By David Swanson

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In the United States it is considered fashionable to maintain a steadfast ignorance of rejected peace offers, and to believe that all the wars launched by the U.S. government are matters of "last resort." Our schools *still* don't teach that Spain wanted the matter of the *Maine* to go to international arbitration, that Japan wanted peace before Hiroshima, that the Soviet Union proposed peace negotiations before the Korean War, or that the U.S. sabotaged peace proposals for Vietnam from the Vietnamese, the Soviets, and the French. When a Spanish newspaper reported that Saddam Hussein had offered to leave Iraq before the 2003 invasion, U.S. media took little interest. When British media reported that the Taliban was willing to have Osama bin Laden put on trial before the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, U.S. journalists yawned. Iran's 2003 offer to negotiate ending its nuclear energy program wasn't mentioned much during this year's debate over an agreement with Iran -- which was itself nearly rejected as an impediment to war.

The *Guardian* reported on Tuesday that the former Finnish president and Nobel peace prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari, who had been involved in negotiations in 2012, said that in 2012 Russia had proposed a process of peace settlement between the Syrian government and its opponents that would have included President Bashar al-Assad stepping down. But, according to Ahtisaari, the United States was so confident that Assad would soon be violently overthrown that it rejected the proposal.

The catastrophic Syrian civil war since 2012 has followed U.S. adherence to actual U.S. policy in which peaceful compromise is usually the last resort. Does the U.S. government believe violence tends to produce better results? The record shows otherwise. More likely it believes that violence will lead to greater U.S.-control, while satisfying the war industry. The record on the first part of that is mixed at best.

Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO from 1997 to 2000 Wesley Clark claims that in 2001, Secretary of War Donald Rumsfeld put out a memo proposing to take over seven countries in five years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran. The basic outline of this plan was confirmed by none other than former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who in

2010 pinned it on former Vice President Dick Cheney:

"Cheney wanted forcible 'regime change' in all Middle Eastern countries that he considered hostile to U.S. interests, according to Blair. 'He would have worked through the whole lot, Iraq, Syria, Iran, dealing with all their surrogates in the course of it — Hezbollah, Hamas, etc.,' Blair wrote. 'In other words, he [Cheney] thought the world had to be made anew, and that after 11 September, it had to be done by force and with urgency. So he was for hard, hard power. No ifs, no buts, no maybes.'"

U.S. State Department cables released by WikiLeaks trace U.S. efforts in Syria to undermine the government back to at least 2006. In 2013, the White House went public with plans to lob some unspecified number of missiles into Syria, which was in the midst of a horrible civil war already fueled in part by U.S. arms and training camps, as well as by wealthy U.S. allies in the region and fighters emerging from other U.S.-created disasters in the region.

The excuse for the missiles was an alleged killing of civilians, including children, with chemical weapons -- a crime that President Barack Obama claimed to have certain proof had been committed by the Syrian government. Watch the videos of the dead children, the President said, and support that horror or support my missile strikes. Those were the only choices, supposedly. It wasn't a soft sell, but it wasn't a powerful or successful one either.

The "proof" of responsibility for that use of chemical weapons fell apart, and public opposition to what we later learned would have been a massive bombing campaign succeeded. Public opposition succeeded without knowing about the rejected proposal for peace of 2012. But it succeeded without follow-through. No new effort was made for peace, and the U.S. went right ahead inching its way into the war with trainers and weapons and drones.

In January 2015, a scholarly study found that the U.S. public believes that whenever the U.S. government proposes a war, it has already exhausted all other possibilities. When a sample group was asked if they supported a particular war, and a second group was asked if they supported that particular war after being told that all alternatives were no good, and a third group was asked if they supported that war even though there were good alternatives, the first two groups registered the same level of support, while support for war dropped off significantly in the third group. This led the researchers to the conclusion that if alternatives are not mentioned, people don't assume they exist — rather, people assume they've already been tried. So, if you mention that there is a serious alternative, the game is up. You'll have to get your war

on later.

Based on the record of past wars, engaged in and avoided, as it dribbles out in the years that follow, the general assumption should always be that peace has been carefully avoided at every turn.