now, we’re at 390 and rising fast.

John Pollack, who for 30 years served as a climatologist with National Weather Service in Omaha, delivered the following remarks at the Memorial Park event October 10. His comments provide an easy-to-understand explanation of the science behind global warming, and explain why we as humans need to act urgently if we are to avert drastic climate disruption. As the caption for the Memorial Park photo on the 350.org website aptly stated, “We need American leadership & worldwide cooperation.” And we need it now...

Statement by John Pollack,

Hello. I’m glad to see you all this afternoon. I’m here to tell you what the ‘350’ is about, and to issue a climate disaster warning.

A ‘climate disaster warning’ sounds drastic, and it is. In my career with the National Weather Service, I issued a lot of warnings. We issued a warning whenever it looked like dangerous weather was imminent, but hopefully in time for people to take protective action. That is, before the bad weather hit.

To me, this is the same idea. To avert a runaway series of climate disasters, we need to protect ourselves and our planet by reducing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million. Right now, we’re at about 390 p.m. and climbing.

The only way to get back to 350 in time will be to quit burning fossil fuel, finding substitutes as fast as we can.

Well, that’s a lot to ask. How can I be so sure that I’m not issuing an unnecessary warning? The answer lies in some recent climate research, research that has kept me awake at night. Let me explain.

Climate scientists know that Earth’s climate is quite complex and changeable. They gather evidence for how it works with a wide variety of sources. Any one item might turn out to be wrong or misleading, so they do it in as many ways as they can think of.

Taken together, the evidence makes a coherent picture: carbon dioxide is a major greenhouse gas, and we’re pushing it into the danger zone.

One important tool for understanding climate is modeling, run on supercomputers. These models embody our understanding of processes that control climate. They allow us to ask ‘what if’ questions. Comparing model results also allows us to examine uncertainties. The models all agree that carbon dioxide is very important.

Observations tell us that our climate is already warming rapidly, and in a way that would be expected if the main cause is more carbon dioxide from fossil fuels. They also show that fluctuations in solar output cannot be the cause of most of the recent warming.

We also know that the oceans are the main repository of excess heat, and they take decades or centuries to heat up, delaying warming, but keeping it going.

350 parts per million is the maximum level of carbon dioxide we dare pump into the atmosphere if we’re to preserve the climatic conditions necessary for civilization to survive.

The study of past climates is critically important. We all know that you can’t totally trust computer models. They have to be checked against real world evidence. That evidence has been rolling in, and it’s why I’ve been losing sleep.

Going back up to 800,000 years, long ice cores drilled in the Greenland and Antarctic Ice Sheets show a strong parallel between ice ages and CO2 levels. Ice ages are most intense when CO2 is between 180 and 220 p.p.m. Warmer interglacials require 260 to 300 p.p.m. This is what was expected from the climate models.

What was not expected was the incredibly swift climate changes in the past. Greenland temperatures could vary as much as 20 degrees in just a few years. In fact, around 125,000 years ago, the Greenland Ice Sheet melted in just a few centuries, raising sea levels 20 feet higher than now. These changes took place once climate tipping points were passed, and the ocean circulation changed abruptly. Climate models are not accurate enough to reflect these huge, fast changes.

Despite appearing changeable to humans, our climate during the last 10,000 years of the current interglacial has been unusually stable. This is about to change, as we push CO2 levels far in excess of where they have been for several million years.

The warming oceans will do a lot more than melt the ice sheets. Rising sea levels will inundate land that billions of people live on, first during major storms. But warming oceans also provide lots of extra water vapor. This is the fuel for many strong storms, from hurricanes and winter storms to thunderstorms, monsoons and floods. Water vapor is also a major greenhouse gas itself, which amplifies the cumulative effect of extra carbon dioxide.

Oceans cannot take a lot of ice sheet meltdown without shifting currents. However, changing ocean temperature patterns are a big cause of climate shifts. El Nino is a well-known example. A big change to the oceans will generate shifting weather patterns worldwide. When that happens, and it may already be starting, food production will be hurt drastically. Farmers won’t know what to expect, as many areas have unusual weather simultaneously. Even if some areas are favored, such as warmer temperatures in Canada, farmers may not have the right equipment or seed to take advantage of the situation. A good crop one year might be very bad the next. There will also be major and unpredictable disruptions in water supplies and fisheries.

So, this IS a climate disaster warning. If we can get back to 350 ppm carbon dioxide, we have a chance to keep the changes tolerable, and we will have more time to find solutions. That’s where we all come in.
Ocean Acidity Update: Wild Oysters Now Sterile

Some of the worst problems from rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have nothing to do with the higher temperatures we associate with global warming. Most are nearly invisible. Take, for example, the intensifying acidity of the oceans. We are killing the oceans by overloading them with carbon dioxide, and acidity—not temperature—is the problem.

Ocean pH is now lower than it has been in 20 million years, and continues to decline, according to marine chemist Richard Feely of NOAA’s Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle. Models by Feely and colleagues anticipate that ocean pH will decline from 8.2 before the industrial revolution to 7.8 by 2100 C.E., increasing acidity by about 150 percent. Shells of microscopic oceanic animals already have thinned by up to one-third due to rising levels of carbon dioxide. These animals are at the base of the oceanic food chain.

The coastal waters of Washington State have become so acid that wild oysters have not reproduced since 2005. Rising atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide are combining with industrial discharges, septic runoff and motor-vehicle traffic to accelerate the acidity of waters off the Washington State coast and in Puget Sound. Acidity problems are worst in Hood Canal, site of most of the area’s shellfish industry. Scientists from the University of Washington and NOAA warned July 12, 2010 that Western Washington waters had become a hotspot for marine acidity.

Acidic water kills oyster larvae. On the oceanic coast, the logic records describes effects as sudden and severe as the present plunge in pH, so future effects on marine wildlife are unknown. Researchers are seeing signs that coral growth does slow, oyster larvae suffer, and plankton with calcareous skeletons lose mass,” according to this study.

With funding from the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Will Howard of the Antarctic Climate & Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre in Australia and colleagues collected microscopic marine animals called planktonic foraminifera (or forams) from the South Tasman Rise region of the Southern Ocean. They compared the weights of the shells of these modern forams to those trapped in ocean sediments before the industrial revolution and its infusion of carbon dioxide, finding that today’s shell weights are 30 to 35 per cent less than older fossils. This is nearly equal to the amount by which the proportion of carbon dioxide has risen in the atmosphere. The findings were described in the March 8, 2009 issue of the journal Nature Geoscience.

In addition to increasing use of nitrogen-based fertilizers and sewage runoff, accelerating emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (and its absorption by the oceans) is causing “dead zones”—desolate regions where pollution-fed algae deprive other marine life of oxygen—to expand rapidly. The number of such areas worldwide increased to about 200 by 2008, a 34 percent rise in two years.

Given carbon dioxide’s long life in the atmosphere, this trend that could persist for centuries or longer even after greenhouse-gas emissions end. A 100,000-year computer simulation indicates that severe ocean oxygen depletion could last for thousands of years. Dead zones that cover about 2 percent of ocean surface today could expand to 20 per cent by that time. Our increasing emissions of carbon dioxide are raping the oceans.

Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacson Professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and author of The Encyclopedia of Global Warming Science and Technology (2009).

REFERENCES
Passin’
In Memory of Mrs. Leola J. Bullock (d. 2010)

by Dr. Kwakiutl L. Dreher

Hush, Hush
Somebody's callin’ my name

I passed through Mississippi Arkansas Oklahoma and Kansas
Bolstered by a blistering obnoxious Nebraska wind
Holding on to Love
    Strong Brown Arms
    Stretched down from the Great Plains
My … Hugh … My … Love
For whom I
    Stood in
    Stood by
    Stood with
In chaotic national times that pushed us to
Shout! for dignity
Sing! to overcome
March! Up & down the concrete sidewalks
To STAND UP … SPEAK OUT
I AM!

Hush, Hush
Somebody's callin’ my name

Somebody's accepted a PASS
To omit
From the textbook my people's contribution
The absence and omission of our handiwork
In the formation of this
Country
Continent
America … The World … CIVILIZATION
I remember Mississippi
You will too … my children will too
We will not suffer the little ones a
Not-Knowing
The All The Way Around
hisssstory of the ancestors
Come, my sisters and brothers
Take my PASS to gather round a table
To STAND UP … SPEAK OUT
For INCLUSION
In those white pages

Lincoln civil rights legend and NFP State Board member Leola Bullock died unexpectedly of heart complications October 17. Dr. Kwakiutl L. Dreher, UNL Associate Professor of English and Ethnic Studies, delivered this poetic tribute to Leola’s memory at the 2010 Lincoln NAACP annual dinner November 6.
Former Bulletin of Atomic Scientists editor Mike Moore delivered a keynote address at the 2010 Annual Peace Conference in Omaha this past October. Author of the award-winning book, Twilight War: The Folly of U.S. Space Dominance, the Missouri native is one of the premier analysts on the dangerous militarization of space.

The Cold War was a nasty, frightful business. By the 1980s, the Soviet Union and the United States had some 85,000 nuclear weapons between them. Most of those bombs and missiles were far more powerful than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than 200,000 men, women and children.

Further, these bombs and missiles were ready to go at any moment. If one side attacked the other, the other side would retaliate. The time to make that ‘go-no go’ decision on retaliation, to ‘launch on warning,’ was, at best, 10 or 15 minutes. If one side waited a few minutes too long, its retaliatory force might be destroyed. ‘Use ‘em or lose ‘em’ was the order of the day.

That’s why nuclear deterrence was labeled “Mutual Assured Destruction.” In shorthand, “MAD.” MAD was an apt acronym, since it was, after all, a mutual suicide pact: ‘If you kill me, I will kill you.’

This nuclear stand-off only ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

So, did deterrence ‘work’? Nearly 20 years later, that’s still a matter of heated debate. All we know for sure is that we made it through those five perilous decades without nuclear war.

The nerve center for America’s nuclear deterrent during that whole period was, of course, the Strategic Air Command (SAC), just down the road at Offutt Air Force Base. SAC’s motto from 1948 onwards was “Peace Is Our Profession,” and in the dangerous and utterly immoral logic of the Cold War, the motto—ironic as it was—could be defended.

**Full Spectrum Dominance**

With the end of the Cold War, however, SAC was ‘stood down’ to be replaced by Strategic Command, or StratCom in 1992. At first, StratCom simply integrated SAC’s nuclear forces—bombers and missiles—with the Navy’s nuclear missiles based on submarines, usually called ‘boomers.’

Bombers, missiles, and boomers. A potent mix of end-of-the-world destructive power. Nonetheless, StratCom’s purported mission was still deterrence. Its weapons were meant not to be used.

The mission of deterrence itself, though, seemed to be on the back-burner.

**Mike Moore**

No longer was there a nation that could threaten America’s very existence. For decades, de facto U.S. policy was that nuclear weapons should never be used in combat. And that ‘nuclear taboo’ was real and potent. If there were a nuclear war (and that was always a possibility), it would start by accident or miscalculation—not by intention.

With the U.S. now the world’s sole superpower, America’s military instead shifted its focus to developing precision weapons that could be used to actually fight wars—conventional weapons tied to precision guidance systems. These new weapons (essentially bombs and missiles targeted by and guided by made-in-America satellites) have revolutionized America’s way of war over the past two decades.

It is now possible for American weapons to actually hit their targets with almost unbelievable accuracy. That is something new in the history of warfare. If targets were properly selected, civilian casualties would be minimized.

Consider NATO’s intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999 on behalf of Kosovar Albanians, who were being brutalized and killed by Yugoslav army and police forces. Justifications of NATO’s actions are endlessly controversial. Was the intervention a “just war”? Or was it a violation of a nation’s sovereignty? In any event, the decision to go to war—even with a limited bombing campaign—was not easily made.

NATO eventually approved air strikes as a way of forcing Slobodan Milosevic to the bargaining table. In opting for air attack, NATO had to weigh the lives of ethnic Albanians against the certainty that at least some civilians would be killed by NATO bombs and missiles. In the end, the decision was made only because NATO’s leaders continued on page 8
The Costs and Legal Hazards of an Arizona-style Immigration Law in Nebraska

by Norman Pflanz
Staff Attorney for the Immigrant Integration and Civic Participation Program at Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest

In April 2010, the state of Arizona passed SB 1070, which would require local law enforcement officers to inquire into an individual’s immigration status during any lawful stop, detention, or arrest; forbid local law enforcement from releasing any person who is arrested until the person’s immigration status is determined; create a state crime for an immigrant’s failure to apply for and carry required documents; criminalize the solicitation and performance of work without proper immigration documents; authorize the warrantless arrest of certain immigrants; and allow private citizens to sue law enforcement agencies and officials if they believe they are not sufficiently enforcing immigration laws, among other provisions. After the law was passed, seven lawsuits were filed by civil rights organizations, individuals and the United States to block its enactment. In July 2010, U.S. District Court Judge Susan Bolton granted in part a preliminary injunction that has kept key sections of the law from going into effect. On November 1, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals heard Arizona’s appeal.

As indicated by the preliminary injunction to block major portions of the law, many provisions of SB 1070 violate fundamental constitution principles and rights. One such principle is the preemption doctrine, derived from the Supremacy Clause in Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, which provides that the “Constitution and the laws of the United States… shall be the supreme law of the land… anything in the constitutions or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding.” The Supremacy Clause has been interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court to invalidate state or local laws that “interfere with or are contrary to federal law” (Gibbons v. Ogden). Regulation of immigration is a federal issue—a patchwork of state and local laws would be unworkable—and state and local attempts to regulate immigration are preempted by federal law.

Under Section 2 of Arizona’s law, local police are newly required to inquire into immigration status during any “lawful stop, detention, or arrest.” As described by law enforcement, requiring local police to serve as federal immigration agents has dangerous ramifications for the public safety of all community members. The defining element of community policing is the development of relationships between police and their communities, including immigrants. Police officers rely upon these relationships to obtain information critical to the prevention and investigation of crime. When some community members fear the police, it becomes less likely that crimes will be reported, or that witnesses will come forward, making us all less safe.

Additionally, the requirement that law enforcement must determine certain individual’s immigration status may be unconstitutional because of the significant burdens it would place on lawful immigrants in Arizona. The U.S. Supreme Court has struck down similar state laws since such statutes could adversely affect international relations and how U.S. nation-
StratCom, continued

were certain that the U.S. Air Force was capable of minimizing civilian casualties.

After 77 days of bombing, Milosevic finally gave in. Human Rights Watch, a nongovernmental organization that does not champion the use of military force, conducted an exhaustive on-the-ground survey with particular emphasis on documenting reports of civilian deaths from the bombing campaign.

“As few as 489 and as many as 528 Yugoslav [civilians] were killed,” the organization’s report said. Human Rights Watch did not defend NATO. Although the designers of the air campaign went to great lengths to minimize civilian casualties, the report noted, the alliance could have done an even better job of protecting civilians. But to military officers, government officials, and think-tank warriors everywhere, the number of civilian deaths was strikingly low. How could some 23,000 bombs and missiles—only about 35 percent of which were true precision weapons—have produced so little collateral damage?

Part of the answer was satellites orbiting in space, particularly observation, communications, and global-positioning satellites. In military-speak, space had become the new ‘center of gravity’ for America’s military forces in the 1990s. This new way of fighting even acquired an ominous-sounding name: Full Spectrum Dominance.

U.S. forces, according to the new doctrine, would no longer be simply daunting. They would be overwhelmingly dominant—on land, at sea, in the air…and in space. So dominant, in fact, that no great power would ever again mount an existential challenge to the United States. After 9/11, Full Spectrum Dominance was to become the overarching mission of Strategic Command.

New Missions

Over the next five years, the Pentagon added a host of new missions to StratCom. The command retained its role of providing nuclear deterrence, even in the absence of an existential threat. But it was now charged with developing the hardware to preemptively attack targets with conventional weapons anywhere in the world within an hour or two of a decision to do so. America would no longer stand by waiting to be attacked; it would be prepared to throw the first punch. “Prompt global strike,” it’s called.

The global-strike mission is now StratCom’s on paper, but how to actually implement it is highly controversial within the military and in Congress. Would the Russians or the Chinese mistake the launch of a prompt-global-strike missile with the launch of a nuclear-tipped missile, thus provoking a nuclear war by mistake? For that matter, would U.S. intelligence be accurate enough to justify preemptive strikes? Finally, was preemption—striking the first blow—consistent with historical American values?

StratCom also inherited America’s military space mission. Part of that involves coordination of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance satellites, communications satellites, global positioning satellites, and warning satellites. These space birds are enablers; they make precision war possible.

There are no weapons in space—no ‘shooters.’ But land, sea, and air-based weapons are now so dependent on orbiting satellites that space assets have become key components of America’s warfighting systems. Beyond that, U.S. space policy—even today—asserts that the United States has the unilateral right to assume control of space in a time of conflict. Our space policies also state that the United States reserves the unilateral right to develop and deploy actual space weapons, a mission called “force application from space.”

That’s bizarre. Outer space is by international treaty the “province of all mankind.” Consonant with that, it must be used solely for “peaceful purposes.” The Outer Space Treaty (which has been in force for more than 40 years) is the brainchild of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a man who knew something of the terrors of war and the virtues of peace.

Similar to space control and force application of space, Strategic Command also was charged with the task of developing both defensive and offensive cyberspace. There is no question that America’s military and civilian computer networks are favorite targets of hackers in other nations; some of these attacks may have government sponsorship.

But how this mission will play out is uncertain. The consequences of ordering a counter-offensive cyber attack against the computer networks of another nation could be enormously dangerous. Cyber attacks typically do not have a return address. And yet, a decision to order a counter-cyber attack might have to be made in minutes on the basis of highly ambiguous evidence.

This is just a sampling of StratCom’s new missions. Nuclear deterrence is cold spaghetti. Today’s StratCom is deeply involved in active warfighting. Satellites under StratCom’s purview identify targets and guide bombs and missiles to those targets. Wherever and whenever an unmanned aerial vehicle fires a missile at presumed terrorists in Afghanistan or Pakistan or elsewhere, StratCom hardware and personnel are key players.

“Peace Is Our Profession” is still StratCom’s motto. But a secondary line may be needed: “Warfighting Is Our Vocation.”

Capabilities v. Intent

Military officers do not make military policy. They do not decide whether the nation will go to war. Such decisions are made by our nation’s political leaders, not by uniformed officers. However, the armed forces are charged with implementing America’s policy of full spectrum dominance in the military sphere.

That policy has been interpreted by some as a smoking gun, proof that the United States intends to dominate the world…that it intends to outdo the Romans by creating a global Pax Americana.

That is not my personal interpretation. Full spectrum dominance describes a way of fighting, not a political program with an imperial slant. Nonetheless, what possible combination of words could seem more imperial than that?

The fact that the United States is focused on achieving total military dominance in battle—our nation’s political and military leaders say—should not alarm

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The court reasoned that while federal law requires certain immigrants to register with the federal government and carry such documentation, failure to do so is not a criminal offense. In blocking enforcement of this provision of SB 1070, the district court determined that Arizona’s attempt to create state criminal penalties would likely be preempted by federal law. Section 5, which seeks to criminalize the hiring, soliciting and performing of work by unauthorized individuals suffers from the same deficiencies and has been enjoined by the district court. The court reasoned that while federal law contains only civil sanctions against such unauthorized employees, SB 1070 impermissibly makes it a state crime for an unauthorized immigrant to perform work in the state. Finally, the district court enjoined Section 6, which would authorize warrantless arrests of certain individuals if the officer has “probable cause” to believe the person has committed a crime for which the person could be removed from the United States. The district court reasoned that such a complex determination should be determined through a federal administrative system rather than a split-second decision by a police officer who is understandably untrained in the complexities and nuances of immigration law.

Arizona in Nebraska

Unfortunately, this fight will soon be coming to Nebraska. Senator Charlie Janssen of Fremont has promised to introduce a bill similar to SB 1070 in January 2011. This is the last thing that we need in Nebraska, especially with the climate of fear and hostility that has been created by the passage of an anti-immigrant ordinance in Fremont. Despite the fact that the ordinance has not gone into effect, we have already seen the community divisions that follow such laws. Passage of a law similar to SB 1070 would only exacerbate this.

Across the country, we have seen the destructive effects of state and local attempts to regulate immigration. While these local and state laws may purport to only target undocumented immigrants, all immigrants and minorities—including citizens, legal residents, and community members born in the U.S.—suffer from the discrimination and humiliation that follows from these ordinances. These laws effectively empower ordinary citizens to enforce federal immigration laws, but do not give them any tools or guidance for doing so. Consequently, even well-intentioned citizens may turn to crude proxies for immigration status, which could result in discrimination against individuals who are perceived to be “foreign-looking” or “foreign-sounding.”

Along with Fremont, other comparatively sized communities that have passed immigration ordinances have experienced similar high costs and community divisions. Hazleton, Pennsylvania (population 23,000) has run up $2.4 million in legal costs for an ordinance that made it unlawful to hire or rent to undocumented immigrants. A federal appeals court recently upheld a ruling that the ordinance is preempted by federal law. Farmer’s Branch, Texas (population 27,500) has spent over $3.2 million on court costs for its ordinance thus far.

In May 2008, a federal court permanently enjoined the ordinance. In Fremont, the city has imposed an 18 percent increase in property taxes and has set aside $750,000 for the first year of defending the ordinance. Kris Kobach, attorney for the legal arm of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR)—which is listed as a ‘hate group’ by the Southern Poverty Law Center—has helped write each of these failed laws and the Arizona law.

Arizona has already lost sporting events, conferences and meetings to other states, costing tens of millions of dollars in business. In the first week alone, the “Hotel and Lodging Association” reported that 19 meetings had been cancelled because of the law, representing $6 million in lost revenue. In the meantime, the state faces expensive legal costs, and Arizona’s governor has allocated $250,000 public relations budget to help repair the state’s image.

Based on the experiences of other local and state governments, Nebraska should not risk our financial stability, public safety and community spirit by passing a law similar to SB 1070. Instead, we must insist that our federal elected officials in Congress create workable solutions that uphold our values and move us forward.
StratCom, conclusion

anyone. Achieving dominance over a foe has been the aim of warfare since the beginning of recorded history. But beyond that observation, our government constantly asserts a companion argument: U.S. intentions are ‘always non-aggressive.’ Its use of military power is always benign.

It is true that the United States, once it had conquered or killed everyone who stood in the way of its Atlantic-to-the-Pacific “Manifest Destiny,” has not engaged in traditional aggressive war. But the obvious question is: What other nation state would be willing to subject its national fortunes to changing U.S. whims and geopolitical aims? Past behavior is not always the predictor of future behavior. That’s ‘International Relations 101.’

In assessing the threat posed by existing or potential rivals, national leaders throughout the world are far more interested in capabilities (demonstrated or presumed) than in intentions. Capabilities are thought to be roughly measurable. In contrast, divining the intentions of another nation’s leaders is a speculative art and often futile. Intentions can change as quickly as governments. Capabilities, on the other hand, have a modest degree of permanence.

All major powers value their own sovereignty and the freedom to act in defense of their vital national interests. They do not like to be at the mercy of another state, particularly a nation such as the United States that has repeatedly demonstrated technological wizardry and amazing capabilities in actual warfighting.

To America’s leaders, building a military of overwhelming dominance seems sensible and necessary. To many other nations, such a capability may suggest a velvet-glove hegemony that could one day turn to steel-fisted imperialism. That’s a recipe for a new arms race, perhaps even a new cold war.

Exceptionalism

American exceptionalism has a long history. Long before there was a United States, the English colonies in the New World were widely seen in Europe as a divinely blessed promised land where spiritual and civic regeneration was possible, even likely.

If the American experiment should fail, wrote Alexander Hamilton in The Federalist No. 1, that failure would deserve “to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.” After retiring as president, Thomas Jefferson described the United States as the world’s “sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government.” Herman Melville put it this way in 1850:

God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours...

It makes no difference whether the United States was actually singled out by God for greatness, or whether it was merely a nation blessed with abundant natural resources, good and deep topsoil, a moderate climate, energetic immigrants from the Old World, and a lot of room to fill once the original inhabitants had died of smallpox or had been otherwise ‘removed.’

What is relevant is that so many Americans have believed in American exceptionalism over the years. The widespread belief in America’s exceptional mission has contributed to a host of misadventures in the name of goodness, of ‘doing the right thing.’ Consider the words of the late Senator J. William Fulbright, who wrote this in 1966, early in the Vietnam War:

Power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God’s favor, conferring upon it a special responsibility for other nations—to make them richer and happier and wiser, to remake them, that is, in its own shining image.

We all know how America’s ‘righteous’ involvement in Southeast Asia turned out. It was our nation’s first modern war largely inspired by the messianic vision of American exceptionalism—a war that caused more than 58,000 American deaths and the deaths of an estimated 1.5 million Vietnamese.

The spirit of exceptionalism took a beating in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The world suddenly seemed more complicated and less amenable to American direction than had been previously thought. But for many Americans in the 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Union as well as the quick victory in Gulf War I restored their faith in America’s steadfast righteousness and military competence.

The two events promoted a resurgence of exceptionalism—even triumphalism—in public life. Triumphalism still flourishes.

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Strategic Command, which revels in its new multifaceted global role, has become the chief cop on the global beat. It is the operational arm of American exceptionalism.

As long as we citizens, in whom sovereignty is vested, go along with that global-cop idea, the United States likely will be beset by conflict and war. We simply cannot police the world. Not even the United States is that powerful. Our attempts to police the globe simply beget resistance and violence.

I have no magic prescription, other than to recall the words of John Quincy Adams, who famously summed up America’s neutralist foreign policy in 1821 while serving as James Monroe’s secretary of state.

“What has America done for the benefit of mankind?” Adams rhetorically asked.

For nearly a half century, he said, America had “respected the independence of other nations while asserting and maintaining her own.” She did not interfere in the “concerns of others.” Indeed, “wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”
Jack Gould Honored as Peacemaker of the Year

by Barb van den Berg

Alternatives to The Military, the volunteer group endeavoring to counteract the heavy-handed efforts of military recruiters in Lincoln’s high schools, honored its ‘Peacemaker of the Year’ at its annual potluck supper last August, just as the new school year got underway. The 2010 honoree was Jack Gould, the ‘Issues’ chair of Common Cause Nebraska, which uses research, advocacy and organizing to make state and local government more open, ethical and accountable. (http://www.commoncause.org)

Gould is the latest in an august line of peacemaking award recipients that began with former NFP State Coordinator Betty Olson, and has included such local luminaries as Dwight Ganzel, Don Tilley, Leola Bullock, Dan Williams, Bob Hitchcock, Marj Manglitz, Carol McShane, Christy Hargesheimer, Robert Epp, John Taylor and George Wolf, MJ Berry, Terry Werner, Michael Baker, Nan Graf and Fran Kaye.

Custom at the ATM annual potluck has always stipulated that, in lieu of an after-dinner speaker, each person attending tells a little about what she or he has done or is doing for the cause of Peace & Justice over the past year. The result is an inspiring collection of personal stories. The steadfastness and endurance of these progressive thinkers and agents is an inspiration to those of us who are novices at promoting alternatives to our society’s violence, militarism, oppression and racism.

This year’s dinner included an important announcement about the organization’s new leadership structure. Several of the original and long-time members have requested help in continuing the work of Alternatives to the Military. Members of ATM (plus several members of the Nebraska Green Party) have volunteered their time to carry on ATM’s principal actions of annual literature distribution to high school students, high school libraries, media and counseling centers, and of requesting changes in public school policies towards military recruitment.

Section 9528 of “No Child Left Behind” requires schools to hand over students’ personal data to military recruiters. The Pentagon has created the “Joint Advertising Marketing Research and Studies”—a database of 30-plus million 16-25 year olds that includes names, street addresses, email addresses, cell phone numbers, ethnicity, Social Security numbers, extracurricular activities, buying habits and areas of study. High schools are required to provide the data they have collected on each student unless the student has opted out. Unfortunately, few students and parents are aware of the possibility of opting out of giving military recruiters this very sensitive personal data. That the military services have reportedly been targeting minors in their recruitment efforts only emphasizes the necessity of ATM’s work.

We thank Alternatives to the Military, which has been active since the first Gulf War in 1991, for persevering in its mission to counter the misleading information that military recruiters provide to our school students. And we appreciate their recognition of others who have worked for Peace & Justice in our communities through their annual Peacemaker Award. Congratulations to Jack Gould on being selected as the 2010 recipient.

Your Foundation Speaks

As we near the end of the year, it is time to evaluate your personal finances and see what you can do for the charities and organizations you care about most. I hope you will put Nebraskans for Peace at the top of your list, and to remember that you can support the educational work of Nebraskans for Peace by a tax-deductible donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation.

If your tax situation will not benefit from tax deductibility, then make your donation direct to Nebraskans for Peace. A year-end gift will help keep NFP going into the year ahead. Any questions, call me 402-489-6662.

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by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

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The Role of Hate Groups in the Immigration Policy Debate

Speaking Our Peace

Tomorrow morning (November 1, 2010) I go in for cataract surgery. My other eye has been partially blinded by a stroke. Things fall apart in my body.

Tuesday comes the elections, and I suspect that—whatever the outcome—things will fall apart nationally as well. Over 50 percent of our national budget goes to legalized mass killing. So does our best technology and our finest research. Meanwhile, the Tea Party rumbles to cut the budgets for people and expand them for the military and does so with billionaire money. The nation’s political discourse in consequence resembles a professional wrestling fracas—brutal, irrational and paid for.

Our national appetite for war (endless and endlessly expensive) has left a trail of carnage extending half-way around the world. The words of a poet writing about the end of the story has not yet been written. I sing the liberation of Nelson Mandela’s South Africa, of MLK’s African Americans and the election of America’s first Black president. Of the freeing of much of South and Central America from military governments, all with few shots. I sing the decline of nationalism in Europe, the growing authority of the UN and of its “Declaration of Human Rights.” I sing the declining of American imperialism in general.

These things did not happen in the main. Standing here amid the shambles, after four decades of dedicated labor, it’s easy to ask, what in fact have we accomplished? All those letters to the editor, demonstrations, candlelight vigils, protests at StratCom, walks to Whiteclay, fiery discussions with friends and opponents seem like so much dust. Fears of phone taps, threatening letters, sleepless nights, firing of clergy friends, divorces over political disagreements, threats of having one’s herd poisoned—surely, all of that grief and pain counted for something? Was it just 40 years for nothing?

Things do fall apart for me in this area of discourse also. I do not know what to mutter. It is not enough to say to myself, “I worked to change the culture of violence to keep the culture of violence from changing me.” Forty years later, I want less violence, more discussion based on facts, fewer lies. I want peace.

We in NFP have done some service of worth—on Vietnam, on racism, on the Nuclear Freeze, on bullying, Whiteclay, Fremont’s immigration ordinance, on the alerting the world about StratCom and the militarization of space. But not enough…

Given the need, not nearly enough.

I know that I am old. I also know—from the poet who reminded me that “things fall apart”—that “An aged man is but a paltry thing, A tattered coat upon a stick, unless Soul clap its hand and sing, and louder sing

For every tatter in its mortal dress.”

So paltry and half blind, with Yeats, I sing. I sing what our movement has done around the world. I sing of the liberation of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the Baltics with hardly a shot. I sing the liberation of Nelson Mandela’s South Africa, of MLK’s African Americans and the election of America’s first Black president. Of the freeing of much of South and Central America from military governments, all with few shots. I sing the decline of nationalism in Europe, the growing authority of the UN and of its “Declaration of Human Rights.” I sing local work: the drab hard work of forming chapters, recruiting members, writing emails, talking to dull legislative aides, creating new climates of opinion, speaking truth to power. This singing is not easy or glorious. But it is our form of clapping hands and singing for every tatter in our mortal dress.

As I leave the presidency of NFP, I am not at ease. I have not done enough. Neither have you. I do know that we have been singing, that we sing as part of a worldwide movement that has changed the face of how we have sung the world into being in the last 40 years. This movement will continue to sing—in South and Central America, in Iran, and, most importantly here in the U.S., where the end of the story has not yet been written.