



# AMERICAN DISPATCHES

A ROBERT PARRY READER

WITH A FOREWORD BY DIANE DUSTON  
EDITED AND WITH AN AFTERWORD BY NAT PARRY

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**ROBERT PARRY**



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**DUSTON; EDITED AND WITH AN AFTERWORD BY NAT PARRY**

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## FOREWORD

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I met Robert Parry in 1982 when I was transferred to the Washington bureau of The Associated Press. He had already gained a reputation within the AP as a relentless investigative journalist who ruffled the feathers of people in power. At the time, he was digging deeply and seriously into misstatements being made by President Ronald Reagan who had been in office a little over a year.

Bob was on the Special Assignments team and tasked with generating his own stories, but sometimes he would be called upon to cover breaking news. So much so, that he jokingly called his Reagan investigation his hobby.

That “hobby” would later become the Iran-Contra scandal, but Bob didn’t know it at the time. He was just following the leads. While on that trail, he discovered that Lt. Col. Oliver North was running an illegal network from the White House to support the Nicaraguan Contras with profits from arms sales to Iran. He was the first to report on North, but in doing so, he was plowing ground that neither The Associated Press nor any other mainstream news organization had been down before.

“My job was to get the story, so I went out to get the story,” Bob said in a television interview. “The more obstacles they put in my way, the more I got determined to get it. But you pay prices. In the real world, you don’t always get the story as easily as you would like to.”

Bob knew that those who wrote stories that the White House didn’t want written ran the risk of having their careers seriously damaged and possibly ended, but it was a risk he felt compelled to take.

He was the best reporter I had ever met. I’d been a professional journalist myself since joining the *Toledo Blade* in 1971. In 1976, I was hired by the AP in Columbus, OH, became news editor there and was sent to the Raleigh, NC, bureau before being transferred to Washington. I had met and worked alongside plenty of accomplished newsmen and women.



I never partnered with Bob on a story, but I did become his life partner when we married in 1987. He was a wonderful husband, a loving father to his four children, and a fun-loving grandfather to six. He never stopped being a determined journalist, but he always had time for us. He was light-hearted and playful with the family. He entertained his children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews with a silly, smart-mouthed, clueless hand-puppet named Kanga that the rest of us joked was his alter-ego. These connections kept him grounded as he pursued some of the toughest stories of his time.

The way Bob employed his craft met resistance within the mainstream news organizations that employed him. To be first with information that exposes misdeeds by powerful people makes those who run the large news organizations uncomfortable. What if the information is wrong? What if the powerful people that engaged in wrongdoing are friends with the owners of the media organization? Or, in the case of Bob's reporting on Oliver North, what if the bureau chief supervising the stories is also meeting with North to discuss how to free AP Beirut Chief Terry Anderson, a hostage of Hezbollah Shiite Muslims in Lebanon?

Anderson was abducted in 1985 and not freed until 1991. Bob and his reporting partner Brian Barger were digging deeper and deeper into the Reagan administration's illegal support for the right-wing Contra rebels in Nicaragua. They didn't know their bureau chief was meeting with North, the White House point man on Anderson. They couldn't figure out why publication of their well-sourced, important reporting was being delayed.

Even when the bureau chief supported their stories, they would run into obstacles. A now humorous example was an article they wrote about drug-trafficking by the Contras. Nervous editors in AP's New York headquarters kept asking for more corroboration. The Washington bureau chief thought the story was going to be killed. It had been going back and forth on the AP's internal computer system when it accidentally popped up on the AP desk that translated stories into Spanish for the news organization's Latin American wire. When word got back to New York that the story had been published in newspapers all over Latin America, the red-faced AP quickly produced it for domestic consumption.

But mostly the resistance Bob experienced was not humorous. He became weary of fighting with the AP. After winning the 1984 Polk Award for National Reporting, he was lured away from the wire service by *Newsweek*. The Iran-Contra hearings were about to start in Congress. The magazine wanted Bob's expertise for its coverage. Unfortunately, it didn't work out the way Bob had hoped. At the AP, he had faced obstacles, but knew how to eventually get his stories out. At *Newsweek*, he was stifled by what he considered the magazine's compulsion to protect the power structure and conventional wisdom.

He left to write his first book, *Fooling America: How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom*, published in 1992. He also went to work for PBS "Frontline" on documentaries that included investigating a long simmering suspicion that the Reagan-Bush campaign in 1980 conspired with Iran to continue to hold 52 Americans hostage as a strategy to prevent re-election of President Jimmy Carter. The Americans had been held captive for 444 days when they were released on Jan. 20, 1981, the day Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as president. That project led to Bob's book *Trick or Treason: The October Surprise Mystery*, published in 1993. The subject remains a mystery, but Bob's reporting was so carefully sourced and detailed that it is still being used today as a resource for writers and documentarians exploring that and other the topics he covered.

By 1995, Bob had given up on the mainstream media. He was gathering more information than he could convince the big news organizations into using. He needed an outlet for his work, so he turned to the very young World Wide Web. He started Consortiumnews.com, the first internet-based investigative news outlet. He called it Consortium because he wanted it to be a place where other reporters who faced roadblocks within the established press could publish their stories.

In 1999, Bob's Consortium for Independent Journalism, publisher of the website, became a non-profit 501c3. Bob had cashed out his retirement savings and sometimes worked without pay to keep the website active. Now, he was applying for foundation grants and running online fundraising campaigns to support this noble enterprise.

In 2000, when money ran short, he took a job at Bloomberg News as an editor of Security and Exchange Commission coverage. He put Consortiumnews.com on mothballs for several months, knowing that Bloomberg wouldn't tolerate him running it even on his own time. Eventually, he quietly resumed the operation on a part-time, low-profile basis. He left Bloomberg after three years and made the Consortium his full-time job from then on.

I was always amazed at his work ethic and determination. "Every day's a workday," he hummed, partly to amuse, but in absolute truth. He got up each morning, jogged 3-5 miles, ate breakfast, showered and started writing and editing. He would break for meals and to walk the dog. After dinner, he would return to work into the evening. He worked on a laptop on our bed. He said it was better for his back than sitting at a desk. Sometimes, he would still be writing after 10 p.m. I'd be ready to go to sleep and would ask him if he could finish in the morning. "Just a minute, I'm almost finished," he'd say as I put a pillow over my ears and closed my eyes.

We traveled quite a bit for fun. He was particularly happy on trips to Europe when he could get up at dawn, write, edit and post stories on his website before folks in the U.S. were awake. Then, we could set out on whatever adventures we'd planned.

Bob and I were married 31 years when he died Jan. 27, 2018. I loved him, laughed with him and admired his journalistic drive. After leaving journalism in 1996 for another career, I'd become much more philosophical about the vagaries of human behavior, and the limits of journalism to correct wrongdoing. When I asked what motivated him against the big odds that I knew caused him pain, he answered simply, "I don't like lying."

He believed journalists should seek the truth and let the chips fall where they may. He believed that if people learned the truth they would effectively participate in a democratic society.

In a speech he gave when accepting an award toward the end of his life, he said: "To me the core responsibility of a journalist is to have an open mind toward any information you might find, to have no agenda and to have no preferred outcome. In other words, I don't care *what* the truth is. I just care *what* the truth *is*."

Bob wasn't in the business for the awards, but he won a few nonetheless. Besides winning the George Polk Award, he also was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, received the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Excellence, and the Martha Gellhorn Prize, among others. He was averse to self-promotion. He felt the work should speak for itself and that the truth would power through, helping people and government officials do the right thing.

He left an impressive body of work. This book brings together articles he wrote during his life. I hope you will see in it the qualities that set him apart.

Diane Duston

Arlington, Va., January 2022

## PREFACE

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Covering more than four decades of Robert Parry's journalism – from his days writing for a student newspaper in college to his early work as an AP beat reporter to a freelancer struggling to get articles published to an iconoclastic independent journalist – the following text provides a broad outline of his development as a writer and thinker, as well as a comprehensive overview of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century American history.

The biggest challenge in compiling this volume was simply the amount of material to choose from. As a truly prolific writer, Parry covered a vast amount of subject matter and themes in his many years as an investigative reporter. Rather than focusing primarily on the areas for which he was best known – for example, the Iran-Contra Affair – I have attempted to provide as broad a sample as possible. To do so, I have done some editing for the sake of brevity and clarity. I have also striven to eliminate repetition, as Parry was fond of revisiting certain subjects to analyze them from different angles. In addition, I have offered brief introductions to each of the articles in this collection, in order to provide historical context for the reader.

Some readers who are well-versed in Parry's journalism might wonder why certain stories that he pursued over the years are not included – for example his work in the 1990s challenging the scandals that plagued President Bill Clinton, who Parry saw in some ways as the hapless victim of a well-oiled right-wing attack machine. New England Patriots fans might complain that his work debunking the “Deflategate” scandal that resulted in a four-game suspension of quarterback Tom Brady is omitted.

Unfortunately, space constraints just don't allow for a full anthology of Parry's writings that would properly do justice to the depth and breadth of his reporting. Those interested in further reading can find these stories elsewhere, such as in the archive at *Consortium News* or in Parry's other books.

Despite my best efforts at conciseness, however, this is obviously a rather thick text. All I can say in my defense is that if I had simply collected every article Robert Parry ever wrote and compiled them without any editing, the result would have likely been a ten-volume set. Compared to that, this *Robert Parry Reader* is mercifully brief.

Since Parry wrote in different styles for a variety of outlets – ranging from the punchy, single-sentence paragraph style of the AP’s wire dispatches to the long-form think pieces that he would later produce for *Consortium News* – the following text includes those diverse styles as they originally appeared. Hopefully readers don’t find the variation too jarring, but I decided it was best to allow the articles to retain their original styles as much as possible rather than edit them too heavily.

The name *American Dispatches*, by the way, is a nod to a short-lived magazine that Parry produced around the turn of the millennium. *American Dispatches* was a rebranding of *I.F. Magazine*, which was published on a bimonthly basis in the late 1990s, but unfortunately was discontinued in 2000. Hopefully this book advances the same mission that Parry hoped to achieve with the magazine *American Dispatches* – to provide a full and accurate picture of America’s recent history to promote an informed electorate, counter false narratives, and build a more peaceful world.

Nat Parry

Copenhagen, Denmark, April 2022

## PART I

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### THE MOB AND THE BLOB

*“The United States, for generations, has sustained two parallel but opposed states of mind about military atrocities and human rights: one of U.S. benevolence, generally held by the public, and the other of ends-justify-the-means brutality sponsored by counterinsurgency specialists. Normally the specialists carry out their actions in remote locations with little notice in the national press. That allows the public to sustain its faith in a just America, while hard-nosed security and economic interests are still protected in secret.”*

*- Robert Parry*

In the spring of 1971, with war raging in Vietnam, the U.S. peace movement hoped to shut down the federal government in an audacious action of mass civil disobedience. Under the slogan “If the government won’t stop the war, then the people will stop the government,” tens of thousands of protesters set out to block major intersections and bridges to bring Washington, D.C., to a halt.

A young Robert Parry, then a student at Colby College, drove from Maine with some friends to participate in the demonstrations and was arrested along with thousands of other protesters who were swept up in the largest mass arrest in U.S. history. Although the *Washington Post* reported on May 4, 1971, that “the disruption plan generally failed,” Parry had a different take.

He wrote about the protests and their significance in the *Colby Echo*, where he was Editor-in-Chief, noting that although some specific objectives were not met, the protests served as “a monument to the determination” to stop the war.

### May Day (May 1971)

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Originally published in the *Colby Echo* student newspaper

There was the air of a mighty athletic contest about it. A super bowl played out in the streets of the nation’s capital. And the news media, always alert for any incident that will appeal to America’s sports-minded viewing public, played the athletics of the situation to the hilt. To the media, it was the kids coming off several big seasons of demonstrations against the seasoned veterans of the Washington police force. The demonstrators with their potent offense trying to throw the city into chaos; the cops, led by their elite Civil Disturbance Unit and backed up by thousands of Marines, Army, and National Guard, putting up a great defense to maintain social order.

It was to be the biggest story of the week, perhaps of 1971, and the participants’ temerarious victory predictions reminded some viewers of Joe Namath psyching

the Baltimore Colts out of the '69 Super Bowl. The demonstrators had stated, "If the government won't stop the war, then the people will stop the government." And President Nixon had countered with assurances that he would not be intimidated. Chief of the D.C. police, Jerry Wilson, who would guide his team on the field, went on saying that the demonstration would be only a minor "nuisance."

So the lines were drawn and the kids readied themselves for game time Monday morning. But the police started things early with a foray into the demonstrators' home base at dawn Sunday. At that time, 41,000 people were camping at West Potomac Park. The police dispersed them hoping that many would go home, but most remained in Washington and others, like the nine members of the Colby contingent, had been staying elsewhere.

But with the thrust into the park, the police had taken the play away from the offense-minded demonstrators. The kids charged foul, but their cries went unheeded. Rules for the week's struggle were fuzzy at best, and with their early move, the police gave warning that many of the fair-play guidelines were out the window for as long as threats of disruption continued. The lack of rules reflected an even greater confusion which would plague observers and commenters throughout the week – how could anyone tell who won.

Nine of us from Colby – Steve Orlov, Dick Kaynor, Bob Knight, Lyndon Summers, Ken Eisen, Joel Simon, Andy Koss, Peter Vose and me – had come to Washington to commit civil disobedience. Most of us expected to be arrested; some were prepared to be clubbed. We had come because we opposed the war and wanted to demonstrate through the power of non-violent civil disobedience that our commitment to the war's end went beyond placards and petitions to congressmen.

We had come expecting to engage in Gandhian civil disobedience (passive non-violence); we learned, however, on meeting up with our regional group Sunday afternoon that the tactic now being favored was "mobile non-violence." Apparently because of fears that the numbers of demonstrators had been significantly reduced by the park clearing and because of a greater concern for the ends (who would win the "Stop the City" Bowl Game) rather than the means, regional leaders favoring "mobile" tactics had prevailed over others wanting more passive disobedience. Gandhi was to be mixed with Abbie Hoffman and the result would be a kind of touch football in the streets.



The kids were up early Monday but, as the slogan goes, the police department never sleeps. The cops and the troops were out in force and they had already had the four bridges from Virginia to D.C. neatly in their pockets. Ken and I drove our cars into the city before six. Our job was to use the cars for blocking and slowing down traffic. Steve and Peter stayed with us in case of trouble and the others disembarked on the D.C. side of the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. From the beginning it was clear that things were not going our way.

Steve and I drove around participating in and occasionally starting traffic jams. Scenes from Godard films met us at nearly every corner. Police charging and swinging into clumps of demonstrators, police cars chasing kids across parks, the grey smoke of tear gas rising everywhere, troops in their full, khaki battle gear lining the city's bridges. The government had responded to the threats of a shut-down with force and throughout the morning they had the kids running from their attacks and reeling from the tear gas. Traffic was snarled (some places for hours) but as the government pointed out, the workers got through.

When the Colby contingent returned to Ken's house in Arlington, we evaluated what had happened and discovered that Jody and Lyndon had been arrested. Everyone at the Eisen's was disappointed with how the demonstration had developed. We had come to be arrested and instead spent the whole day avoiding arrest. All of us agreed, no more of the same.

That evening, however, Bob, Steve and I talked with Hosea Williams, a leader of the SCLC, and he told us that his organization would lead a march to the Justice Department Tuesday afternoon which would end in a mass sit-down and, almost certainly, arrests. Six of us decided to go; four of us (Ken, Steve, Dick and I) got arrested. (Bob and Peter had taken a lunch break during the speeches and when they returned from their "Justice Department" sandwiches, they found four rows of police blocking off access to the several thousand demonstrators.)

The demonstrations at Justice were what we had been hoping for. When the police arrived, the two or three thousand protesters sat down and pulled out handkerchiefs to use in case of tear gas. The police moved toward us in rows, a tear gas canister was set off accidentally. The people didn't panic, they didn't run, they stayed together. The police began the arrests. At first, there were some incidents of violence, police clubbing and macing demonstrators, but when the cops realized that there would be no resistance, the arrests came orderly and peaceful.

The arrested demonstrators were taken in buses to areas of detention. The four of us from Colby and about 800 other people were placed in the U.S. District Court cell block. We were held in a cell (50'x20') with 100 other protesters and later in a cell (15'x15') containing 66 people.

The over-crowding, the oppressive heat, and the bologna sandwiches served with rancid mayonnaise made life in the cells difficult. But it also served as a crucible test for the principles of communal living. When food was provided for us, we asked to be allowed to pass the food back to the back of the cell in an orderly way. The people sitting against the back wall ate first. We overcame the difficulties of too many people by communicating with each other and arranging shifts for sleeping (while some slept, others stood or sat uncomfortably). In short, we survived by learning to live with and care for each other.

At 10:30 Wednesday morning, I was taken in a bus to court. Ken, Steve, and Dick had to remain in an even smaller cell (8'x12') with 33 people until five that evening. Dick, Ken, and I were fortunate to be arraigned before Judge Halleck, the judge most sympathetic to our cause in the city. Halleck was accepting pleas of *nolo contendere* (no contest) and giving sentences of two days or \$20 (the two days considered already served). Steve and Jody were released on bond and the charges against Lyndon were dropped.

People have asked us since we've returned to Colby what was accomplished in Washington. The media, knowing that nobody likes a tie game, had ruled that the police had won. And indeed there are strong arguments to support that conclusion: the city was kept open, the government did function, and the war still continues. The police statistics were also impressive: virtually all government employees made it to work and almost 14,000 demonstrators had been arrested. And the people who watched on their TV sets at home saw the police always on the offensive and the demonstrators on the run.

But one thing that the media seemed to forget was that the shutting down of Washington was only one of May Day's aims. The demonstrators were designed to project an image of Washington, D.C., to the world as the scene of social chaos brought on by the country's involvement in Indochina and the problems of racism and poverty at home. By forcing the government to line its streets with thousands of soldiers the demonstrations created an image not easily washed away.

But more importantly, May Day was the first large-scale application of non-violent civil disobedience by white Americans. The arrest tallies that are pointed to with such pride by Chief Wilson stand perhaps as a greater monument to the determination and will to sacrifice of the protesters. As we were being taken away from the Justice Department in a bus, the cry of the people with us was not of defeat but of victory. As we passed people on the streets kids leaned out the windows shouting “We won, we won.”

But the greater measure of victory of defeat had to lie in the effect the actions had on those not participating. The initial reaction from television commentators and politicians indicated that the demonstrations were not well received, but other adults who were more immediately involved with the May Day occurrences felt differently. For instance, a reporter for the *Washington Star* who was arrested at Justice and spent time in our cell block wrote on Thursday, “I ... was radicalized, but not just in the political sense.”

The spirit, he wrote – comparable to that of the “Britons in their bomb shelter during World War II or civil rights workers in the south” – was the feeling of men and women with a vision of a new society that is coming. Everyone I’ve talked to who experienced that feeling left Washington knowing that they had found 14,000 brothers and sisters by being in jail. The whole question of victory or defeat became submerged under all of us win or all of us lose.

In his first job at The Associated Press, Parry was assigned to the Baltimore bureau, where he covered a variety of topics. In this article from 1974, which ran on front pages of newspapers across the country, Parry reports on an innovative – but apparently ineffective – gun buyback program designed to curb violent crime in the city. Despite spending more than \$660,000, the program showed little success in reducing gun violence in Baltimore, Parry writes, but was nevertheless being replicated by other cities, including Washington, D.C.

## [Gun Bounty Program Has Problems, Hopes \(Dec. 8, 1974\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

BALTIMORE – Housewives sneaked into the police station during the day bringing guns their husbands had lying around the house.

“They knew their hubbies would be mad when they got home, but at least there wouldn’t be a gun around to use on somebody,” said Police Sgt. Laurence E. Leeson Jr.

“One guy won a gun on a \$20 bet in a craps game and turned it in for \$50. But that’s the kind of gun we were after, one that was floating around.”

Adds Dennis Hill, the police information officer:

“All kinds of people took part. Street people turned in guns with very little comment.

“A number of homeowners brought in guns because they were afraid someone would use one in anger or that they would be stolen. They’d been thinking about getting rid of the guns anyways, and the \$50 was enough to make them do it.”

Still the Baltimore Police Department’s experimental payment of a \$50 bounty for every gun turned in was cut short in November. The program had lasted two and a half months, and the police had collected 13,500 firearms – mostly handguns – at a cost of over \$660,000 in city funds. Donald D. Pomerleau, city police commissioner, said that Operation PASS – People Against Senseless Shootings – ended because the federal government refused to provide funds to keep PASS going.

### **Crime Goes Up**

PASS was supposed to have reduced the number of gun-related crimes. Instead they went up during the life of the program. Pomerleau conceded this, but said, “Over the long run, lives will be saved.”

Pomerleau, 59, a retired Marine colonel, has been known as an innovative police commissioner during his eight years as head of the Baltimore force.

He is credited with opening the first storefront police-community relations office in the nation during the 1960s. He established a police academy with fully accredited college courses, and he required on-duty policemen to return for 40 hours of retraining each year.

The Baltimore gun program was the first of its kind in the nation involving money, according to Hill. The Philadelphia Police Department conducted a voluntary gun-turn-in program a few years ago, but no money was involved and few guns were received.

Since the termination of PASS, however, the City Council of Washington, D.C., has voted to authorize a gun bounty program. The council approved a bill authorizing payment of \$100 for each tip leading to the confiscation of an

illegal firearm. The mayor was empowered to set a bounty for handguns and sawed-off shotguns turned in by residents.

For the 235 days in 1974 prior to Operation PASS, police figures show that 112 homicides involving firearms. In two months of the program, 47 persons were killed by handguns. That is an average of .477 homicides a day involving firearms before the program and .758 a day during the program, a 50 percent increase.

The same failure seems evident in police data on assaults involving firearms. Before the program there were 2,808 gun assaults in 1974, or 11.1 per day.

During the 39 days from Aug. 22, when the program began, through the end of September – the latest available assault figures – there were 977 assaults with firearms, or 25.1 a day.

Pomerleau, not an advocate of strict gun control, thought of the bounty idea as an alternative. He reportedly decided to begin the bounty while attending a funeral for one of three city patrolmen shot while on duty.

But when Pomerleau tried to get federal funds to continue PASS, the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration said no and argued that PASS would encourage manufacture of handguns.

“As long as it is possible to buy a gun, any gun, for less than \$50 and turn it into the police department for \$50, the profit motive is present and the law of economics indicates that if people can buy guns at a lower price and sell them at a higher price they will do so, the LEAA statement said.

1975 was dubbed the “Year of Intelligence” due to high-profile congressional investigations that were taking place into illegal CIA and FBI activities. The Senate’s and House’s Church and Pike committees uncovered shocking details about the drugging and torture of unwitting U.S. citizens as part of the CIA’s MK/ULTRA program, the FBI’s COINTELPRO (short for “counter-intelligence program”) which involved the infiltration of American anti-war and civil rights organizations, Operation Mockingbird’s media influence program, and a secret CIA assassination program called Family Jewels.

As these revelations rocked the nation, routine violations of civil liberties were also being uncovered that didn’t receive as much attention but raised serious concerns about intelligence agencies’ respect for constitutional rights. One such abuse was the opening of mail without warrants, as Parry describes in this July 1975 AP article.

## [Rhode Islander Says CIA Opened His Mail \(July 23, 1975\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE – The CIA has illegally opened and copied the mail of possibly thousands of American citizens, the American Civil Liberties Union charged July 22 in a suit filed in U.S. District Court here.

The class action suit alleges that 30 present and former officials of the CIA, the FBI and the U.S. Post Office opened the first-class mail of plaintiff Rodney Driver and an undetermined number of other Americans.

Michael B. Dollinger, executive director of the state ACLU chapter, said that the suit puts the issue of the CIA's alleged illegal opening of mail before the courts on a national basis.

Driver, a mathematics professor at the University of Rhode Island, said three letters he sent to mathematicians in the Soviet Union were opened and copied.

At a news conference, Driver said he concluded that the CIA opened his mail after he obtained copies of the letters from the CIA this year through a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

"If someone had told me my mail was opened in the United States (without a warrant), I wouldn't have believed them," Driver said. "The difference between the Soviet Union and the United States is the Bill of Rights."

"If we don't object when our mail is opened, we shouldn't object when our phones are tapped, or our homes are searched without a warrant, or when our friends are arrested without a warrant," he added.

The suit asks the court to order compensatory damages of \$20,000 for each letter opened and read by the CIA and punitive damages of \$100,000 for each person whose mail was illegally opened.

Spokesmen for the ACLU said they were unaware of the exact number of persons covered by the class action suit but estimated the number of Americans whose mail was opened to be in the tens of thousands.

The suit also alleges that the officials named in the suit conspired to cover up the violations, which the ACLU contends include the abridgement of constitutional protections from illegal searches.

The ACLU further asks the court to order illegal opening of mail stopped and records obtained through such illegal openings to be destroyed.

Driver said his three letters contained mathematical and personal information and were sent to Russian mathematicians in 1965 and 1969. Driver said he has corresponded with Soviet mathematicians 100 times.

Among the officials named in the suit are: present and former CIA officials Richard Helms, James R. Schlesinger and William E. Colby; present and former FBI officials Clarence M. Kelley and Louis Patrick Gray III; and former U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell.

Present and former U.S. Post Office officials named include Lawrence F. O'Brien and Winton M. Blount.

ACLU officials charged that these officials, except Colby and Kelley, knew of and approved the illegal opening of mail.

The ACLU said Colby, the present CIA director, and Kelley, the present FBI director, were named in the suit because they are the officials presently responsible for holding the information obtained from the alleged illegal actions.

Later in 1975, Parry was reporting on school busing programs. With the Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of these programs in 1971, the question then became whether they were an effective tool to remedy the segregation of U.S. schools. Critics complained that sending kids across town to attend school undermined social cohesion in tight-knit communities and that forcing children to bear the brunt of society's failures was unfair to young people.

Although in later years a politician's support for busing was taken as a litmus test of whether they were sufficiently sensitive to racial issues – as Joe Biden would find out during the Democratic primaries in Campaign 2020 – during the 70s and 80s there were nuanced debates on the topic, with even the chair of the Democratic Party platform committee taking issue with the practice, as Parry discusses here.

## [Top Democrat Discusses Busing \(Oct. 24, 1975\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE – The new chairman of the Democratic party platform committee believes busing to achieve school integration has hurt the cause of civil rights and should be scrapped.

Rhode Island Gov. Philip W. Noel, the chairman, said he favors a more general commitment to racial justice and a more gradual approach to integration.

"I think the polarization, the hate and resentment that comes about when you force that kind of integration, using children in schools, makes the program more detrimental than helpful," Noel said in an interview with The Associated Press.

While strongly endorsing the principle of an integrated society, the 44-year-old governor said forced racial integration was putting the cause of civil rights

backward.

“Let’s not try to make false progress,” he said about efforts to bus children to achieve racial balance. “Whoever designed forced busing said, ‘Hey, we got it done. We got all the black kids and all the white kids in the same school.’

“Fine, the first chance their mothers and fathers get they’re going to stab each other,” Noel commented.

Noel, who also chairs the Democratic Governors’ Conference, said the focus of efforts to make America an integrated society should be shifted more toward equal economic opportunity.

“I don’t think we should talk about integrating schools,” Noel said. “I think we should talk about integrating society. Equal economic opportunities is much more palatable to me than forced busing because you’re dealing with consenting adults.”

Noel said parents react strongly against forced busing because they sense their children are being used to achieve racial integration.

“What makes it emotional and develops all the hostility and the hatred is that you’re trying to force integration among young children,” he said.

“It’s just a natural instinct in all animal life – there’s a tremendous protectionism in the parent for the young,” he said.

He believes the tense racial situation in South Boston should be a warning to social planners about what forced integration of schools can create.

“It will be 20 years before you erase the scars in South Boston,” Noel said. “That whole generation of people has to die out before that hatred subsides. That hatred wasn’t there in those dimensions until court-ordered forced busing.”

Noel said another negative against busing is that he does not believe it improves the educational level of black students.

“In the context of what are you doing for that black student educationally, the answer is nothing,” he said. “Now are we then trying to use that kid just to achieve racial integration on a grander scale, well shame on us if we’re using kids for that.”

He added that more Democrats would come out against busing if they weren’t afraid they would be labeled too conservative.

New England mob boss Raymond Patriarca understood the value of having friends in high places. In the 1930s, despite being designated by the Providence Board of Public Safety as “public



enemy No. 1,” he served just four months of a five-year sentence for robbery, paroled in 1938 at the behest of Executive Councilor Daniel H. Coakley, a close associate of Governor Charles Hurley. Coakley had drawn up a parole petition based on the appeals of a phony “Father Fagin,” a fabrication that ultimately got Coakley impeached and dismissed from the Governor’s office.

Over the next few decades, Patriarca continued to cultivate his connections. According to FBI wiretaps, he was a big donor to political campaigns, having given \$4,000 for example to the campaign of former Rhode Island Governor John A. Notte. Many believed that his political connections may have helped him get out of prison early once again, after serving four years of a ten-year sentence in the 1970s.

Parry covered Patriarca’s ups and downs in the mid-70s, and in this article explores whether he was still involved in organized crime while out on parole.

## [Officials Say Reputed Crime Boss in New England Still Runs Things \(Jan. 7, 1976\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE – How does reputed New England crime boss Raymond Patriarca spend his time while on parole?

Walking the straight and narrow, says the parolee. Running the mob, says the government.

Patriarca, released from prison almost a year ago, says, “At my age all I want is to be left alone to live out my life.”

But federal crime officials contend the 67-year-old Patriarca still wields control of racketeering in such cities as Boston; Worcester, Mass.; Portland, Maine; and Providence.

“I have no reason to change my opinion that he is running the show,” U.S. Attorney Lincoln C. Almond said. “He has the same area of influence he had during his incarceration.”

But federal crime officials, citing legal restrictions on what they can say, declined to be specific about Patriarca’s alleged underworld activities.

Patriarca, reached by telephone Monday at his CoinOMatic vending machine company, said he has been under tight supervision since his release last Jan. 9 and referred questions about his behavior to his parole officer.

“I’m the only person in the state of Rhode Island who has to report where they are every 24 hours,” he said. “I’ve been working hard and staying out of trouble.”

Parole Officer Eleanor F. Boucher agreed that Patriarca has been a “model parolee” and called him the most cooperative and least troublesome of the 100 parolees she keeps tabs on.

“Whatever I’ve asked of him, he’s done it,” Miss Boucher said. “He’s completely cooperative. We’re in contact with him almost every day by phone and in person at least once a week. “If the others had to report as often as he’s had to, they’d be running to the [American] Civil Liberties Union.”

“There have been absolutely no complaints from any law enforcement agencies,” she said. “And if there were, you’d better believe they’d call down here PDQ.”

Patriarca, who has a criminal record stretching back 49 years, was granted parole in December 1974 after serving four years of a 10-year sentence for conspiracy to murder Rudolph Marfeo in 1968.

Rhode Island has often been called one of the most corrupt states in the country, and following Robert Parry’s reporting in the 1970s, it’s not difficult to understand why.

In this article, Parry reports that a grand jury probe into allegations of a bribe Patriarca paid to the Parole Board to influence its decision in December 1974 to release him early did not result in any indictments, but notes that its findings were less than convincing to some. The grand jury included some contradictory recommendations, Parry explains, fueling suspicions that there was some validity to the claims of corruption on the Parole Board.

## [Patriarca Claims Indifference to Finding \(Nov. 18, 1976\)](#)

Originally published by The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE – “I had nothing to worry about because I wasn’t involved,” says reputed New England crime boss Raymond L.S. Patriarca about a bribery allegation stemming from a 1974 parole bid.

Patriarca said Wednesday he was therefore not surprised when a Providence County grand jury found insufficient evidence to warrant any indictments in connection with his parole request in June 1974.

The grand jury had been investigating an allegation that a legislator attempted to bribe the state Parole Board chairman into supporting that unsuccessful parole application.

In a telephone interview with The Associated Press, Patriarca complained about being called before the grand jury to testify about the allegation.

“It’s like being caught in a football,” he said. “What did I know about it? I was in prison.”

However, Patriarca declined further comment, adding: “Right now, I’m in the hands of the Philistines. I say one word and they say two.”

The Parole Board rejected Patriarca’s request for release in June 1974 but approved a subsequent parole bid by the alleged leader of organized crime in New England in December 1974.

Patriarca was released from the state Adult Correctional Institutions in January 1975 after serving four years of a 10-year sentence for conspiracy to murder Rudolph Marfeo in 1968.

Patriarca and state Rep. Samuel C. Kagan, D-Providence, who reportedly was the legislator under investigation, were among 18 persons questioned by the grand jury.

In a separate interview, Kagan told the AP that he was pleased with the grand jury’s findings. “I’m grateful, of course,” he said. “I’m very happy about it and have confidence in the jury system.”

Last summer, Kagan said he had been asked by the FBI about his sponsorship of a bill that would have permitted Joseph Galkin, Parole Board chairman, to buy back credits in the state retirement fund.

Kagan, however, denied any wrongdoing and said the bill, which eventually died in committee, was not designed to influence Galkin’s vote. The lawmaker also said he had never met Patriarca.

Kagan was defeated in his bid for reelection last September when he lost the Democratic primary.

“The people who knew me voted for me,” Kagan said. “Those that didn’t [know me], thought I was mixed up in the rackets and they didn’t vote for me. And I don’t blame them if that is what they thought.”

Among its findings, the grand jury reported: “That there was no evidence whatsoever of any illegal activity on the part of any member of the Parole Board.”

However, the grand jury also issued a series of recommendations “to prevent a recurrence of a similar situation and in order to tighten the procedures of the Parole Board.”

The grand jury urged the state General Assembly to enact legislation requiring Parole Board members who receive a request on behalf of an inmate seeking parole to report that approach in writing.

The grand jury also recommended making a failure by a Parole Board member to report a suspected bribe attempt to the attorney general within seven days a criminal offense.

Joseph Anthony Bevilacqua Sr. was Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court from 1976 through 1986, having previously served in the Rhode Island House of Representatives where he became Majority Leader in 1966 and Speaker in 1969. Long suspected of being associated with organized crime, he became the subject of a criminal probe in 1977 for harboring a fugitive in the 1960s. In this article, Parry reports on the pressure he was coming under to step down from his Supreme Court position while under investigation.

Although Bevilacqua survived this criminal probe, he would ultimately be impeached in 1986 for his association with the mob.

## [RI's Governor Suggests Bevilacqua Quit Supreme Court Seat Pending New Inquest \(Feb. 2, 1977\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE – Rhode Island Gov. J. Joseph Garrahy urged state Supreme Court Chief Justice Joseph A. Bevilacqua on Tuesday to temporarily step aside pending completion of an investigation.

Garrahy made the request following the start of a state police probe into allegations that Bevilacqua, while a criminal lawyer in 1963, received stolen funds and helped harbor a fugitive.

“It is essential that there be complete confidence in our judicial system,” the governor said in a prepared statement.

“The renewed allegations against the chief justice have an effect on that system, a fact concurred in by the chief justice himself in his statement answering the allegations,” Garrahy added.

Bevilacqua denied the allegations last week but joined in calling for a full-scale investigation. Garrahy added that “the chief justice should consider temporarily refraining from the exercise of his duties pending completion of the investigation.”

“I would emphasize this is a decision he alone can make,” the governor continued.

In a related development, records were found Monday which should help state police determine if allegations against the chief justice were properly brought before a grand jury 13 years ago.

Atty. Gen. Julius C. Michaelson said Tuesday the stenographic notes of the secret grand jury testimony in the Outlet Co. larceny case were located at the state records center.

Michaelson said the records would be transcribed and turned over by the end of the week to state police.

In a 1963 statement to police, Robert D. Northrop admitted stealing \$25,000 from the Outlet Co. and alleged that Bevilacqua, then a criminal attorney, received stolen funds and helped harbor a fugitive.

Northrup later repudiated parts of his confession as it related to Bevilacqua.

State police have said a preliminary probe into Northrop's initial allegations against Bevilacqua last month proved inconclusive because police did not have access to the grand jury minutes.

The attorney general has asked the state police to determine the truth of allegations against Bevilacqua and whether the attorney general's department or the Providence police obstructed justice at the time.

Smithfield Police Chief Vincent J. O'Connell, a former Providence police detective, has said the presented Northrop's full statement to the grand jury in 1963 and left out no names.

However, former members of the attorney general's office who handled the case have said they do not remember seeing the confession or presentation of evidence about Bevilacqua to the grand jury.

Meanwhile, the General Assembly's top-ranking Republicans called on the state Commission on Judicial Tenure and Discipline to investigate allegations made against Bevilacqua.

Forty years before Russiagate, an influence-peddling scandal dubbed "Koreagate" would hit Washington during the Carter era. With U.S.-South Korea relations having soured in the early 1970s, a number of South Korean political figures, working through the Korea Central Intelligence Agency and a businessman named Tongsun Park, allegedly funneled bribes and favors to ten Democratic members of Congress. The objective was to gain favor and influence in American politics in order to reverse President Richard Nixon's earlier decision to withdraw troops from South Korea.

In this article, Parry reported on legal developments in the case in late 1977, which would pave the way for Park to eventually come to the United States to testify publicly in a House hearing in April 1978.

## Indicted Korean Said Ready to Go on Stand (Dec. 15, 1977)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Indicted South Korean businessman Tongsun Park is willing to testify in court about alleged influence buying on Capitol Hill but is balking at a House committee appearance, his lawyer says.

William G. Hundley, Park's lawyer, confirmed Wednesday that his client has agreed to the Justice Department's offer to drop bribery and other charges against him in exchange for his court testimony.

Hundley said "only a few loose ends" must be tied down before a final agreement can be signed assuring Park's return to the United States, probably shortly after the first of the year.

"He is willing to come back and testify in certain trials if there are trials," his lawyer said, adding that the government might require Park to undergo a lie-detector test.

However, Park has not agreed to appear before the House ethics committee, which also is investigating the alleged South Korean scheme to buy influence with leading congressmen, Hundley said.

"I wouldn't exclude that possibility," Hundley said in a telephone interview. "But nothing has been worked out on it."

The lawyer added that if Park agreed to testify before the congressional committee, he might insist on a closed-door session.

Later Wednesday, Leon Jaworski, special counsel to the House ethics committee, said he would subpoena Park if the South Korean returned to the United States and refused to testify before the committee.

"We are not going to make any agreement that would permit him to testify in any criminal trial and also not be required to testify before the investigating body," the former Watergate prosecutor said.

"He will be subject to subpoena and we will subpoena him when he comes to this country," Jaworski said. "It would be improper for one department of government to hear his testimony and not another department."

Hundley said Park agreed to return to the United States because he feared his continued refusal might cause a rift in U.S. South Korean relations.

“He doesn’t want anything to happen to the alliance between the United States and Korea,” Hundley said. “He has correctly surmised that he was the cause of an international incident between the two countries.”

The lawyer, however, said Park, a one-time Washington social figure, was not pressured by the South Korean government into accepting the Justice Department’s offer.

Starting with the passage of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) in 1971, Congress adopted a succession of amendments throughout the decade to regulate the activities of candidates, parties, private organizations, and individuals in raising and spending campaign money.

The new laws limited the amount candidates could contribute to their own campaigns, capped the amount that a federal campaign could spend on paid advertising, expanded disclosure requirements, and set a \$1,000 limit on the amount an individual could contribute to any federal campaign per election. But while curbing individual contributions, FECA also authorized corporations and unions to administer a “separate, segregated fund” to be used for political purposes. This gave rise to political action committees, or PACs, which collect and bundle large numbers of small contributions, and donate them to political campaigns.

Heading into the 1980 campaign season, Parry wrote the following article explaining the growing influence of political action committees in government.

## [Growth of Political Action Arm Giving Worries Common Cause, Some Leaders \(Jan. 11, 1979\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Thirteen congressmen who helped kill a federal no-fault car insurance bill in committee received \$28,600 in contributions from the political fundraising arm of the trial lawyers’ association, a leading opponent of the bill.

Two dairy industry groups donated \$110,750 to members of the House Agriculture Committee, which helps decide milk price supports and other issues worth millions of dollars to dairy farmers.

The trucking industry’s political action committee contributed to the campaigns of two-thirds of the members of the House subcommittee that will handle de-regulation of the \$31 billion trucking industry.

The chief political fundraising committee of the marine engineers’ union donated \$1,000 or more each to 24 of 36 members of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee who sought reelection. The committee handles shipping

legislation, and one member, citing a conflict of interest, sent his contribution back.

These contributions and thousands of others mark a growing trend in congressional campaigns – heavy financial support for candidates by political action committees, the campaign fundraising arms of businesses, unions and professional associations.

These political action committees – known as PACs – now number more than 1,700 and are allowed by law to give candidates up to \$5,000 per election. Last year, they donated an estimated \$40 million, raised through voluntary donations. Two years ago, the amount was \$24 million.

Common Cause, which calls itself a citizens' lobby and researches and publicizes government abuses, refers to the PAC contributions as “the buying of Congress.”

“The greater the growth of PACs in the political process, the less reason citizens have to believe their interests are going to be part of the decision-making process,” says Fred Wertheimer, Common Cause vice president.

Common Cause gets most of its money from \$15 per year memberships and does not contribute to political campaigns. It advocates a system of partial public financing to reduce the influence of special interest money on elections.

Most PAC officials say the current system of making contributions encourages “broad-based” participation in the political process.

Some PAC officials also contend their donations are needed to protect their interests in Congress against competing interests that also contribute money to candidates.

In the House, much of the campaign money was directed to key committee and subcommittee chairmen, and PACs generally focused attention on committees dealing with their special areas of interest.

Rep. Thomas S. Foley, chairman of the Agriculture Committee, won a tough reelection fight in November, helped by \$67,300 from political action committees representing agricultural interests.

Foley says he favors public financing for congressional campaigns but has “no apologies to make” for accepting the money. He says he “never accepted any strings attached” to contributions and is “not going to give any individual or group special consideration.”



Four ranking members of the House Banking Committee received a total of nearly \$100,000 from financial, insurance and housing interests that are affected by legislation handled by the committee.

Rep. Fernand J. St. Germain, D-RI, chairman of the House Banking subcommittee on financial institutions' supervision, regulation and insurance, was given \$37,475 by political action groups representing interests affected by Banking Committee actions.

Rep. Henry S. Reuss, D-Wis., committee chairman, reported \$23,600 from such groups; Rep. Thomas Ashley, D-Ohio, chairman of the housing and community development subcommittee, received \$21,300; and Rep. William S. Moorhead, D-Pa., chairman of the economic stabilization subcommittee, got \$17,200.

Spokesmen for St. Germain, Ashley and Moorhead said the congressmen feel PAC donations do not represent conflicts of interest although Ashley and Moorhead favor public financing for campaigns. Reuss was unavailable and a spokesman declined to comment for him.

However, some congressmen do find fault with PAC donations.

Rep. David Emery, R-Maine, returned a \$1,000 contribution to the political action fund of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association (MEBA) to avoid what he considered a conflict of interest.

"Serving on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee and taking money from these organizations is the worst kind of conflict of interest," Emery said. "MEBA is interested in influencing my vote on the committee."

The American Trial Lawyers Association's PAC gave a total of \$28,600 to 13 of 22 congressmen who voted last August to kill no-fault legislation in the House Commerce Committee.

The no-fault bill, defeated in committee 22-19, was vigorously opposed by the trial lawyers, who would have been hurt financially by eliminating litigation over who is at fault in car accidents.

Leonard Ring of the trial lawyers' PAC said opposition to no-fault insurance would be "a factor, but not the only factor" in deciding to donate to a congressman's campaign.

As Election 1980 got underway, polls showed that a majority of Americans had come to believe that the government held too much power. While Republican nominee Ronald Reagan chastised President Carter for establishing two new Cabinet agencies – the Department of Energy and the Department of Education – Carter cited his record in reorganizing the federal government to

eliminate waste. In this article, Parry examines whether Carter had lived up to promises he made four years earlier to clean up Washington.

## Has Carter Kept the Promise? (Sept. 12, 1980)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

Throughout his 1976 presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter pledged to create a government “as good and honest and decent and truthful and fair and competent and idealistic – compassionate and as filled with love as are the American people.”

Portraying himself as a warrior in the battle against waste, corruption and red tape, Carter also vowed to “take a new broom to Washington and do everything possible to sweep the house of government clean.”

Four years later, White House officials say the president has made headway toward those goals, largely through changes in the civil service system, the openness of his administration and his governmentwide reorganization.

Republican Ronald Reagan is ridiculing Carter’s creation of two new Cabinet agencies – agencies which fulfill a Carter campaign promise. Other Republicans contend Carter failed to fulfill his promise to remove politics from the Justice Department.

The latter issue waned after Griffin Bell, a close friend of Carter’s from Georgia, quit as attorney general. Bell’s successor, Benjamin Civiletti, has become embroiled in a new controversy, however, stemming from his discussion with the president of a Justice Department inquiry on his brother Billy.

Another close friend of Carter’s from Georgia also quit his post. Bert Lance, who was forced to resign as director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget after only eight months in office when he became embroiled in controversy because of his personal finances and practices as head of two Georgia banks.

When Carter announced Lance’s resignation, he fought back tears as he said, “I know him personally, as well as if he was my own brother. I know him without any doubt in my heart or mind to be a good and honorable man.”

In April of this year, Lance was found innocent of nine charges of misusing funds from the two banks, and in June the case came close when a federal judge dismissed remaining bank fraud charges against him.

Carter's government reorganization has fallen short of the goal Carter pledged during the campaign, although there are more than 20 percent fewer federal government units than there were when the president took office.

Administration officials now concede the goal of cutting the number of federal agencies from 1,900 to 200 was unrealistic. The administration identified 1,846 units of the federal government in 1976 and by April 1979 had reduced that number to 1,434, mostly by eliminating advisory committees that had outlived their usefulness.

The president has made a modest dent in the federal payroll, cutting the number of full-time, permanent employees in the executive branch by about 1½ percent.

White House officials also point to a dozen internal reorganizations, ranging from international trade to the president's executive office, that they say have increased efficiency and saved money. They say the administration has reduced the paperwork burden on the public by 15 percent.

Carter reorganization efforts have not been without controversy, however. Reagan charges that the creation of the Departments of Energy and Education fattened the federal bureaucracy.

Harrison Wellford, a Carter reorganization expert, said that without consolidating three former energy agencies into a new department, "it would have been folly to try to develop a national energy policy."

In a 1977 speech, President Carter reaffirmed America's commitment to human rights "as a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy" and backed these words up with actions – regularly pressuring unsavory regimes, including U.S. allies, to respect human rights. In early 1978, for example, when popular Nicaraguan opposition leader Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was assassinated in Managua, the Carter administration condemned the Nicaraguan regime and cut off U.S. military aid.

Many dictators breathed a sigh of relief, therefore, when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, taking it as a sign that the days of U.S. nagging over human rights would come to an end. Early signs indicated that they were right, with Reagan's transition team undermining Carter diplomats still in the field by publicly criticizing their handling of their jobs. Some even speculated that the mixed messages from Washington during the transition period may have led to the deaths of four American churchwomen murdered in El Salvador in December 1980, as Parry explains here.

## [El Salvador Feud: Carter People Accuse Reagan Advisers of Contributing to Unrest \(Dec. 13, 1980\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – The State Department said Friday “unofficial statements and news leaks” by President-elect Reagan’s foreign policy advisers have added to unrest in Latin America, and one department official charged that such unauthorized comments contributed to the murder of four American women.

And presidential press secretary Jody Powell said leaded criticism from the Reagan camp of the performances of two U.S. diplomats in the region created “headlines all over the place” that made their already delicate and dangerous jobs even more difficult.

The sharp criticism represents the first major rift between the Carter administration and the president elect’s incoming government and could shatter the surface harmony that has so far prevailed during the transition period.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Patricia M. Derian, assistant secretary of state for human rights, charged that Reagan transition aides have made imprudent statements” suggesting a reduced U.S. interest in human rights and thus encouraging increased brutality by right-wing forces.

“In El Salvador, I believe our ambassador’s life was endangered,” she said. “Others were emboldened to take action that led to the deaths of some individuals.”

Ms. Derian said she was referring to the murders of four American women, three of them Roman Catholic nuns, in El Salvador last week and the assassination of six Salvadoran leftist leaders last month.

The killings were allegedly carried out by right-wing death squads in the tiny Central American country that has been increasingly torn by fighting between right- and left-wing factions.

Spokesmen for Reagan denounced Ms. Derian’s remarks as “totally irresponsible,” “farfetched,” and “uncharacteristic of a State Department official.”

On Friday, State Department spokesman Jack Cannon characterized Ms. Derian’s comments as “a personal statement [that] does not represent the view of the department.”

Cannon said the department has “no evidence that official activities by the transition team have added to the jeopardy of our people” in El Salvador.

But, reflecting at least partial agreement with Ms. Derian, he added: “It is a time ... when unofficial statements and news leaks can have an impact on delicate

and tense situations [in Central America] and on those present in those delicate and tense situations.”

“Problems have been created in the hemisphere by leaks from the transition team and statements by people who do not represent them but claim to do so,” Cannon added.

In the interview Thursday, Ms. Derian singled out a report by Pedro San Juan, a Reagan adviser on Latin American affairs, that indicated that the U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, Robert E. White, would be fired because of his support for economic reforms in that country.

Ms. Derian said the San Juan report, which was obtained by the *New York Times*, was interpreted in El Salvador as the position of the incoming U.S. government when “all it was aggrandizement of a low-level person who has no [government] position but is simply a worker on the transition team.”

The leaking of the report also drew angry – and unusual – public reactions from White and the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Lawrence Pezzulo, another envoy reportedly targeted for removal after Reagan takes office.

White and Pezzulo said the report undermined their authority and contributed to worsening political situations in those two countries.

Reacting to those attacks, Edwin Meese III, counsellor to the president-elect, said Friday that no authorized member of the Reagan transition team has made any statement that might “undercut the position of any ambassador anywhere.”

Meese added, “I question in a sense the professionalism of those ambassadors if they’re making such reckless accusations.”

Meanwhile, there were these other developments Friday in the El Salvador situation:

William D. Rogers, who headed the U.S. commission sent to El Salvador to investigate the four murders, said there was circumstantial evidence that Salvadoran security forces may have been involved in the slayings but no evidence that the Salvadoran government was.

The State Department said it will continue to withhold assistance to El Salvador pending progress toward a significant governmental restructuring that would ensure greater protection of human rights.

The United States suspended \$25 million in economic and military aid to the country last week after the four American women were murdered.

President Reagan took an early hard line towards alleged communist influence in the Western hemisphere, which translated in practice into support for dictatorships and death squads in the region. But with the Salvadoran military regime under fire for human rights abuses, and many Americans outraged over the rape and murder of four American Catholic Church workers, the new Reagan administration had to come up with justifications and excuses for its odious ally.

Reagan's foreign policy advisor and later UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick declared her "unequivocal" belief that the Salvadoran army was not responsible for the deaths of the churchwomen, adding that "the nuns were not just nuns – they were political activists." Secretary of State Alexander Haig also floated the idea that the women attempted to run a roadblock, which may have drawn fire from the soldiers, an accusation that was criticized by the families of the victims, as Parry explains here.

## [Kin of Women Victims Blast Administration \(March 20, 1981\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Relatives of American churchwomen slain last December in El Salvador are accusing the Reagan administration of engaging in a subtle smear campaign against the dead women by suggesting they may have been killed while trying to run a roadblock.

Bill Ford, brother of Ita Ford, one of the women, levelled the charge Thursday after Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. Said the "most prominent theory" about the unsolved killings was that the four women were shot after they tried to drive through a security roadblock or soldiers thought they were trying to drive through it.

Speaking with a group of reporters, Ford said Haig's remarks apparently reflect a growing belief that Salvadoran government security forces were responsible for the deaths of the four women – three nuns and one lay worker.

He argued that the administration is trying to divert public anger over the killings with a "subtle or not so subtle campaign to discredit the missionaries."

Ford, 44, a lawyer from Montclair, NJ, said the alleged campaign included comments attributed to UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick last December that the women were "not just nuns [but] political activists."

"We are very upset by suggestions that these women were guerrilla supporters and got what they deserved," he said.

In Ossining, NY, Maryknoll spokeswoman Sister Martha Bourne also took issue with Haig's statement.

“I find it inconceivable that the women would have run a roadblock,” she said. “The women were all familiar with the situation in El Salvador. I just don’t think they would have taken such a chance.”

In another development related to El Salvador’s violence, documents released by the State Department Thursday fell far short of substantiating President Reagan’s claim that Salvadoran guerrillas boasted of killing 6,000 people last year.

The State Department summaries based on guerrilla war bulletins and radio broadcasts, cite 4,017 people killed by the rebels in 1980, and department officials concede that figure may be inflated.

The documents were provided to The Associated Press after the department was asked for evidence to back Reagan’s figure. But one official insisted the president’s statement reflected “the best estimate of our analysts.”

Reagan used the 6,000-killed figure at his March 6 news conference in arguing that by sending weapons and military advisers to El Salvador’s ruling junta, the United States was “helping the forces that are supporting human rights.”

In an interview with the AP this week, Fabio Castillo, a representative of the insurgents’ Democratic Revolutionary Front, said Reagan’s claim of 6,000 killed by the guerrillas “is without any basis.”

Castillo estimated that Salvadoran guerrillas had killed “up to 1,000 enemy troops” in 1980.

Overall, about 10,000 people died last year in El Salvador’s political violence. Most religious, human rights and labor organizations blame government security forces and right-wing paramilitary groups for the vast majority of the deaths. The administration has claimed that the left has committed about half of them.

Regarding the religious workers’ deaths, Haig told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a piece of windshield glass embedded in the body of one of four Catholic missionaries shot Dec. 2 has led investigators to theorize that the group may have tried to run a security roadblock. “Some have constructed the theory that either they were perceived or may actually have been running a roadblock,” Haig said.

“The [Salvadoran] troops could have fired into the vehicle, killed one or more of the passengers, panicked, killed the rest and tried to dispose of the evidence,” Haig said.

Mike Donovan, brother of Jean Donovan, the lay worker, confirmed that an autopsy discovered glass in a bullet wound in the back of his sister's head. But Donovan, 30, an accountant from Danbury, Conn., discounted the theory outlined by Haig.

"The government has to find some justification for the acts of the security forces so this doesn't continue to be a thorn in their sides," Donovan said.

Ford said an FBI agent involved in the investigation told a group of relatives and Catholic Church officials Thursday that there was "no evidence that the women were running a roadblock" when they were killed.

As the Reagan administration began to take shape in 1981, all signals were pointing towards a de-prioritization of human rights and a more hawkish approach to international relations, particularly in Central America. Its foreign policy team for the region included many Vietnam War figures, serving as a warning to many Americans still reeling from the long and bitter conflict in Southeast Asia that a new war could be on the horizon – this time closer to home.

## [Military Bias Developing \(May 27, 1981\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – President Reagan, assembling a team to handle U.S. policy in the volatile states of Central America, is drawing heavily on men who played active roles in the Vietnam War and other past international hotspots.

From Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. to military advisers on the ground in El Salvador, Reagan's Latin American policy team has considerable experience in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Other key State Department officials were on the scene in Chile during U.S. efforts to "destabilize" the Marxist government of Salvador Allende in the early 1970s, and several were in the Dominican Republic when 14,000 U.S. troops occupied the island in 1965.

Administration officials say it is only natural for Reagan to turn to people with such backgrounds in a situation that has "gone beyond talking." Critics, however, contend Reagan selected officials who are likely to seek military answers to largely political problems.

"They're emphasizing the military aspects," said Enrique Baloyra, a University of North Carolina professor on Latin American affairs. "They see only one side."



Reagan dispatched 56 non-combat military advisers to El Salvador to help the ruling military-civilian junta defeat leftist guerillas, who the State Department contends are supplied and directed by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

“A friendly country in our hemisphere is trying to halt the infiltration into the Americas by terrorists, by outside interference and those who aren’t just aiming at El Salvador but, I think, are aiming at the whole of Central and possibly later South America and, I’m sure, eventually North America,” Reagan said March 6.

Among officials involved with U.S. Latin American policy:

- Haig commanded troops in Vietnam from 1964 to 1967 and later, as deputy National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger, played a prominent role in efforts to block Allende from taking office.
- Thomas O. Enders, 49, Reagan’s choice to be assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, was deputy chief of mission in Cambodia from 1971 to 1974.

According to a 1973 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, “U.S. Air Operations in Cambodia,” Enders chaired an “embassy bombing panel” which met daily to decide on bombing targets.

“The final decision rests, according to the rules of the panel, with the deputy chief of mission (Enders),” the report said. The report also said Enders tried to conceal information about the embassy’s bombing role during the committee’s staff investigation.

Enders has refused to talk with reporters prior to his confirmation hearings, expected next month.

- John Bushnell, 47, acting assistant secretary for inter-American affairs and spokesman for U.S. policy in El Salvador, was assigned to work on Indochina as a staff member of the National Security Council from 1971 to 1974, according to a former government official familiar with Bushnell’s career.

Bushnell was attached to the U.S. embassy in the Dominican Republic in 1965, when President Johnson dispatched 14,000 troops to occupy the island and prevent what Johnson claimed was a possible communist takeover.

Bushnell also was unavailable to be interviewed, the State Department press office said.

- Retired Gen. Vernon A. Walters, 64, a behind-the-scenes figure on El Salvador and Guatemala, was an aide to Kissinger during the secret Paris peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese.

In his autobiography, *Silent Missions*, Walters called the Vietnam War “one of the noblest and most unselfish wars in which the United States has ever participated. ... It was in a sense the 10<sup>th</sup> Crusade; unfortunately our resolution flagged and 20 million Vietnamese passed into the tyranny of communism.”

While in Guatemala this month discussing resumption of U.S. arms sales, Walters was asked about a possible political settlement of unrest in Central America. While saying the administration favors peace to war, he added, “We do not want a political solution like that of Vietnam.”

Walters served as deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1972 to 1976, a period during which the CIA waged a covert campaign to “destabilize” Allende’s elected government in Chile.

- Col. Eldon Cummings, 50, who as former head of the military assistance group in El Salvador, wanted 75 U.S. military advisers sent there, was a military attache to the U.S. embassy in Laos from 1969 to 1972 and was involved in training and supplying pro-American Laotians.

Cummings is now stationed at the Pentagon as an adviser on Central American security.

- Col. Woody E. Hayes, 48, who succeeded Cummings in April as head of Salvadoran assistance group, commanded troops in Vietnam in 1970 and 1971, winning the Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnam Campaign Medal.
- Roy L. Prosterman, a University of Washington consultant to the Salvadoran land reform program, designed a similar “land to the tiller” program in Vietnam.
- Deane R. Hinton, 58, new ambassador to El Salvador, was director of Agency for International Development in Chile from 1969 to 1971, a period when the United States blocked outside support to Chile. AID assistance cut from \$35.4 million in 1969 to \$1.5 million in 1971.

Hinton previously served as AID director in Guatemala in 1967, where his office assisted the U.S. backed military government in counterinsurgency work. From 1966 to 1968, the Guatemalan government crushed a guerilla movement,

killing as many as 10,000 peasants, according to a recent academic report prepared for the State Department.

The State Department press office said Hinton also was unavailable for comment.

As Reagan reprised the U.S. counterinsurgency tactics of the Vietnam War era, veteran peace activists revived tactics of the latent anti-war movement, hounding the president at public appearances, and vowing to make him a “captive of the White House.”

In this article, Parry explains how various protest groups were uniting in their opposition to Reagan’s foreign and domestic policies, with sizable demonstrations of upwards of 10,000 people becoming routine.

## [Reagan Protests Becoming Routine \(April 18, 1982\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – In a pattern not seen since the Vietnam War, protesters are greeting President Reagan at nearly all his public appearances.

The protests range from challenges to Reagan’s cuts in spending for the poor to calls for him to freeze development of nuclear weapons. And increasingly, demonstrators are linking concerns over reduced domestic spending to the sharp increases in the Pentagon’s budget.

The All-Peoples Congress, a group organizing some of the protests, is adopting the slogan “Feed the People, Not the Pentagon” as it tries to unite critics of U.S. involvement in El Salvador with welfare recipients facing cuts in food stamps.

“Reagan can’t go anywhere in the country now without being met with visible, vocal demonstrations,” said Brian Becker, a congress spokesman. “Like Presidents Nixon and Johnson, Reagan will be made a captive of the White House.”

The All-Peoples Congress helped organize a demonstration March 24 of more than 10,000 people in New York City when Reagan received a humanitarian award. It also is calling for a series of protests – including a May 1 march on Washington – during “national roll-back Reaganism week” from April 24 to May 2.

The president’s trip to Chicago on Thursday drew two separate protests – one criticizing his economic policies and the other opposed to U.S. actions in Central America.

But organizers of the two demonstrations said they share many concerns and work easily together, a contrast with the sometimes bitter rivalries among protest groups in the 1960s.

“It’s easier than it was in the 60s to work together,” said Kathy Devine, and organizer for the Illinois Coalition Against Reagan Economics (ICARE), one of the protest groups.

“People are understanding more and more that an escalating military budget is taking money from the poor in this country to kill the poor in other countries,” said Renny Golden, a member of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, which organized the other protest.

As Reagan outlined his proposal for private school tuition tax credits on Thursday, Ms. Golden and other protesters unveiled a banner that read, “Arms race equals theft from the poor.”

The president then departed from his prepared text and said: “Whatever we are doing in Washington today in this regard is aimed at one purpose and one only – to make war impossible, and never have to bleed a generation of young Americans on the battlefield.”

Although presidential trips often are made with only short public notice, demonstrations are becoming almost a routine part of Reagan’s public appearances.

Mary Ann Corley of the American Friends Service Committee said the protests represent “a spontaneous movement” against Reagan’s policies that did not occur during the Ford and Carter administrations.

Calling Central America the United States’ “exposed southern flank,” neoconservatives in Reagan’s foreign policy team viewed the region as an opportunity to salvage their discredited approach to international affairs after the debacle of Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the Reagan administration’s strategy was to undermine the new Sandinista government in Nicaragua, which they did by organizing, funding and training a band of rebels known as the Contras. These fighters, however, soon came under scrutiny for employing brutal tactics and indiscriminate violence, for example an attack against a Nicaraguan farm cooperative and killings of international humanitarian aid workers, as Parry explains here.

## [CIA Told to Curb Nicaraguan Rebels \(July 18, 1983\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

Members of congressional intelligence committees have told the CIA not to allow the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan rebels to attack civilians in their war against

Nicaragua's leftist government.

"We don't want [the CIA-supported rebels] down there burning cotton fields and killing civilians," Rep. Dave McCurdy, D-Okla., a House Intelligence Committee member, said in an interview. "That's not something we want to be involved with."

McCurdy and other officials knowledgeable about the committee said the CIA denies the U.S.-supported "Contras," or counterrevolutionaries, are responsible for attacks that have destroyed economic targets in Nicaragua and killed civilians.

Congressional sources who would only speak anonymously said the CIA claims to keep firm control over and maintain close communication with the Contras operating out of Honduras. But the sources said evidence implicates the Contras in at least some civilian attacks.

CIA spokesman Chuck Wilson refused comment.

Sources said House Intelligence Committee members expressed concern about attacks on civilians to CIA Director William Casey in secret meetings in the weeks before the Democratic-dominated House committee's May 3 vote to end covert aid to the counterrevolutionaries. That bill, which would replace the covert aid with an \$80 million fund to help friendly nations, is scheduled for a House vote this week. It is given little chance of Senate passage.

The strongest objections have come from the House panel, but some Senate Intelligence Committee members also have said they are concerned about civilian casualties, sources said.

One Senate source said most members of the Republican-controlled committee believed the CIA has maintained control and held such violence to a minimum.

But some congressional critics are skeptical of CIA denials that U.S.-backed forces are responsible for destroying civilian targets and killing noncombatants.

Rep. Norman Mineta, D-Calif., a committee member, said, "I can't imagine some ragtag band outside the CIA's control."

One source said that in April, Casey was asked about an NBC News report on a Contra attack against a Nicaraguan farm cooperative, and Casey denied CIA-backed forces carried out the attack.

However, the source said a congressional investigator later uncovered a CIA "after-action" report on the assault. The source said the CIA keeps such reports

only on actions it is involved in.

In other, well documented assaults:

- On March 26, four residents of the northern Nicaraguan town of Rara Grande, including a French doctor doing volunteer work, were killed in a village and news reports said was an attack by 300 Contras.
- A West German doctor and 12 Nicaraguan assistants were killed April 30 in an ambush also blamed on Contras.

In late 1983, President Reagan ordered the mining of Nicaragua's harbors in order to stifle commerce and cut off the supply of fuel and weapons to the Sandinista government. When cargo ships hit the mines, it sparked outrage around the world, leading Nicaragua to file a case at the International Court of Justice. Although the ICJ would ultimately find that the U.S. had violated international law and awarded reparations to Nicaragua, the U.S. simply ignored the ruling, claiming that the ICJ had no jurisdiction to hear the case. The harbor mining fiasco also led Congress to cut funding to the Contras in mid-1984.

In this piece, Parry provides some background on the mining incident, tying it to the Central Intelligence Agency.

## [CIA Linked to Nicaraguan Port Blast \(April 18, 1984\)](#)

Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Three months before mining Nicaragua's harbors, the CIA directed a sabotage raid against the key Nicaraguan port of Corinto, destroying 3.2 million gallons of fuel and forcing the town's evacuation, intelligence sources say.

The sources, who spoke on condition they not be identified, said that like the mining, the Oct. 10 Corinto raid was carried by CIA-hired Latin mercenaries who reached the port by speedboat from an offshore mother ship where American CIA agents directed the operation.

"This was totally a CIA operation," said one intelligence source.

Another source said the Corinto raid was one in a series of CIA-directed seaport attacks that dated back to an attack on oil storage facilities at Puerto Sandino on Sept. 8.

Members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who complained last week that they were not adequately informed about the mining, also appeared not to have known about the CIA's direct role in the Corinto raid, according to sources close to the panel.

One source said the CIA provided no information on the Corinto attack last fall and told the committee in September that the Puerto Sandino operation was carried by Latin scuba divers who worked for the Honduras-based Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the rebel group most closely tied to the CIA.

The sources said the first time the committee staff learned that the special Latin paramilitary team worked for the CIA was on March 30 when the agency sent a letter on the mining that mentioned “unilaterally controlled Latino assets,” meaning agents directed exclusively by the CIA.

On April 2, the CIA told the Senate committee staff that those agents were used in the mining operation, a disclosure that according to one source led to the panel’s discovery that the Corinto raid and other port attacks were directed by the CIA.

In those raids, American CIA agents remained on a mother ship more than 12 miles off the Nicaraguan coast, the territorial waters recognized by the United States, the sources said. The Latin American mercenaries then reached the coast by CIA-supported speedboats.

Corinto residents said that on the night of Oct. 10, the attackers positioned their speedboats behind a South Korean ship and then opened fire on oil storage tanks. The residents said the shells set one oil tank ablaze, touching off a chain of fires that raged out of control for two days. The Nicaraguan government claims 112 persons were injured.

The CIA declined comment on its reported role in the operation.

On April 9, Nicaragua filed suit against the United States, claiming before the International Court of Justice that “its territory has been invaded by a military force organized and directed by the United States.” The attacks on Corinto and Puerto Sandino were two of the incidents cited.

The World Court opened deliberations April 17 on Nicaragua’s complaint, but failed to agree on when it would hear arguments from the opposing sides.

The Reagan administration has announced it will not accept the court’s rulings on cases involving Central America for the next two years.

Besides mining harbors and attacking farms, the CIA also employed more creative methods of undermining the Sandinista government, including by distributing comics that encouraged people to clog toilets. As Parry describes here, the so-called Freedom Fighter’s Manual featured 38 ways to participate in the counter-revolutionary resistance, in what became a rather embarrassing episode of the Reagan administration’s support for the Contra war.

## Comics Bedevil Sandinistas (June 30, 1984)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – The CIA has produced a comic book-style manual that encourages Nicaraguans to report late for work, pour sand into engines, hurl “Molotov cocktails” and engage in other forms of sabotage, intelligence sources say.

The booklet, its title translated as Freedom Fighter’s Manual, is written in Spanish and relies heavily on captioned illustrations to show 38 ways to commit sabotage or otherwise undermine Nicaragua’s leftist Sandinista government.

The manual describes itself as a “practical guide to liberate Nicaragua from oppression and misery by paralyzing the military-industrial complex of the traitorous Marxist state without having to use special tools and with minimal risk for the combatant.”

Although President Reagan has said the United States is not seeking to overthrow the Sandinista government, the booklet calls on Nicaraguans to join in the “final battle” against the 5-year-old leftist regime.

Intelligence sources, who insisted on anonymity, said the CIA prepared the manual for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, known by its Spanish initials, FDN, the largest of the rebel groups and the one most closely associated with the CIA.

A copy of the multicolored, 16-page booklet was found by a Nicaraguan peasant after a June 1 attack by the FDN on Ocotal, a town near the Honduran border, according to Betsy Cohn, director of the Central American Historical Institute of Georgetown University.

### **No confirmation**

Cohn said the peasant gave the manual, which had been stuffed into the door of a house, to Peter Olson, a member of the Witness for Peace, an American religious delegation opposed to CIA support for the rebels.

Cohn provided a photostatic copy to The Associated Press, and U.S. intelligence sources identified it as a CIA production.

CIA spokesman George Lauder declined comment. Shown a copy, Bosco Matamoros, an FDN representative in Washington, called it “a typical manual of resistance” but said he could not confirm who wrote it. An FDN official in



Honduras, who refused to be identified, said the rebel group has no sabotage manual and added: "That document doesn't exist."

The manual urges Nicaraguans to slough off at work, leave the lights and water on, damage books and office equipment, smash windows, clog up toilets, cut telephone lines, call in false alarms, slash tires, spread rumors, make false hotel and plane reservations, short-circuit electrical systems, paint anti-government slogans, damage truck engines, fell trees, release farm animals, steal government food supplies, set fires, and throw "Molotov cocktails" at police officers and at fuel depots.

Some of the targets depicted in the manual are clearly tied to the Sandinista government, such as police stations, army trucks and farm cooperatives. But other suggested actions appear aimed at more general economic targets, such as factories, telephone lines, utilities and hotels.

CIA officials have assured congressional oversight committees that the U.S.-supported rebels would refrain from attacks on civilians and economic targets, sources said. It was not clear, however, if the committees would object to the manual.

Following disclosures that the CIA directed the mining of Nicaragua's harbors, Congress has balked at providing more money for the covert action, begun by Reagan in December 1981. On Monday, the Senate voted 88-1 to shelve Reagan's emergency request for \$31 million more so other money for youth summer jobs and social programs could be passed.

While repeatedly denying the CIA is trying to oust the Sandinistas, administration officials have said the covert operation is intended to block weapons shipments from Nicaragua to leftist Salvadoran guerrillas and to pressure the Sandinistas to moderate internal policies and cut their ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The manual's introduction, in effect, calls on Nicaraguans to join in a popular uprising against the Sandinistas.

It exhorts Nicaraguans to sabotage the "essential economic infrastructure that any government needs to function, which can easily be disabled and even paralyzed without the use of armaments or costly and advanced equipment, with the small investment of resources and time."

It says the book presents "a series of useful sabotage techniques, the majority of which can be done with simple household tools such as scissors, empty bottles,

screwdrivers, matches, etc.”

### **Clog a toilet**

One page, picturing a man reclining in an easy chair and holding a drink, says: “Call in sick so as not to work.” Another, showing an army truck, instructs: “Don’t do maintenance work on vehicles and machines ... hide and damage tools ... throw tools into sewer.”

A nine-step illustration shows how to short-circuit a factory’s electrical system by putting a small coin into a light socket. A four-step depiction explains how to use a dried-up sponge to clog a toilet.

Several illustrations are devoted to showing how to disable trucks, by damaging tires or destroying engines. Another picture urges readers to block highways with rocks and fallen trees.

The manual also demonstrates how to set delayed fires by using cigarettes wrapped in matches and how to make an incendiary bomb, commonly known as a “Molotov cocktail.”

Cohn said the booklet contains both words and pictures that were odd for Nicaragua. She said, for instance, that the manual uses the Spanish words *los grifos de agua* for faucet when Nicaraguans more commonly use *la paja*. In one drawing, a two-story brick building is shown, but Cohn said such structures are rare in Nicaragua.

In addition to clogging toilets and calling in sick, the CIA also advocated carrying out “selective use of violence” to “neutralize” public officials in Nicaragua. Parry’s reporting on this “assassination manual” would earn him the 1984 George Polk Award for National Reporting. He would also become a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and his reports led to an internal investigation and a congressional inquiry.

## [Nicaraguan Rebels Said to Get Subversion Manual From CIA \(Oct. 15, 1984\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – The CIA produced a psychological warfare manual for Nicaraguan rebels that instructs them to hire professional criminals for “selective jobs” and says some government officials can be “neutralized” with the “selective use of violence,” intelligence sources say.

The 90-page manual, written in Spanish, also urges the rebels to create a “martyr” by arranging a violent demonstration that leads to the death of one of

their supporters, and it tells how to coerce Nicaraguans into carrying out assignments against their will.

A photostatic copy of the book was obtained by The Associated Press. Its authenticity and the CIA's role in its production were confirmed independently by U.S. intelligence sources, who insisted on anonymity. CIA spokesman George Lauder refused to comment on the manual.

After being produced by the CIA about a year ago, the manual entitled "Psychological Operations in Guerrilla War" was distributed inside the Honduran-based Nicaraguan Democratic Force, which is known by its Spanish initials FDN, the sources said.

FDN President Adolfo Calero, whose group is the largest rebel faction, said that he first saw the manual "less than a year ago" and that it was given only to "our top people." He denied that the CIA produced it, claiming it was a "contribution" from a supporter whose name he could not recall. He said the author's name on the cover – "Tayacan" – is a pen-name that means "head man."

Calero said that while the manual presents "some applicable ideas, it also contains some things ... we would not accept and do not practice. It talks about terrorism, which is something we haven't done."

Although Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government and some Americans living in the country have accused the FDN of murdering and kidnapping civilian officials, it could not be determined if any of the actions recommended by the manual were implemented.

The manual stresses the need for political propaganda in a guerrilla war, and much of it deals with routine psychological operations designed to turn the people against the government.

"Guerrilla war is essentially a political war," the book's preface says. "This book is a manual for training guerrillas in psychological operations and their application in the concrete case of the Christian and democratic crusade in which the freedom commandos are engaged in Nicaragua."

It counsels the rebels not to use "explicit terror" against the civilian population because that could cost support and says they should "demonstrate good conduct" in dealing with the public.

But the manual endorses the "selective use of violence" against Nicaraguan judges, police and security officials. It says that such people can be

“neutralized,” but that the targets should be selected carefully based on their unpopularity with the people and the “level of violence necessary to carry out the change.”

“For psychological effect, it is necessary to take extreme precautions, and it is essential to assemble the townspeople so they gather, take part in the activity and formulate accusations against the oppressor,” the manual says.

The book does not use the words “assassinate” or “kill,” although references to “danger to other individuals in the area of the target” and to assessing likely replacements suggest the goal is to remove the officials physically.

An executive order signed by President Ronald Reagan on Dec. 4, 1981, said no U.S. government employee “shall engage in or conspire to engage in assassination” and adds that no intelligence agency “shall participate in or request any person to undertake activities forbidden by this order.”

The manual says: “If possible, professional criminals should be hired to carry out specific, selective ‘jobs.’” The precise nature of those “jobs” is not explained. The manual adds that “specific jobs should be assigned to other elements, with the goal of creating a ‘martyr’ for the cause.”

The rebels are advised to lead “demonstrators into clashes with the authorities, to provoke riots or shootings, which lead to the killing of one or more persons, who will be seen as the martyrs; this situation should be taken advantage of immediately against the government to create even bigger conflicts.”

The manual also instructs the rebels how to coerce Nicaraguans into carrying out assignments against their will. The rebels are told to draw a person into meetings with rebel leaders without him knowing their identities and then threaten to expose him to police “if he fails to cooperate.”

The rebels are told that if they shoot a citizen trying to flee, the village should be told the person was “an enemy of the people” who would have alerted the Sandinistas – prompting government troops to “carry out reprisals such as rape, pillage, destruction, kidnapping and so forth.”

One source familiar with the book said the CIA sent the manual to the FDN at about the same time the agency supplied a comic book-style booklet instructing Nicaraguans how to sabotage their government.

That booklet, distributed in northern Nicaragua and also obtained by The Associated Press, urged Nicaraguans to call in sick to work, pour sand into

engines, clog toilets and hurl firebombs at police offices and fuel depots. Only 1,000 to 2,000 copies were ever distributed, the source said.

From 1982 to 1984, Congress passed a series of laws restricting U.S. government assistance to the Nicaraguan Contras. Named for Representative Edward Boland (D-Mass), who authored the first of the restrictions – an amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act of 1983 – these laws were collectively called the Boland Amendment and prohibited aid intended to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. Although President Ronald Reagan signed them into law, he soon began finding ways around the restrictions, as Parry explains here. This is the first article about Lt. Col. Oliver North's secret intelligence operation being run out of the White House.

## [Support of Contras Was Given \(June 10, 1985\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – The White House gave advice – at least initially – to individuals involved in private fundraising for Nicaraguan rebels despite a public stance that it doesn't encourage or discourage those efforts, according to sources.

The government and private sources, who spoke on condition they not be identified, also said the White House did not discourage offers from several friendly governments to funnel aid to the Contra rebels.

But, according to these sources, the Reagan administration has adopted an arms-length relationship with the fundraising efforts since last fall, when Congress based a ban on U.S. aid that "would have the effect of supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua."

That language, the most recent of a series of Nicaraguan restrictions sponsored by Rep. Edward P. Boland, D-Mass., is a principal target of current administration proposals in Congress to resume CIA aid to the Contras.

One source, familiar with the administration handling of private Contra aid, said White House efforts to encourage and coordinate that support began in early 1984 as Congress turned increasingly hostile to the CIA's backing of the rebels.

The source said that beginning last July, at least three countries approached the White House and volunteered to provide aid to the Contras. He said one was an Asian country, but he refused to identify any of them.

"They came to the U.S. to make sure we had no objection to it," the source said, adding that the White House welcomed the offers but provided no "quid pro quo" to reward the nations for giving the help. He also said the White House

estimated that outside support would total about \$11 million this year, and thus agreed to scale back its 1985 request to Congress to \$14 million.

The source said the National Security Council staff handled contacts with private groups, including the World Anti-Communist League, a conservative organization headed by retired Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub.

Singlaub, who resigned from active duty in 1978 after publicly criticizing then-President Carter's plan to withdraw forces from South Korea, said the league's international network and other fund sources raise about \$500,000 a month for the Contras.

In recent interviews with The Associated Press, Singlaub said that amount was enough for the rebels to continue "surviving" but prevented them from becoming a greater threat to the leftist Nicaraguan government.

Singlaub said that a year ago, when he started his fundraising effort, he would receive advice on the Contras' military needs and an occasional briefing from the NSC staff. The former general said his chief contact was Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, an NSC deputy director for political-military affairs.

But now, Singlaub said, North has been "pretty much immobilized by this idiotic amendment" prohibiting even indirect help for the Contras. "He can't act to give advice or encouragement," Singlaub added.

NSC spokeswoman Karna Small said North and other council officials would not comment on the question of a White House connection to the private groups.

The CIA spent about \$80 million training and organizing the estimated 15,000 rebels from 1981 until a year ago when Congress cut off the aid. Last week, the Republican-controlled Senate voted to let the CIA ship \$38 million in non-lethal aid to the rebels and the House is slated to consider a similar plan this week.

White House officials refused to discuss the alleged NSC role in the fundraising, although State Department spokesman Joseph Reap reiterated the administration's position that "we neither encourage nor discourage such activities as long as they fall within applicable law."

In a 1981 report, the Anti-Defamation League described the World Anti-Communist League as "a gathering place ... for extremists, racists and anti-Semites." Singlaub confirmed that the league's Latin American branch was

“terribly anti-Semitic” and that one European chapter contained former Nazi SS troops, but he added that those extremist elements have been purged.

Although it would be another year before the Iran-Contra Affair would break wide open, the basic forms of the scandal were already being shaped by Parry’s reporting for The Associated Press. The following article explains how Reagan had approved a plan to circumvent restrictions on aid to the Contras, which essentially was the genesis of the scandal that would eventually lead to a full-blown investigation.

## [Reagan Reportedly OKd Secret Contra Aid \(Oct. 8, 1985\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Facing a congressional cutoff of military aid to Nicaraguan rebels early last year, President Reagan approved a secret plan to replace CIA money with aid from U.S. citizens and U.S. allies, say current and former administration officials.

White House officials picked retired Army Maj. Gen. John Singlaub as the chief fundraising contact and advised him how to structure the campaign within laws that bar U.S. citizens from supporting foreign wars, said the sources, who insisted on anonymity.

White House spokesman Ed Djerejian refused to comment on Reagan’s reported approval of the plan to go outside government channels to supply the Contras fighting to overthrow Nicaragua’s leftist government.

In the past, the White House has insisted it “neither encourages nor discourages” private fundraising that sprang up after Congress refused to continue military aid in the spring of 1984.

But government sources, including one senior administration official, described the behind-the-scenes White House role in organizing and advising the aid network as much more extensive than acknowledged.

The aid network – particularly a recent surge of arms and money from allied countries – allowed the rebels to continue military operations during the 15-month cutoff of direct U.S. aid.

One source familiar with the program said the “big three” countries that were expected to help the rebels were Israel, South Korea and Taiwan.

Representatives of those governments denied they helped the rebels. But other U.S. sources said Israel agreed to sell them captured PLO weapons. They said

aid from South Korea and Taiwan came from private businessmen and an anti-communist organization with close ties to those governments.

Three congressional committees are reviewing whether White House National Security Council officials violated a year-old ban against direct or indirect military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.



But the administration officials said the White House role in establishing the aid network had ended by Oct. 1, 1984, when that ban was enacted. Last July, Congress voted \$27 million in nonlethal aid to the rebels but maintained the ban on lethal U.S. assistance.

National security adviser Robert McFarlane has denied that his staff violated the ban but has ignored a congressional request for documents on security council contacts with the rebels.

As for White House actions before October 1984, McFarlane said: "We did not solicit funds or other support for military or paramilitary activities either from Americans or third parties."

Several sources said McFarlane's statement is technically correct because private Americans and "third parties" in allied countries "volunteered" help in supplying the rebels.

One source who was close to the program said the plan for accepting the offers was prepared by Lt. Col. Oliver North, a deputy director for political-military affairs on the security council staff.

The sources said McFarlane and Reagan approved the plan and it fell to North to implement.

All three sources said creation of the aid network came at about the time of congressional protest in April 1984 over CIA mining of Nicaragua's harbors.

By the mid-1980s, a crack cocaine epidemic was ravaging America's cities and hitting the African-American community particularly hard. Rising crime and violence associated with the drug trade led to President Reagan declaring a "war on drugs" and his wife Nancy initiating an anti-drug campaign known by the slogan "Just Say No."

But even as the Reagan administration publicly took a hard line against drugs, it tolerated drug trafficking by the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contras who were importing tons of cocaine into the United States to fund their war against the Sandinista government. As Parry explains here with his partner Brian Barger, all the main Contra groups were involved in this activity.

## [Contras Funded By Cocaine Trafficking \(Dec. 21, 1985\)](#)

Originally published by The Associated Press, co-written with Brian Barger

WASHINGTON – Nicaraguan rebels operating in northern Costa Rica have engaged in cocaine trafficking, in part to help finance their war against Nicaragua's leftist government, according to U.S. investigators and American volunteers who work with the rebels.

The smuggling operations included refueling planes at clandestine airstrips and helping transport cocaine to other Costa Rican points for shipment to the United States, said U.S. law enforcement officials and the volunteers.

These sources, who refused to be identified by name, said the smuggling involves individuals from the largest of the U.S.-backed Contra groups – the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) and the Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (ARDE) – as well as a splinter group known as M-3.

A leader of M-3, Sebastian Gonzalez Mendiola, was indicted in Costa Rica for cocaine trafficking a year ago. No other Contra leaders have been charged.

A new National Intelligence Estimate, a secret CIA-prepared analysis on narcotics trafficking, alleges that one of ARDE's top commanders loyal to ARDE leader Eden Pastora used cocaine profits this year to buy a \$250,000 arms shipment and a helicopter, according to a U.S. government official in Washington.

FDN spokesman Bosco Matamoros and Levy Sanchez, a Miami-based spokesman for Pastora, denied that their groups participated in drug smuggling.

Cornelius J. Dougherty, spokesman for the Drug Enforcement Administration, said DEA headquarters in Washington is aware that drug traffickers use airstrips in northern Costa Rica to transship cocaine, but has not examined the political affiliations of those involved.

Dougherty said the DEA focuses its Latin American enforcement efforts on the cocaine-producing nations of South America, rather than on countries, such as Costa Rica, that are used in shipping the drugs to the United States.

Earlier this year, President Reagan accused the leftist government of Nicaragua of "exporting drugs to poison our youth" after a Nicaraguan government employee, Federico Vaughan, was indicted by a federal grand jury in Miami. But Dougherty said DEA investigators are still not sure if Sandinista leaders were involved.

Rep. Sam Gejdenson, D-Conn., a House Foreign Affairs Committee member, called on the administration Friday to investigate the Contra allegations "with the same vigor that they would devote to charges of left-wing drug trafficking.

"After all, the victims of narcotics smuggling are not able to differentiate between left-wing and right-wing cocaine," the congressman said.

Responding to the AP report, State Department deputy spokesman Charles Redman said the United States “actively opposes drug trafficking” and that the DEA is not conducting any investigation of the charges.

“We are not aware of any evidence to support those charges,” Redman added.

The U.S.-backed rebels, fighting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, operate from basecamps in Honduras to Nicaragua’s north and from Costa Rica, to its south. Contra leaders claim a combined force of 20,000 men, although some U.S. officials say the real number is much lower. The Costa Rica-based rebel groups are smaller and more poorly financed than those in Honduras.

Associated Press reporters interviewed officials from the DEA, Customs Service, FBI and Costa Rica’s Public Security Ministry, as well as rebels and Americans who work with them. The sources, both inside government and out, spoke only on condition that they not be identified by name.

Five American rebel supporters said they were willing to talk about the drug smuggling because they feared the trafficking would ultimately discredit the war effort.

The five – including four who trained rebels in Costa Rican base camps – said they discovered the Contra smuggling involvement early this year, after Cuban-Americans were recruited to help the Honduran-based FDN open a Costa Rican front.

These American rebel backers said two Cuban-Americans used armed rebel troops to guard cocaine at clandestine airfields in northern Costa Rica. They identified the Cuban-Americans as members of the 2506 Brigade, an anti-Castro group that participated in the 1961 Bay of Pigs attack on Cuba. Several also said they supplied information about the smuggling to U.S. investigators.

One American rebel backer with close ties to the Cuban-American smugglers said that in one ongoing operation, the cocaine is unloaded from planes at rebel airstrips and taken to an Atlantic coast port where it is concealed on shrimp boats that are later unloaded in the Miami area.

Three U.S. officials who monitor drug traffic from Colombia through Central America to the United States said they began receiving reports about Contra involvement in cocaine shipments in 1984, about the time Congress cut off CIA funding to the rebels. Each official said he considered the reports “reliable.”

Earlier this year, a Nicaraguan rebel leader in Costa Rica told U.S. authorities that his group was being paid \$50,000 by Colombian traffickers for help with a

100-kilo cocaine shipment and that the money would go “for the cause” of fighting the Nicaraguan government, one U.S. law enforcement official said.

The plan called for the rebels to guard a clandestine airstrip where a cocaine-laden plane from Colombia would land. The rebels would then take the drugs “to a stash house in San Jose,” where they were to guard it for three days until it was picked up, said the investigator.

The rebel leader asked for \$50,000 from the U.S. embassy in exchange for turning in the Colombian smugglers. The deal was rejected, said the investigator, who added that the smuggling arrangement was later completed without any arrests.

M-3 leader Gonzalez, known as Guachan, was charged with cocaine trafficking on Nov. 26, 1984, by Costa Rican authorities in the northern town of Liberia. The indictment describes Gonzalez as “el maximo dirigente” – or top leader – of M-3, part of the ARDE political coalition. Instead of facing the charge, Gonzalez fled to Panama.

A U.S. investigator said Dr. Hugo Spadafora, a former Panamanian deputy health minister who fought with the Nicaraguan rebels, met secretly with a senior American law enforcement official in early September and outlined allegations linking Contra drug trafficking and Gonzalez to a prominent Panamanian official.

After announcing plans to publicize those charges, Spadafora was seized on Sept. 13 by Panamanian soldiers as he crossed the border by bus from Costa Rica, according to eyewitnesses. Spadafora’s headless body was found a day later, dumped inside Costa Rica in a mail bag.

In spring 1986, President Reagan was lobbying Congress to lift the ban on military assistance to the Contras and pressing for \$100 million in aid. Congressional leaders were reluctant, however, with reports of drug trafficking and human rights abuses by the Contras, not to mention their incompetence in achieving the objectives they were ostensibly fighting for. In this article, Parry explains the difficulties that the Contras had on the battlefield as well as on the public relations front.

## [Reagan Upbeat on Contras \(March 18, 1986\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Pressing for renewed U.S. military aid for Nicaragua’s Contra rebels, President Reagan is one of the few voices still speaking optimistically about the insurgents’ battlefield prospects.

Reagan offers the upbeat view of a growing rebel force – already more than 20,000 strong – that has “pinned down the Sandinista army” and needs only more supplies and anti-aircraft weapons to put severe pressure on Nicaragua’s leftist government.

But many other private and government assessments depict the Contras as a battered army – losing men, retreating to Honduran base camps, nearing collapse.

Some administration experts on Nicaragua put Contra troop strength at well below 20,000, with some estimates closer to 12,000. These officials, speaking only on condition of anonymity, said the vast majority of rebels have fled Nicaragua to neighboring Honduras.

After a trip to Central America last month, Sen. James Sasser, D-Tenn., said, “There is almost no one you can talk to down there, or up here for that matter, except for the people who are absolutely committed, who thinks that the Contras can really be anything more than a nuisance for the Sandinistas.”

A new report by former CIA analyst David MacMichael concludes that “Contra bands inside Nicaragua have been chopped into small groups by persistent and remorseless government offensives,” leaving the rebels on the verge of outright defeat.

MacMichael left the CIA in 1983 after disputing administration claims of a massive weapons flow from Nicaragua to leftist Salvadoran guerrillas and now works for the liberal-oriented Council on Hemispheric Affairs private research group. He said the Contras achieved some military success in 1984 and 1985, but now have withdrawn from major areas of operation, such as the Jalapa region.

“Desperate Contra attempts to recover the initiative in late 1985 through suicidal attacks ... were fiascos that left them with hundreds of dead, including many of their experienced ex-National Guard combat leaders,” said MacMichael, who just returned from a month-long trip to the war zone.

MacMichael’s bleak assessment is shared by many American Contra backers and leading anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan exiles.

Two prominent U.S. supporters, Bruce Cameron and Penn Kemble, said in a recent discussion paper on the Contras that “as it stands today, it seems unlikely that the resistance can achieve much against the Sandinistas even with substantial U.S. military assistance.”

“The present war is programmed in such a way as to lose,” said former Nicaraguan Vice President Silvio Arguello Cardenal in a letter to Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Arguello Cardenal, now living in Miami, complained that the Contra leadership was “nominated by the Central Intelligence Agency.”

Senior administration officials also have acknowledged the Contras’ dire military position.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz told a Senate panel two weeks ago that without renewed military aid, “the situation will fall apart in a hurry.”

Rebel leaders themselves cite supply shortages and the Sandinistas’ use of sophisticated, Soviet-built Mi-24 helicopter gunships as the main reasons for recent reversals.

Last October, after the Sandinistas had turned back a determined Contra offensive, Adolfo Calera, head of the CIA-organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force, or FDN, said the Mi-24s had dealt the rebels a serious blow and “have definitely forced us to change plans.”

By June 1986, the Reagan administration’s flouting of the Boland Amendment was coming into greater focus, as this article details. Parry would later modestly explain that it didn’t require a journalistic genius to break these stories – all it required was “sort of following the leads,” which “were all over the place.”

## [U.S. Aided Contras During Congress’ Ban \(June 10, 1986\)](#)

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Originally published by The Associated Press, co-written with Brian Barger

WASHINGTON – The Reagan administration worked through outside intermediaries to manage a private network that assisted Nicaraguan rebels during last year’s congressional military-aid ban, according to government officials, rebel leaders and American Contra backers.

The American intermediaries helped the rebels with arms purchases, fund raising and enlistment of military trainers after Congress, in October 1984, barred U.S. officials from “directly or indirectly” aiding the Contra war against Nicaragua’s leftist government.

The White House’s behind-the-scenes role was described by more than two dozen sources in interviews over the past 18 months. It exceeds the description

provided by administration officials who told Congress last summer that White House contact with the rebels had been limited to political advice.

Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, deputy director for political-military affairs at the National Security Council, oversaw the work of the intermediaries, including conservative activist Robert W. Owen and retired Army Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, sources said.

Most sources – five current and former U.S. officials, 12 rebel leaders and eight American Contra backers – insisted on anonymity. The aid ban lasted through September 1985, when Congress provided \$27 million in non-lethal aid but kept restrictions on a U.S. military role.

Owen, a former Republican congressional aide, operated as a private individual during the aid ban although sources said he worked out of North's office in late 1984 and early 1985. Last fall, he won a \$50,675 State Department grant to work with the rebels.

An administration official said North sent messages through Owen to Contra leaders in the field. A former government official close to the White House said North used Owen as a "buffer" when dealing with the aid network – the dozens of conservative groups that gave money, supplies and training to the rebels after Congress cut off aid.

Owen, asked to comment both directly and through associates, refused to discuss his activities. North also refused comment, as did White House spokesman Pete Roussel.

Singlaub, chairman of the World Anti-Communist League, is credited by rebel leaders with raising funds internationally by rebel leaders with raising funds internationally for arms purchases and advising them on military strategy.

Singlaub said in an interview last June that the congressional ban stopped North from giving him direct "advice or encouragement."

In an interview last October, Singlaub said his arrangement with North was "like in the military" when a junior officer tells his superior what he plans to do and silence is regarded as approval. Singlaub said he talked with North about once a week by telephone and would meet him "eyeball to eyeball" once a month but he denied his work was directed by North.

One administration official close to both North and Owen said Owen acted as North's go-between to the rebel movement and would participate in military-

related meetings that North “considered (legally) risky,” given the congressional ban.

A prominent rebel official said Owen “represented North” as almost a “proconsul” to Contra leaders. The rebel said Owen helped organize Nicaraguan Indian military operations in Honduras and establish a 200-man force in Costa Rica in early 1985.

Two paramilitary trainers, Tom Posey and Jack Terrell, said Owen, claiming to represent the U.S. government, sought their help in training that new Contra force.

In a Sept. 5, 1985, letter, then-National Security Adviser Robert C. McFarlane told Congress the NSC staff gave only political advice to the rebels during the aid ban, adding that “at no time did I or any member of the National Security Council staff violate the letter or spirit of the law.”

The Reagan administration managed to keep the story of its illegal support for the Contras contained through a combination of vehement denials, pressure on journalists and editors, and a general timidity in the Washington press corps reluctant to pursue the story. This all changed on Oct. 5, 1986, when a cargo plane was shot down over Nicaragua and Eugene Hasenfus was captured by the Sandinistas.

In this long-form piece, Parry and Barger provide the details and background for the scandal that would grip the country for the next year – explaining that what the administration had done was essentially to establish its own personal “shadow CIA.”

## [Reagan’s Shadow CIA \(Nov. 24, 1986\)](#)

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Originally published in *The New Republic* magazine, co-written with Brian Barger

The crash of an arms-laden cargo plane in southern Nicaragua on October 5 exposed more than an operation mounted by private American mercenaries or, as one critic put it, by ex-CIA men with “a wink and a nod” from the U.S. government. It brought into sudden focus a highly covert paramilitary network of former intelligence operatives working for the White House. The secret organization was set up by Reagan administration officials in early 1984 and enabled the White House to circumvent a congressional ban against “directly or indirectly” aiding the Contra rebels fighting to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. It was a shadow CIA – hidden from Congress, unaccountable to the American public, and answering only to the White House.



The secret White House program reunited an old-boys network of former CIA operatives dating back to the Vietnam War and the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Many of the participants – from the program’s chief organizers to the men kicking cargo out of the planes – had worked for the CIA. Eugene Hasenfus, the cargo handler who was captured after the October 5 crash, flew missions for the CIA-owned airline Air America during the Indochina War. So did William Cooper, the pilot killed in the crash.

Documents on the plane led to other CIA connections. In February Wallace Blaine Sawyer Jr., the co-pilot killed when the plane was shot down, flew cargo planes to a U.S.-built airstrip in Honduras for a Miami company called Southern Air Transport. Southern Air was owned by the CIA until 1973. Over the past three years – as the Contra aid network evolved – Southern Air emerged as a leading Pentagon contractor transporting military equipment to Central America and elsewhere. Southern Air’s address was also used by a mysterious firm, Corporate Air Services, when it purchased the cargo plane that was shot down.

The former CIA operatives involved in the Contra air resupply network worked out of El Salvador’s Ilopango military airfield. Senior Salvadoran officials say the air base would not be available for such operations without high-level U.S. approval. These former operatives also carried credentials from the Salvadoran armed forces, identifying them as U.S. military advisers.

Hasenfus, now on trial in Nicaragua, says the supply operation was directed by two Cuban-Americans. Both, he said, worked for the CIA. One of them was named Felix Rodriguez, and also known as Max Gomez. According to a report prepared by a private arms dealer involved in the aid network, Rodriguez/Gomez was placed at Ilopango airfield by Donald Gregg, a senior aide to Vice President Bush, and by Nestor Sanchez, a top Pentagon official responsible for Central American military aid programs. Gregg and Sanchez have held senior-level jobs at the CIA, and Bush was the director of the agency in 1976.

But the connections go deeper still, ultimately tying in to a White House program started in early 1984 to keep Contra aid alive despite fierce congressional opposition. Senior White House officials, facing a congressional aid cutoff, prepared plans to establish a “private aid” network. This more covert operation would replace the CIA in training, arming, and directing the Contra rebels in their war against the leftist Sandinista government.

The initial “private aid” plan was drafted by Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, a National Security Council deputy director for political-military affairs, according to administration officials involved in the program. After discussion of North’s three-page memo by senior NSC staff officers, then-NSC adviser Robert McFarlane presented it orally to the president. The officials said Reagan approved the operation.

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North, working with Pentagon, State Department, and other White House officials, implemented the plan. He called upon former covert intelligence officers to handle the operational side of the program, according to U.S. officials and Contra leaders. The White House recruited retired Army Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, whose intelligence background dates back to World War II and the CIA’s forerunner, the OSS. Singlaub organized fundraising for the Contras and provided military advice.

Singlaub acknowledges clearing his actions with North and meeting frequently with CIA Director William J. Casey to discuss the operation. Singlaub said he had an arrangement with North “like in the military” when a junior officer would tell a superior what he planned to do. North’s silence was regarded as affirmative approval. Two former intelligence officers described the Contra support program as a “classic” covert operation with deniability built in for the White House at every level.

Singlaub, through his leadership of the World Anti-Communist League, traveled extensively to solicit aid for the Contras from right-wing organizations and governments receiving U.S. military assistance. One senior White House official who participated in the discussions said the “big three” countries expected to provide substantial aid were South Korea, Taiwan, and Israel. Sources close to Singlaub said sizable donations came from businessmen close to the governments of South Korea and Taiwan, the nations that founded WACL in the 1960s. Singlaub also became involved, through brokers in Europe, with Israeli sales to the Contras of weapons and ammunition captured from the PLO during Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Over time, other former CIA operatives were put in key operational positions in support of the Contras. Bay of Pigs veteran Rodriguez/Gomez, who according to Hasenfus was in charge of the Contra air resupply operation, was a CIA adviser to the Bolivian armed forces when they captured and killed Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara in 1967. Hasenfus said the other Cuban-American

CIA agent directing the Contra air wing was named Ramon Medina. Based on a photograph shown him by Sandinista officials, Hasenfus later identified Medina as Luis Posada Carriles, a veteran of CIA anti-Castro operations in the 1960s. Posada Carriles is now a fugitive wanted in Venezuela on charges that he helped plan the October 1976 midair bombing of a Cubana airliner with 73 people aboard, including the Cuban national fencing team. A U.S. official subsequently confirmed that Medina was Posada Carriles.

It is still not precisely clear how much day-to-day direction the resupply operation received from administration officials. Salvadoran telephone bills from a safe house used by Rodriguez/Gomez show repeated calls in September to North's private lines at the National Security Council. North, through a spokesman, responded that he never knowingly received calls from the safe house. Other calls went to Stanford Technology Trading Inc., a firm outside Washington run by retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord. The former general, who helped negotiate the sale of AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia, reportedly acted as an intermediary for gaining Saudi financial support for the Contras. Secord denies the allegation.

The "private" network did succeed in keeping covert American aid flowing to the Contras while the administration pressured Congress to resume funding of the Contras. (Congress reluctantly agreed to provide \$27 million in nonlethal aid in 1985, and then approved \$100 million in military and other aid last month.) One retired senior CIA official, though, said the Contra aid network had spun "out of control" and could end up resurrecting deep public distrust of the CIA. He said the operation's lack of accountability contributed to reported widespread corruption and even narcotics trafficking.

In early 1984, the Reagan administration was faced with the stark choice: either bow to congressional demands to halt U.S. aid to the Contras or devise some way to circumvent the legal restrictions.

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The administration had long chafed under the legal requirement to keep the House and Senate intelligence committees fully informed about covert activities. CIA officials complained that the committees leaked sensitive information and obstructed operations. Congress, in turn, complained that the CIA had consistently misled the oversight panels as to the goals and actions of the Contra program. The administration had justified the Contra operation as a way to interdict weapons smuggled to leftist Salvadoran guerrillas by the

Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But Congress soon suspected the objective was much more ambitious and barred the CIA from trying to overthrow the Sandinista government.

The tension between Congress and the executive branch erupted into a full-scale confrontation in early 1984 when the oversight committees learned belatedly that the CIA had directed the mining of Nicaragua's harbors and then told the Contras to claim public credit for the operations. The mining controversy led to the cutoff of CIA aid in the spring of 1984. Congress approved an amendment sponsored by Representative Edward Boland of Massachusetts banning outright all U.S. military assistance to the Contras beginning in October 1984. The ban – after the CIA had spent an estimated \$80 million – prohibited the CIA, the Pentagon, or any other entity of the U.S. government involved in intelligence from “directly or indirectly” aiding the Contras militarily.

Although many in Congress believed the Boland Amendment was so tightly written that the administration would be forced to the sidelines, Oliver North had already made clear to the rebels that U.S. assistance would continue. Edgar Chamorro, then one of eight directors of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), the largest rebel army, said that in early 1984, North assured the FDN “of continued United States government support, notwithstanding the refusal of Congress to appropriate more funds.” Chamorro made his statement in a sworn affidavit given to the World Court after Nicaragua accused the United States of violating international law. In January 1985, two close associates of North quoted him as saying, “If it weren't for those liberals in Congress, we wouldn't be doing half of what we do illegally.”

Operating at the edges of the law, White House officials used “cutouts,” or intermediaries, to insulate themselves from direct contact with some covert operatives. One conservative activist who played that role was Robert W. Owen. Although not on the government payroll, Owen worked out of North's office in late 1984 and served as his liaison to the Contras. In the fall of 1985, Owen's personal consulting firm was given a \$50,000 contract with the State Department office administering the \$27 million in “humanitarian” aid to the rebels.

One prominent rebel official said Owen “represented North” as almost “a proconsul” to Contra leaders. A well-placed U.S. government official said Owen acted as North's go-between to the rebels and sat in on military-related meetings that North “considered risky” in terms of the Boland Amendment.

Owen, for example, helped organize Nicaraguan Indian military operations in Honduras in late 1984 and early 1985, and tried to establish a 200-man force in Costa Rica in early 1985, according to Contra and American sources.

Teofilo Archibald Wilson, a leader of Nicaraguan Indians fighting the Sandinistas, described how the Owen-North connection worked. Wilson met with North in June 1985 to complain that the FDN had refused to share promised military supplies. Wilson said North agreed to “solve the problem” and told the Indian leaders to go to Miami, where they would be contacted. Wilson said that several days later, Owen arrived in Miami to discuss the situation further and give the Indians cash to pay for their rooms. Upon their return to Honduras, Wilson and two other Indian leaders said the CIA station chief brokered an agreement that brought two planeloads of ammunition.

Owen also collaborated with John Hull, an American who owns a farm in northern Costa Rica and whom several rebel officials have identified as a CIA asset working with the rebels. Jack Terrell, then the field commander of a pro-Contra group called Civilian Military Assistance (CMA), said he met Owen and Hull at a hotel room in Houston in December 1984. Terrell said that Hull identified himself as the liaison between the CIA and the rebels, and that Owen called himself “a liaison officer for a government agency that had a vested interest in this meeting.”

Terrell said Owen and Hull sought CMA’s help in organizing a Costa Rican front for the Honduran-based FDN and discussed the number of American volunteer trainers needed. Owen cautioned that the Americans could not be seen as entering Costa Rica to train Contras. Terrell said he called FDN leader Adolfo Calero, who stressed the importance of describing the plan exactly to Owen so he could relay the information back to Washington.

A month later, at President Reagan’s second inaugural in Washington, CMA founder Tom Posey and a former U.S. official met with Owen. They said Owen described himself as representing North. They said Owen urged CMA to postpone a planned operation in Honduras and instead assist the FDN open a military front in Costa Rica. CMA agreed to send a training team to Costa Rica to help build a “southern front,” long a dream of CIA strategists seeking to squeeze Nicaragua from north and south.

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The Reagan administration has never acknowledged any violation of the congressional ban, but neither has it offered a comprehensive explanation of its

contacts with the “private aid” network. One White House official, speaking for the administration but insisting on anonymity, denied any wrongdoing, but added that it was “quite possible that Reagan and McFarlane discussed how to help” the Contras in the face of the cutoff. In response to one inquiry from the House Intelligence Committee, McFarlane wrote on September 5, 1985, that no one on the NSC staff had violated “the letter or spirit of the law.”

But the hidden U.S. government role underscores a key fact of the Contra war since it started in 1981: its success hinged on outside training and often direct U.S. control. Early expectations at the CIA that the Contras could oust the Sandinistas by the end of 1983 were dashed when the FDN proved unable to hold any territory or win significant popular support inside Nicaragua. The frustration led to a meeting in mid-1983 in Honduras, chaired by CIA Director Casey. After the meeting, the CIA assumed direct responsibility for a series of port raids, including the destruction of oil reserves at the Pacific port of Corinto, and later for the mining of Nicaragua’s harbors.

On January 5, 1984, at the town of Potosi, and at San Juan del Sur on March 7, 1984, American CIA personnel flying Hughes 500 helicopters exchanged fire with Sandinista forces, government sources said. One intelligence official said the Potosi attack was ordered by a CIA officer out of frustration that Nicaraguan pilots could not do the job.

Hasenfus offered a similar explanation for creation of the air resupply operation. In an interview in a prison outside Managua, he said the Contras, who also own a small fleet of planes, did not have the pilots or aircraft to carry out effective air drops. “Let’s just say our flights hit the target,” Hasenfus said. The original plan, he said, was to buy supply planes, train the Contras to use them, and then sell the aircraft to the Contras. But Hasenfus said that “just never materialized,” and “all of a sudden they needed flights and the flights started to go” with American pilots and crews.

Although the October 5 plane crash brought to light many new details of the Contra aid network, one area that is still unclear is where the funding came from after Congress cut off aid. One U.S. government official involved in the program recently estimated that no more than \$17 million was channeled to the Contras through private groups. Yet other officials estimate the cost of sustaining the Contra war at between \$100 million and \$200 million. One possible explanation is that the Contras had access to a variety of funding sources, many originating with or arranged by the United States.

Earlier this year the General Accounting Office concluded that more than half of the \$27 million in non-lethal assistance approved by Congress last year for the Contras could not be tracked. Records of bank accounts used by brokers for the funds revealed that millions of dollars were transferred into offshore bank accounts, paid to the Honduran military, or given to Miami brokers who worked closely with the Contras. A draft GAO audit has also concluded that \$15,000 earmarked for purchase of clothes for Indian rebels based in Costa Rica was diverted to buy ammunition.

One U.S. official involved in the Contra program also said that the diversion of U.S. Economic Support Funds (ESF) through El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Israel was vital to financing the secret war. One American arms dealer who has sold weapons to the Contras said some arms were purchased with “black money,” a term for CIA funds that are concealed in padded U.S. military contracts.

Other evidence points to the rebel forces using profits from drug trafficking to pay for the war. One U.S. intelligence report claimed that \$250,000 from cocaine smuggling was used to buy a helicopter and other military equipment for troops loyal to Eden Pastora, a leader of the Costa Rican-based force Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (ARDE). American law enforcement officials have said other Contra organizations operating in northern Costa Rica, including the FDN, engaged in drug trafficking, often with Cuban-Americans from Miami.

But on October 18 the Contras’ money problems eased considerably. President Reagan signed into law the congressional authorization for the \$100 million aid package. Two years after Congress banned aid and two weeks after Eugene Hasenfus parachuted out of the fiery plane, U.S. military aid to the Contras was legal once again.

The Reagan administration’s support for the Contras relied on creative interpretations of legal restrictions placed on the CIA’s activities, combined with a healthy dose of “plausible deniability” that shielded officials from accountability. In this article, Parry explains how the CIA parsed concepts such as “political support,” “intelligence sharing,” and “military aid,” all while building buffers between the agency and private networks that clandestinely armed the Nicaraguan rebels.

## [How the CIA Went Wrong \(March 2, 1987\)](#)

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Originally published in *Newsweek*

The CIA's Central American task force chief, Alan Fiers, had good news for his station chiefs when they gathered secretly in Miami in the autumn of 1985. After a year of being handcuffed by Congress, effectively preventing the agency's operatives from providing military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, the group was told that restrictions had been eased slightly.

"Intelligence sharing" between the agency and the rebels would now be permitted, they were told. To Congress, which had loosened the law that October at White House request, the change seemed modest enough. But for the CIA, *Newsweek* has learned, it became a loophole large enough to fly cargo planes through. In fact, this small change was taken by the CIA as license for its operatives to aid Oliver North and his private supply network.

At his confirmation hearings last week, Robert M. Gates, the president's nominee to become CIA director in place of the ailing William Casey, testified that the agency had "tried to build in a buffer" between itself and private efforts to aid the Contras. The agency had not wanted to even know how the Contras were getting arms, much less help them, said Gates, a professional intelligence analyst who had risen through the ranks to become the agency's deputy director last year. The evidence, however, indicates that at least several top CIA officials on the covert side of the agency were determined to ignore the buffer, and they apparently took their lead from the top.

Sources say that North kept CIA Director Casey well informed about efforts to funnel arms to the Contras. And one well-placed official added that North talked about his activities once or twice a day with Clair George, a Casey deputy who headed the agency's clandestine operations. The spy agency also continued to funnel millions of dollars into the Contras' "political projects," picked up Contra salaries, financed foreign trips by Contra leaders and paid for "security" at rebel offices.

**Military needs:** The CIA apparently regarded all this activity as "political" support for the Contras, not banned by congressional restrictions on military aid. Harder to explain away is the evidence that some CIA officers worked closely with North on channeling not just dollars but weapons to the Contras. From Costa Rica, the agency's station chief, who goes by the name of Tomas Castillo, communicated with North about Contra military needs and the timing of airdrops, intelligence sources say. Initially, the CIA cleared Castillo of wrongdoing. But when North's files showed the station chief to be the main



conduit for arms-related messages, Castillo admitted that he had withheld information and the CIA was forced to oust him.

Some skeptics wonder whether Castillo was simply the scapegoat. According to one knowledgeable source, Castillo's actions were approved at the Miami meeting by Fiers and George. Fiers reportedly told Castillo and other CIA station chiefs that changes in the congressional ban permitted them to "pass messages and facilitate contact between Ollie [North] and the private people" who were involved in providing military supplies to the Contras. The source said the CIA station chief in El Salvador balked at that interpretation of the law, but Costa Rican operative Castillo agreed after clearing the arrangement with George.

The CIA has heatedly disputed the allegations against George and the Nicaragua task force chief. CIA spokesman George Lauder said, "There's no basis for stating that either [official] authorized any activities contrary to the ban on U.S. military assistance." But in preparing for his confirmation hearings, Acting Director Gates ordered a new internal probe of the CIA's compliance with the directive, demanding what one source called "a full and complete record" from agency personnel on what they had done.

Massachusetts Senator John Kerry initiated a subcommittee investigation into Contra drug trafficking in 1986, and over two years of hearings uncovered many important details of the operation. In this article, Parry explains an outfit called the Arms Supermarket and the possible role of then-Vice President George Bush's office in a guns-for-drugs scheme, which had become the focus of Kerry's investigation in spring 1988.

## [Guns for Drugs? \(May 23, 1988\)](#)

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Originally published in *Newsweek*, with reporting by Rod Nordland

From the outside, they are three anonymous warehouses in San Pedro Sula, the steamy industrial capital of Honduras. Inside, they are stacked high with cases of weapons from the East bloc – \$20 million worth, by one estimate, originally destined for the Nicaraguan Contras. That's what remains of an enterprise called the Arms Supermarket, and it is generating new and potentially damaging questions about the role of Vice President George Bush and his staff in keeping the Contras supplied during the congressional aid cutbacks of 1984-86, before Oliver North set up the Iran-Contra connection. The Arms Supermarket was an unlikely partnership involving longtime CIA arms merchants, agents of the Israeli Mossad secret service and the intelligence arm of the Honduran military.

And according to government documents and high-level administration officials, it was financed at least in part with drug money.

The Vice President has repeatedly denied that he knew anything about the Contra resupply efforts until late 1986, after the scandal became public. Bush's national security adviser, Donald Gregg, has said he didn't find out until August 1986, and even then, he kept Bush in the dark because the matter was "not vice presidential." But there are discrepancies and unexplained entries in government records that cast doubt on both denials. Gregg told *Newsweek* he "had no operational role [in Central America] at all," but he was in frequent contact – at times almost daily – with Felix Rodriguez, the former CIA agent who kept tabs on the resupply efforts in El Salvador for North and the NSC staff in Washington. Rodriguez was a close friend of Mario Delamico, a principal in the Arms Supermarket. *Newsweek* has obtained a report, prepared for North by a private arms broker in 1986, warning bluntly that disclosure of "covert black money" flowing into Honduras to fund military projects "could damage Vice President Bush."

**Contact man:** A Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, headed by Massachusetts Democrat John Kerry, has been looking into the operation for several weeks. Its investigators are also evaluating a sworn deposition from an Oregon businessman who has done work for both Mossad and the CIA and who makes even more damaging charges about Gregg and the Arms Supermarket. The former agent, Richard J. Brenneke, an arms dealer with connections in the Soviet bloc, told the committee that Gregg was actually the Washington contact for the supply operation. He also says the Medellin cocaine cartel put up financing for the operation, used its planes to fly arms to the Contras and then used the same planes to fly some of its drug shipments from Colombia to the United States.

Brenneke says he flew with one such shipment to Amarillo, Texas, in mid-1985 and then tried to tell Gregg what was going on – only to be told: "You do what you were assigned to do. Don't question the decisions of your betters." Gregg denies that he ever talked to Brenneke, picturing him as a shady operator who once tried to get Bush to approve an arms deal with Iran. Committee staffers say they have confirmed part of Brenneke's story from another ex-Mossad agent and from former Panamanian consul Jose Blandon, but they are still assessing Brenneke's credibility.

*Newsweek* has pieced together the origins of the murky operation from high-level government sources, the Iran-Contra record and the committee's investigation. Late in 1983, with the cutoff of funds for the Contras looming, unnamed officials in the Reagan administration were looking for alternatives. It was natural to turn to Israel, which had been helping to arm Guatemala after human-rights abuses made that government ineligible for direct U.S. aid. The Israelis agreed to be middlemen if someone else would put up the money.

Brenneke told the committee and *Newsweek* that the Israeli network was run by Michael Harari, a former Mossad agent who had become a close friend and adviser to the Panamanian strongman, Gen. Manuel Noriega. He said Pesakh Ben-Or, who he said was Mossad's Guatemala station chief, recruited him and William Northrop, a supposed Mossad agent who is under federal indictment in an alleged plot to smuggle arms to Iran. Northrop has also talked to Kerry's investigators.

**Noriega's cut:** As Brenneke recounted his deposition, which Kerry has not released, he asked the Israelis for proof that this unlikely scheme was really approved by the U.S. government, and they gave him Gregg's phone number. He said Gregg reassured him and he started buying arms in Eastern Europe. Some flights had to stop over in Panama, and Bandon and Brenneke said Harari advised Noriega to cooperate with the network, to get added leverage with Washington. Brenneke and Bandon say the cartel volunteered to finance the arms deal, believing that would safeguard its drug flights to the United States. Noriega granted transit privileges for the flights and took his cut of the profits, Bandon has testified at Kerry's hearings.

The accusers have their own axes to grind, and the investigators are still looking for proof. But if the basic story is true, the question is, how much did U.S. officials know about the operation, and when did they learn it? Could they have been duped by the cartel? Among the facts and discrepancies that have turned up so far:

- Oliver North made frequent reference to the Arms Supermarket in his personal notebooks. An entry for July 12, 1985, recently released by the Iran-Contra joint committee, reads: "[White House deletion] plans to seize all ... w Supermarket comes to a bad end. \$14 M[illion] to finance came from dru This knowledge may have prompted North to create a new supply network financed with profits from the Iran arms deal and headed by retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord. Rodriguez, however, was involved with both groups

He insists that he did nothing wrong and says Kerry “is just playing politics dragging out these wild charges.”

- On Sept. 10, 1985, North’s notebook records a meeting with Gregg and James Steele, chief of the U.S. military advisory group in El Salvador discuss, among other topics, “log[istical] support” for the Contras. The specifically refers to Mario Delamico arranging arms shipments to the Contras. Gregg has testified, “I don’t think that meeting ever took place.”
- In May 1986 Bush met with Gregg and Rodriguez. Gregg’s deputy, Col. Sam Watson, prepared two memos to set up the meeting. Both said Rodriguez would brief Bush on “the status of the war in El Salvador and resupply of the Contras. Since neither Bush nor Gregg admits knowing anything about Contra supply until months later, it was a hard phrase to explain. Gregg said simply that he was “baffled as to how that agenda item appears.”
- A high-level government official told *Newsweek* that early in 1987 Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams and CIA officer Alan Fiers told the House and Senate intelligence committees that the Arms Supermarket was believed to have been financed with drug money. That was more than a year after Brenneke had told Gregg and after North referred to the drug financing in his notes. As late as June 1986, North noted a need to “pay off” Ronald Martin and James McCoy, said to be the Supermarket’s principal partners.
- Rodriguez insists that despite his frequent talks with Gregg, an old CIA buddy and one of his best friends, he never mentioned his work with the Contras until Aug. 8, 1986. By then the Supermarket had been phased out, with \$20 million of arms sitting unsold in its warehouses – and Rodriguez told Gregg and Watson that the Secord operation was corrupt, “a bunch of crooks.” This was an intelligence staff operation, and Bush was a member of the council. But Gregg says he did not tell his boss. When one of Secord’s planes was shot down over Nicaragua, resulting in the capture of the hapless Eugene Hasenfus, the operation was blown. And the first man in Washington to hear the news was Watson. Rodriguez telephoned Bush’s office first. Even then, Gregg and Watson they didn’t tell Bush what had happened.

Bush has also said that until recently he was not aware of Noriega’s drug involvement. The *New York Times* reported that a former U.S. ambassador to Panama, Everett E. Briggs, briefed Bush on the subject in December 1985. Briggs denied that, saying he had no evidence at the time, and Bush amended his position to say he had no proof. Last week the *Times* found three officials

who said Briggs had told a House committee of the charges against Noriega less than three weeks after his talk with Bush.

Bush's office said last week that Brenneke's story was "just rumors and the same old regurgitated stories we thought we'd put to rest long ago." But there were more than enough open questions to plague Bush. Bandon has testified to Kerry's committee that Noriega boasted to him that he knew things that "could affect the elections of the United States," and Noriega's former sidekick, Col. Roberto Diaz Herrera, put that more bluntly to *Newsweek*: Noriega told him, he said, that "I have Bush by the balls." In the vocabulary of the spook shop he once headed, Bush still has deniability on the Contra connection. Whether it is plausible is another matter – one that will surely come up in the fall campaign.

In an effort to sell the Reagan administration's Central American policies to the American people, a "public diplomacy" apparatus was set up that flirted with violating legal prohibitions on the CIA conducting domestic propaganda operations, as Parry explains here with Peter Kornbluh.

## [Reagan's Pro-Contra Propaganda Machine \(Sept. 4, 1988\)](#)

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Originally published in the *Washington Post*, co-written with Peter Kornbluh

As the Iran-Contra Affair moves onto the dusty library shelf of history, one of its most troubling stories remains untold. To a degree little understood even by the congressional investigating committees, the Reagan administration attempted to manipulate American views of the war in Nicaragua through an unprecedented, covert propaganda bureaucracy.

The apparatus was coordinated by the National Security Council staff, used CIA experts and Army psychological-warfare specialists and worked to intimidate or discredit those who stood in the way of military aid for the Contras. Ultimately, the campaign came to resemble the sort of covert political operation the CIA runs against hostile forces overseas but is outlawed from conducting at home.

The Iran-Contra committee unearthed hundreds of pages of documents about the domestic propaganda operation and took depositions from many of the principals. House investigators even drafted a chapter about the domestic side of the scandal for the Iran-Contra report. But Senate members of the panel block edits inclusion in the final report, arguing that the issue fell outside the committee's mandate.

The explosive conclusion of that draft chapter was that the administration's covert propaganda operation had used "one of the CIA's most senior specialists, sent to the NSC by Bill Casey, to create and coordinate an inter-agency public-diplomacy mechanism. [This network] did what a covert CIA operation in a foreign country might do – [it] attempted to manipulate the media, the Congress and public opinion to support the Reagan administration's policies."

The troubling aspects of the domestic propaganda operation include:

### **A CIA link**

Iran-Contra documents show that the propaganda campaign's chief architects were the late CIA director William J. Casey and Walter Raymond Jr., a veteran of CIA clandestine media operations overseas. In 1982, Casey detailed Raymond to the NSC staff where he set up the "public-diplomacy" machinery. One U.S. official described Raymond in an interview as the CIA's leading propaganda expert; Raymond told congressional investigators he was recommended for the NSC staff by another CIA veteran, Donald Gregg, national security adviser to Vice President George Bush.

One senior NSC official acknowledged in an interview that the public-diplomacy apparatus was modeled after CIA covert operations overseas. "They were trying to manipulate [U.S.] public opinion ... using the tools of Walt Raymond's tradecraft which he learned from his career in the CIA covert-operation shop," the official said. To sidestep legal bars on CIA domestic activities, Raymond retired from the CIA in April 1983 so that, as he said in his deposition for the Iran-Contra committee, "there would be no contamination of this."

### **Psy-war specialists**

To staff the State Department public-diplomacy office on Central America, the administration recruited Defense Department personnel with propaganda training. One high-level operative, Lt. Col. Daniel "Jake" Jacobowitz, had a "background in psychological warfare," a senior public-diplomacy official, Jonathan Miller, told the Iran-Contra committee. The office drew five other psy-war specialists from the 4<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Group at Fort Bragg, N.C. One was assigned to find "exploitable themes and trends," Jacobowitz wrote in a May 30, 1985 internal memo. The military men worked in the State Department office for stints ranging from several months to about a year.

According to military doctrine, psychological operations identify cultural and political weaknesses in a target country that can be exploited to induce the population to comply, whether consciously or not, with those carrying out the psy-op.

Both Raymond and the man he picked to run the State Department public-diplomacy office, Otto Reich, have denied any impropriety in the operation of the public-diplomacy campaign, calling it a legitimate means to inform the American public about the conflict in Central America.

### **Casey's role**

Despite bars on CIA domestic operations, Casey appears to have been the guiding hand behind the propaganda campaign, as he was behind the Contra war and North's secret Contra-resupply network. As the public-diplomacy apparatus took shape in August 1983, Casey summoned advertising specialists to the Old Executive Office Building to brainstorm about how "to sell a 'new product' – Central America – by generating interest across-the-spectrum," according to an NSC summary of the meeting. Sensitive to the bars on executive-branch propaganda and Casey's participation, Raymond noted in one August 1983 memo that "the work done within the administration has to, by definition, be at arm's length. "Raymond added that he hoped "to get [Casey] out of the loop." Yet Casey remained active through 1986.

### **North's role**

The ubiquitous Oliver North served Casey and Raymond as a chief operational officer for propaganda while he was also running the secret Contra resupply. North's calendars show some 70 public-diplomacy strategy sessions scheduled with Raymond between 1984 and 1986 – although Raymond insists that North was "not a regular attendee" at those meetings.

In a 14-page memo dated March 20, 1985, North informed then national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane about more than 80 planned publicity events to influence public and congressional opinion for the upcoming Contra-aid vote. North then said that "other activities in the region continue as planned – including military operations and political action. Like the chronology, these events are also timed to influence the vote [such as] special-operations attacks against highly visible targets in Nicaragua ... You should also be aware that Director Casey has sent a personal note to [then White House chief of staff] Don Regan on the timing matter [of the vote]."

North's hand also appeared in some of the more dramatic White House publicity stunts to promote the Contra cause. In 1984, for instance, North oversaw a "sting" operation that involved flying a shipment of cocaine into Nicaragua, photographing a little-known Sandinista official with the drugs and then transporting the load to Florida. Although Reagan seized on the case as proof the Sandinistas were poisoning America's youth, DEA officials later acknowledged that they had no evidence of drug-running by any other Nicaraguan government official.

Ex-Panamanian consul Jose Blandon testified before a Senate Foreign Relations panel that in 1986 Panama's Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega said he had planned with North to plant a shipment of East-bloc weapons in El Salvador, where it was to be intercepted as the long-missing proof of Sandinista gun-running to the Salvadoran guerrillas. The "proof" was to be discovered right before a key congressional vote resuming Contra military aid. But Blandon said the plan went awry when the general, angered by U.S. press disclosures about his drug trafficking, seized the ship carrying the weapons.

Although other administrations have routinely attempted, in former secretary of state Dean Acheson's words, to "spin a story clearer than truth," President Reagan created an unusually aggressive peacetime propaganda campaign. By running the operation from the NSC – as would later be the case with North's Contra resupply efforts – the administration was able to employ CIA specialists while sidestepping restrictions on the CIA. Reagan's own Executive Order 12333 bars the CIA from activities "intended to influence United States political processes, public opinion ... or media."

The "public-diplomacy" bureaucracy took shape in secret in early 1983, as the White House sought a means to amplify its foreign-policy themes. Reagan formally authorized its creation in January 1983 by signing National Security Decision Directive 77, entitled "Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security." A special planning group was created within the NSC to direct public-diplomacy campaigns at home and abroad.

In a Jan. 25, 1983 planning memo to then national security adviser William Clark, Raymond expounded on the need for this "new art form" in foreign policy. "It is essential that a serious and deep commitment of talent and time be dedicated to this," he argued. "Programs such as Central America, European strategic debate, Yellow Rain and even Afghanistan have foundered by a failure to orchestrate sufficient resources and forces [for] these efforts."



The propaganda operation's goal for Central America was to paint the Contras – in Reagan's famous phrases – as “the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers” and Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as “a totalitarian dungeon.” This did not merely reflect Reagan's fondness for simplistic explanations; it was an explicit propaganda strategy. In a July 1986 memo that could be a summary for the entire campaign, Raymond said, “in the specific case of Nica[ragua], concentrate on gluing black hats on the Sandinistas and white hats on UNO [the Contras' United Nicaraguan Opposition].”

In a war fought on both sides by “gray hats,” the strategy meant distorting the factual record by exaggerating Sandinista offenses while concealing those of the Contras. Journalists, human-rights investigators, law-enforcement officials and members of Congress who uncovered the facts thus threatened the desired public relations image.

The administration's penchant for exaggerating and distorting the factual case in Central America dates back to its earliest days. In February 1981, it issued a “white paper” describing the leftist Salvadoran insurgency as a “textbook case of indirect armed aggression by communist powers through Cuba.” Only later, after journalists examined the supporting documents, did the public find out how flimsy the administration's evidence was. In a *Wall Street Journal* interview, the report's author conceded that the white paper had included “guesses” and “extrapolation” and that critical parts were “misleading” and “overembellished.”

As the administration's focus shifted to Nicaragua, so did the pattern of distortion, sometimes using carefully calibrated campaigns to exploit the fears of everyday Americans.

In one case in 1983, former Contra director Edgar Chamorro said CIA officers targeted the American Jewish community by fashioning a propaganda drive accusing the Sandinistas of anti-Semitism because much of the small Jewish community had fled Nicaragua after the 1979 revolution. Reagan and other senior officials often have repeated this allegation since then, despite a July 28, 1983 classified cable from the U.S. embassy in Managua reporting that there was “no verifiable ground” to make the anti-Semitism charge. The Nicaraguan Jews who left had been associated personally with the ousted dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle, according to the cable.

When the administration found through pollster Richard Wirthlin's opinion surveys in 1983 that Americans feared an influx of Latin American refugees, it

argued that only by crushing leftist movements could such a flood be stopped. Reagan promptly raised the issue in a June 1983 speech, warning that unless a tough stand was taken, a “tidal wave” of “feet people” would be “swarming into our country.”

The administration became so obsessed with manipulating public and congressional opinion that the Contra war itself became part of the propaganda game. To conceal the Contras’ military ineffectiveness in 1983 and early 1984, Casey ordered a series of CIA-run coastal attacks on Nicaragua, including mining its harbors. According to Chamorro, the CIA then instructed Contra leaders to claim credit for the raids. Back in Washington, the public-diplomacy apparatus informed reporters that the attacks proved that the Contras were capable of mounting sophisticated military operations, thus justifying continued CIA support.

The most visible arm of the propaganda machinery was the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, known by the initials S/LPD. The office was directed initially by Raymond’s choice, Reich. It was housed at the State Department but actually reported to the National Security Council, Raymond said in an Aug. 7, 1986 memo for Casey. (Reich and Raymond have since denied that the office “reported” to the NSC. But files obtained by the General Accounting Office show that Reich provided activity reports directly to the president’s national-security adviser, his budgets were cleared by the NSC and Raymond arranged personnel for Reich’s office.)

The office’s principal activity was to produce and disseminate one-sided publications on Nicaragua and El Salvador, while pressuring the press into conformity with administration arguments. But it also planted stories in newspapers while concealing government sponsorship – an intelligence tactic called “white propaganda” – and relied on the skills of Army psychological-warfare specialists to manage the perceptions of the American public, according to a GAO legal opinion.

Called Reich’s “A-Team,” the psy-ops experts were used to “prepare a daily summary of exploitable information for S/LPD use, analyze media trends and highlight areas of possible S/LPD concern, as well as suggest themes and media for use in the S/LPD mission,” according to a March 1985 memo.

S/LPD aggressively monitored American reporting on the region. As Reich reported to Raymond in March 1986, public diplomacy officials took “a very aggressive posture vis-a-vis a sometimes hostile press” and “generally did not

give the critics of the policy any quarter in the debate.” S/LPD report cards boast of having “killed” purportedly “erroneous news stories.” And when stories aired that did not conform with administration views, Reich often met personally with editors and reporters to press for more sympathetic coverage.

After National Public Radio upset S/LPD with a report on a Contra attack, Reich informed NPR editors that he had “a special-consultant service listening to all NPR programs” on Central America and that he considered NPR’s reporting to be biased against U.S. policy, according to NPR’s Bill Buzenberg.

Reich made a similar visit to CBS in April 1984 after Reagan became upset with the network’s news coverage of Central America. In a memo, Secretary of State George Shultz told the president that Reich had spent one hour complaining to the correspondent and two more hours with the Washington bureau chief to point out flaws in the information.” This was but one example of “what the Office of Public Diplomacy has been doing to help improve the quality of information the American people are receiving,” Shultz told the president. “It has been repeated dozens of times over the past few months.”

The office also sought to discredit journalists who didn’t toe the propaganda line. In July 1985, Reich’s office helped spread a scurrilous story from a Sandinista defector that suggested that some American reporters received sexual favors from Sandinista prostitutes in return for favorable reporting. “It isn’t only women,” Reich asserted in an article in the July 29, 1985 issue of *New York* magazine. For gay journalists, Reich contended, the Nicaraguans provided men.

Late last year, Congress quietly shut down S/LPD, making it the only governmental body scrapped in the Iran-Contra scandal. Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.) denounced the office as “an important cog in the administration’s effort to manipulate public opinion and congressional action.” But as one senior public-diplomacy official noted wryly at the time, “they can shut down the public-diplomacy office, but they can’t shut down public diplomacy.”

The use of economic sanctions by the United States has become so prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that it’s virtually impossible to definitively tally the number of countries, companies and individuals that are on the Treasury Department’s blacklist. According to one calculation in 2019,<sup>2</sup> the U.S. had some 8,000 sanctions in place, including restrictions against doing business with individual companies like China’s Huawei and people like Vladimir Putin’s inner circle, but also on entire countries such as Iran, Cuba, and Syria.

While economic sanctions are certainly not a new concept – with the Athenian empire banning traders from Megara from its marketplaces in 432 BCE – it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they started to become a go-to policy option. In this article, Parry explains how Washington learned

their usefulness in achieving desired foreign policy goals, and how the case of Nicaragua would demonstrate that economic sanctions could be seen as an effective alternative to military action – a “compromise” that could easily gain bipartisan support in Congress despite their questionable morality.

## [The Use of Starvation as a Tool of Democracy \(March 25, 1990\)](#)

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Originally published by the LA Times News Service

After the invasion of Panama earlier this year, before the election of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro in Nicaragua, a mid-level contact at the State Department assured me that U.S. policy was not based on military force: “We have to refocus the campaign onto economic issues.”

Although diplomats are sometimes faulted for lacking street savvy, this time they had grasped a fundamental political principle: Given a free choice, people normally vote their pocketbooks. It was an adage as American as apple pie, and on Feb. 25 it was the devastated Nicaraguan economy that spelled the end of the Sandinistas’ decade-long rule.

Voter after voter cited the economy as a principal reason for Chamorro’s resounding victory. Daniel Ortega’s slick television advertisements could not erase the memories of 35,000% hyper-inflation and a drastically declining standard of living. The Sandinistas may have adopted the campaign slogan that “everything will be better” but Chamorro, with her close ties to the United States, could guarantee an end to the tough trade embargo, access to U.S. and foreign capital and cessation of the Contra war. The Sandinistas could only hope.

Largely ignored in the mountains of postelection analysis was this new recognition among American policymakers: If carefully designed and relentlessly enforced, U.S. economic pressures can make a country “cry uncle,” a goal President Ronald Reagan had set for Nicaragua years earlier. It was also proof that nearly two decades after the Central Intelligence Agency had succeeded in destabilizing Marxist President Salvador Allende by making the Chilean economy “scream,” similar tactics could be employed against a leftist, Latin government while winning broad bipartisan support in Congress and in the U.S. press.

Economic sanctions also work outside the hemisphere. In South Africa, even half-hearted pressure contributed to the release of political prisoner Nelson

Mandela and forced other concessions from the white government. Despite South Africa's long-time insistence that anti-apartheid sanctions wouldn't work – a view shared by the Reagan administration – one of President Frederik W. de Klerk's first acts after releasing Mandela was to ask the nations of the world to lift their trade embargoes.

And in Panama, before the application of military force, economic sanctions of military force, economic sanctions played a role in another U.S. policy success. In 1988, President Reagan froze Panamanian assets in the United States and cut off other payments to Panama's once-thriving financial district, leading to a widespread depression. Even with hundreds of Panamanian deaths in last December's invasion, the assault appeared to enjoy strong local backing because Panamanians then expected generous U.S. aid to revive their economy.

Economic sanctions were bypassed in China. There, President George Bush argued that they would only goad the communist Chinese leadership into a more severe crackdown: "I think I know China well enough to know that this isn't the way to do it." But even Bush recently acknowledged that his quiet coaxing had produced little progress.

To proponents of economic sanctions, the message from these disparate examples is clear: Well-designed economic pressures work. "The Nicaragua sanctions will serve as a positive and instructive example of the role that carefully crafted economic and financial sanctions can play in the 1990s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century," said Roger W. Robinson, an architect of that program while a senior adviser on Reagan's National Security Council staff.

As late CIA Director William J. Casey understood, Nicaragua's economic devastation was what would feed the popular discontent that would one day destroy the Sandinistas.

Many of the major Contra attacks hit directly at the country's fragile economic infrastructure. Striking from a "mother ship," the CIA sent specially trained commandos to sabotage Nicaraguan oil facilities in 1983 and mine its harbors in 1984. On the ground, the Contras attacked bridges, electrical towers, farm cooperatives and other economic targets. Responding to the CIA's "low-intensity conflict," the Sandinistas diverted more and more scarce capital to the army – and away from popular social programs such as literacy projects, land reform and expanded medical care. Further, the Sandinistas increased internal repression and worsened their lot through clumsy economic policies.

“We were convinced that a sharp downgrading of the economic situation would mirror the substantial reduction of political freedoms allowed by the Sandinistas,” explained Robinson, now president of a Washington firm. “Over time, that population would be convinced that the yoke of Sandinista leadership simply had to be lifted.”

Robinson said the turning point in economic war against Nicaragua came in 1985 when Reagan even voided existing contracts between American firms and Nicaragua. Reagan’s action required a finding that impoverished Nicaragua and its three million people were “an unusual and extraordinary threat” to U.S. security, a determination reissued every six months for the past four years.

Beyond direct U.S. action – CIA economic sabotage and the trade embargo – Reagan and Bush strategists lobbied against Nicaragua aid requests to European nations and multilateral financial institutions.

A senior State Department official, briefing the U.S. press after the Feb. 25 election, said that in April 1989, Secretary of State James A. Baker III had “burned up the telephone wires” trying to thwart Ortega’s desperate requests for \$250 million in aid from European nations, assistance that the Sandinistas considered vital to salvage their economy. Ortega raised only \$20 million on the trip.

That meant the Sandinistas would head into election day with massive unemployment, cutbacks in services and high inflation. In Robinson’s view, the United States had only given the Sandinistas a push toward demise. “These guys were screwing up anyway, but the economic decline was accelerated and deepened,” he said.

Far from generating complaints from congressional Democrats about U.S. interference in another country’s affairs, the economic warfare against Nicaragua was, in effect, a bipartisan compromise – a way to end the bickering over the Contra shooting war. After Chamorro’s win, some Democrats embraced the economic-political strategy as their idea to begin with. “I think the sanctions did this,” concluded Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), chairman of the House intelligence oversight subcommittee. “I opposed military aid. I said we’d win it another way.”

While liberal Democrats also applauded the Chamorro victory, not all U.S. public figures felt comfortable with a strategy that contributed to widespread hunger and reduced medical care in a poor country. Asked about Robinson’s comments on economic warfare, former House Speaker Jim Wright said, “Isn’t

it amazing that a man would boast about forcing people into serfdom – by deliberately creating hardship and poverty.”

While few of his old colleagues were willing to argue with success, Wright remains troubled. “I’m not sure,” he said, “that you can say the United States can force a country into doing what it wants by starving it to death.”

Originally nominated to become Director of Central Intelligence in early 1987, Robert Gates decided to withdraw his name once it became clear the Senate would reject the nomination due to controversy about his role in the Iran-Contra Affair. Four years later, Gates would get a second chance to head the CIA when President George H.W. Bush nominated him on May 14, 1991, with his confirmation hearings commencing that September.

Despite testimony at the confirmation hearings by former CIA analysts that as deputy director in the 80s Gates had helped proliferate disinformation and intentionally exaggerated the alleged threat posed by the Soviet Union, as well as lingering concerns about his role in the Iran-Contra Affair, Gates was ultimately confirmed by the Senate on November 5. He would later go on to serve as Defense Secretary during the Bush-43 and Obama administrations, helping to perpetuate policies such as the Iraq and Afghanistan “surges” and fueling tensions with Russia by advocating for a missile shield in Eastern Europe which Moscow saw as provocative.

In this article, published a month after his nomination, Parry offered several pertinent questions for the Senate to ask regarding Gates’ dubious record, which had they been aggressively pursued, could have derailed the nomination.

## [Questions About CIA Nominee go Beyond Gates’ Iran-Contra Role \(June 12, 1991\)](#)

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Originally published by the LA Times News Service

When Robert Gates goes before the Senate Intelligence Committee as President Bush’s first nominee to be CIA director, the panel is poised to ask all the wrong questions. The focus is likely to be a warmed-over inquiry into Gates’ foreknowledge of the Iran-Contra scandal.

But many of the committee’s key senators have already expressed a let-by-gones-be-by-gones attitude toward Gates’ misleading testimony from the early days of that scandal. So the Iran-Contra probing is likely to be a yawning formality on the way to an affirmative vote for Gates’ confirmation.

The overriding question should in fact be more basic: Exactly who is Robert Gates and is he the right man to direct the nation’s intelligence services in the post-Cold War era?

Although known as a Soviet analyst from the “clean,” intelligence-assessment side of the Central Intelligence Agency, Gates appears to have ventured much more into policymaking and operations than is publicly known. He has been

linked to the still-mysterious CIA role in Iraqi military shipments during the Reagan administration's "tilt" to Iraq, a policy miscalculation that lasted almost to the day Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

Although it may seem natural for secrecy to surround a career CIA man, the 47-year-old Gates is a mystery even to many of his intelligence colleagues. That is largely because two important periods of his government career were spent at the National Security Council, first from 1974 to 1979 and then as deputy NSC adviser under Bush.

The prematurely white-haired Gates jumped over more seasoned men to head the CIA's analytical division in 1982 before rising to be William Casey's deputy director in 1986. His nomination to succeed Casey, who was dying of a brain tumor in 1987, collapsed because of concerns that Gates had contributed to misleading statements by Casey to Congress.

Gates himself had insisted to the Senate Intelligence Committee in 1986 that the spy agency knew virtually nothing about a secret White House operation to arm the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, even though well-known CIA operatives were managing the program.

As the scandal unfolded, however, Congress would learn that CIA personnel, from senior headquarters officials to agency officers in the field, were actively participating in the supply network. Despite evidence of Gates' dissembling, the who-knew-what-when questions about Iran-Contra are certain to lead nowhere – and shed little new light on the nominee. Instead, he should be pressed on a variety of issues that have drawn less attention than the Iran-Contra Affair. These questions should cover both the analytical and operational sides of Gates' career:

What intelligence activities made Gates such a frequent visitor to the Mideast? As a CIA representative in the NSC in the late 1970s, Gates could have been expected to express strong opinions about the fall of the shah of Iran and President Carter's handling of the Iranian crisis. What were they?

What does Gates know about allegations that Reagan-Bush campaign director Casey and some CIA officers took part in unauthorized meetings with Iranian representatives that might have interfered with Carter administration negotiations to free American hostages in Iran? As an executive assistant to Carter's CIA director Stansfield Turner in 1980, Gates might have valuable insights into that historical mystery.



What information does Gates have about shipments of U.S. weapons to Iran during the early 1980s after President Reagan took office? Retained by Casey as an executive assistant, Gates might have seen evidence about the source of these still-secret shipments. Recently, senior State Department officials have confirmed that the Reagan administration approved the shipments without notifying Congress.

What was Gates' stand on Casey's supposed efforts to politicize the CIA's analytical product? During the early 1980s, senior CIA analysts quit the intelligence directorate in protest against Casey's attempts to compel more hardline analyses about world events. As the director of the analytical section, beginning in 1982, what did Gates do to defend his analysts?

What role did Gates play in the woefully off-target analysis of the Soviet economy? One of the most serious intelligence failures in recent decades was the CIA's gross overestimate of Soviet economic strength. The consequences of the erroneous CIA assessment have been catastrophic. For one, a more accurate analysis could have saved the nation billions of dollars on defense spending.

Has Gates altered his outdated view that the Soviet Union has not significantly changed? As one of the leading anti-Soviet hardliners, Gates has refused to recognize the world's new realities almost as stubbornly as some earlier CIA officials insisted that the Sino-Soviet split was just a trick. Gates' hidebound lack of foresight does not speak well for his future leadership of the CIA.

Did Gates assist Casey's tilt to Iraq, which resulted in the misguided policy that armed Saddam Hussein with sophisticated weaponry?

In short, Robert Gates remains a mysterious figure. His is a crucial nomination that deserves more than a cursory examination. The American people have a right to know precisely whom President Bush wants to install at the head of the nation's secret intelligence service, an agency that has proved over and over again that it doesn't like to play by the rules of democracy.

Rumors that the Reagan campaign interfered with President Carter's efforts to release 52 American hostages held in Iran date all the way back to 1980. The speculation over a Republican gambit to block a so-called October Surprise of a resolution of the hostage crisis on the eve of Election 1980 was bolstered by the suspicious timing of the hostages' release – freed from captivity just moments after Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President on Jan. 20, 1981.

The suspicions continued to dog the GOP for the next decade and in 1992, a congressional investigation was authorized to look into the allegations. In this article, Parry examines the available evidence for the so-called October Surprise Mystery as it stood in late 1992.

## The Looking-Glass ‘Surprise’ (Dec. 6, 1992)

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Originally published in the *Washington Post*

For nearly three decades America has been divided into two camps – those who see conspiracy theories as a way to explain history and those who ridicule them as paranoid fantasies; those who buy the Official Story and those who don’t.

This “conspiracy/not” split dates at least back to the Kennedy assassination. It widened during the Vietnam and Watergate eras and became a chasm in the 1980s and early ‘90s. At the end of 12 years in power, the Reagan-Bush presidencies are leaving behind a mass of sometimes intersecting scandals: Iran-Contra, Iraqgate, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International and Banco Nazionale Lavoro. In conspiracy circles there is dark talk of an “octopus” theory pulling all the scandals into one, while the custodians of Washington’s “conventional wisdom” attack the rise of conspiratorial thinking as ludicrous and irresponsible. The verbal combat between these competing worldviews has been especially sharp over the so-called “October Surprise” theory.

The October Surprise holds that the Reagan-Bush campaign of 1980, primarily in the person of its chairman, William Casey, interfered with President Carter’s negotiations to free American hostages held in Iran so as to prevent an 11<sup>th</sup>-hour release that would enable embattled incumbent Jimmy Carter to win the election.

Despite near-unanimous Republican opposition, congressional leaders authorized investigations by the full House and by a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee. A preliminary report by the Senate investigator, Reid Weingarten, was released last month, tentatively concluding that no credible evidence existed that the Reagan-Bush campaign engineered a deal to delay the release of the hostages. But the report criticized Casey for “fishing in troubled waters and conducting informal, clandestine and potentially dangerous efforts” to gather intelligence on the hostage talks.

Though little noticed at the time, the October Surprise scenario was first aired in 1980 when Iran’s acting foreign minister, Sadeq Ghotbzadeh, alleged Republican interference to reporters in France. Meanwhile, *Chicago Tribune* reporter John Maclean was told by a Republican source in Washington about a supposed mid-October trip by vice presidential candidate George Bush to Paris

for the purpose of hostage negotiations. GOP campaign spokesmen promptly denied the charge and Maclean never wrote the story.

In 1983, a congressional investigation into the theft of Carter's debate briefing book during the 1980 presidential campaign revealed that the Reagan campaign had an elaborate 24-hour-a-day operation, overseen by Casey, to monitor Carter's efforts to free the hostages. Ex-CIA and military officers were on the alert for any sign that Carter had cut a deal. But it was unclear if this political intelligence operation had gone any further.

In the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal in 1986, more allegations about Republican hanky-panky in 1980 surfaced. Iran's ex-president Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr offered the *New York Times* a sketchy account of a meeting between Republicans and Iranians in Paris in October 1980. Senior Reagan-Bush campaign advisers acknowledged to a *Miami Herald* reporter that they had held a private meeting at Washington's L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in September or October 1980 with a mysterious Iranian emissary. The Republicans – Richard Allen, Laurence Silberman and Robert McFarlane – said they rebuffed a proposal to deliver the hostages to Ronald Reagan.

The allegations entered the official government record in spring 1990 when federal prosecutors charged Richard Brenneke, an arms dealer, for claiming that he had first-hand knowledge of the supposed Paris meetings. Brenneke was acquitted when not a single juror was persuaded by the government's argument that Brenneke was lying.

The congressional General Accounting Office started a cursory review of the charges. Gary Sick, a former staff member of the National Security Council who had worked on Middle Eastern policy for the Carter administration, said he was inclined to give credence to the allegations and has since published a book making his case. The producers of the Public Broadcasting System's "Frontline" documentary series asked me to help them investigate the allegations.

Some of the October Surprise claims proved flimsy and some outright false, such as Brenneke's assertion of a direct role. But the welter of allegations included charges of meetings from individuals with verifiable connections to U.S. and Western intelligence services.

One Iranian, Jamshid Hashemi, had worked with the CIA in 1980 and was the brother of a man who was serving as an intermediary between the Carter administration and the Iranian government. Ari Ben-Menashe was an Iranian-

born Israeli who had worked for a unit of Israeli military intelligence from 1977-87. He had approached American reporters in the spring of 1986 with accurate stories about American arms-for-hostage deals with Iran. Some of his other early claims about Western arms shipments to Iraq had also proven true. Ben-Menashe asserted that in October 1980, he saw Bush head into a meeting at a Paris hotel with Casey and Mehdi Karrubi, a radical Iranian cleric.

Reagan, of all people, helped keep alive suspicions about secret Republican diplomacy when he cryptically told reporters in June 1991 that he “did some things to try the other way” to win the hostages’ freedom. Since then, Reagan has refused to explain what he meant.

The new Senate report tried, with mixed success, to dispense with a variety of the longstanding October Surprise allegations.

### **Paris Meetings**

Like Iranian ex-president Bani-Sadr, Ben-Menashe insists that Bush traveled to Paris in October 1980 for secret meetings with Iranians – only Ben-Menashe claims he personally saw Bush with Casey as the two men entered a meeting with radical Iranian cleric Mehdi Karrubi. Bush and Karrubi have emphatically denied the allegation. Secret Service records show no foreign travel by Bush, indicating that Bush was in the Washington area on the supposed meeting date of Oct. 19, 1980. Bush’s whereabouts could also have been corroborated by a family friend visited by the Bushes that Sunday afternoon. But congressional investigators were allowed to see the friend’s name under the agreement that the person not be interviewed and the name not be disclosed.

**The L’Enfant Plaza meeting:** The most baffling new information developed by the Senate investigators concerns the meeting of GOP campaign aides and an Iranian emissary at the L’Enfant Plaza Hotel. Prior to the congressional investigation, the three Republicans – Allen, Silberman and McFarlane – said they rejected a proposal by a Middle Easterner to release the hostages to candidate Reagan. But they all blanked on the man’s name and position, thus leaving the possibility of more conspiratorial explanations. An Iranian arms broker, Houshang Lavi, then stepped forward claiming to be the emissary. Later Ari Ben-Menashe claimed that the L’Enfant Plaza meeting was arranged by the Israelis in a bid to resolve the hostage crisis and that he brought Lavi and another emissary named Abolhassan Omshei to the meeting. Lavi is dead. I interviewed Omshei for “Frontline” in Tehran and he told me that he did not travel to Washington in 1980.

Just before Allen testified at a closed Senate hearing, he discovered a long-lost memo about the L'Enfant Plaza meeting. However, many of the details in the memo differed from the accounts of others: The emissary was Malaysian, not Middle Eastern; he proposed to resolve the hostage crisis through a bizarre plan for putting the shah's son on the Peacock Throne. Further, McFarlane and Silberman, who is now a federal judge, disputed the account in Allen's memo. The Senate report notes the contradictions but discounts their importance on the grounds that neither Lavi nor Ben-Menashe was credible enough to justify challenging the Republicans' basic point that nothing came from the meeting. There is another possible explanation – that there were two meetings.

**The Casey-Shaheen-Hashemi connection:** The Senate report's most provocative new information is drawn from FBI wiretaps of Cyrus Hashemi in his home and office in the fall of 1980. Hashemi was a suspected Iranian government agent who was doubling as an important intermediary between the Carter administration and Iran's radical mullahs. The wiretaps and other evidence demonstrated that Hashemi was a close business associate of Casey's longtime friend, John Shaheen, a New York-based oilman who had known Casey since both served as spies in the World War II Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner.

Although the phone conversations are cryptic, Shaheen is overheard on Oct. 23, 1980 calling a European business associate from Hashemi's New York office and discussing Hashemi's work on the hostage issue. In another intercepted call shortly after the November election, Shaheen tells Hashemi that he should begin "a direct one-to-one relationship" with Casey. Before Shaheen's death in 1985, he told FBI investigators that he indeed had introduced Hashemi and Casey prior to Casey becoming CIA director. But neither that interview nor the tapes clarify whether Casey knew Cyrus Hashemi personally in July and August 1980 as Jamshid Hashemi, Cyrus's brother, insists.

**Meetings in Madrid:** Jamshid Hashemi claims that he and Cyrus helped arrange two rounds of hostage meetings in late July and early August 1980 between Casey and cleric Mehdi Karrubi. Jamshid Hashemi says the first round lasted two days. But with Cyrus Hashemi and Casey both dead, and Karrubi denying the story, the Senate investigators were left trying to piece together Casey's whereabouts on July 26 and 27, 1980 to prove or disprove the allegations. They succeeded at neither.

The investigators found that Casey's personal and office calendars placed him in Washington on Friday, July 25 and that his office calendars contain no mention of travel over the next four days. There is the possibility of tampering with Casey's records, however. His personal calendar is missing the pages for the key dates of July 26-27; Casey's passport has also disappeared.

While finding no clear evidence that Casey went to Madrid, the congressional investigators did discount the anti-conspiracy reports in *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* which claimed definitively last year that Casey was in London on Sunday, July 27, 1980, and therefore could not have spent the weekend in Madrid. Those reports had depended on records of Casey paying for a bed-and-breakfast for two nights while attending a historical conference. But British authorities told the investigators that the records meant only that a room was made available to Casey, not that he actually used it. The earliest that Senate investigators could confirm that Casey was in London was Monday afternoon, July 28. Before going to the historical conference at 4 p.m., a receipt shows that he stopped by a London bookstore and bought four books, including one entitled "Master of Deception."

### **Bohemian Grove**

The Senate report examined another story that would debunk Jamshid's Madrid story: that Casey attended a retreat at the exclusive Bohemian Grove in northern California the last weekend in July, flying out of San Francisco on the evening of July 27 and arriving in London mid-day on July 28. The Senate investigators thought this was a 50-50 proposition. At "Frontline," however, we concluded, based on numerous interviews, that Casey was almost certainly at the Bohemian Grove retreat in the first weekend in August, not the last weekend in July. One participant, Matthew McGowan, read to us a notation from his diary for Aug. 3, 1980 stating that "we had Bill Casey, Governor Reagan's campaign manager, as our guest this last weekend."

Thus where William Casey spent the weekend of July 26-27, 1980, is still grist for debate between conspiratorialists and debunkers.

The House investigation into the October Surprise allegations, which was far better funded and staffed than the Senate probe, is expected to issue its findings as early as this Thursday. Like the Senate report, the House task force is likely to stress the lack of any convincing evidence to support allegations of a deal to delay release of the hostages. But in the world of conspiracy and counter-conspiracy, no answer is likely to be final.

Launching his first book, *Fooling America: How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom*, which came out at the end of the 12-year Reagan-Bush reign and the beginning of what appeared at the time to be a hopeful new era to begin a process of truth and reconciliation, Parry gave the following talk in Santa Monica, California. In the speech, Parry describes his background as a reporter for the AP, his experiences at *Newsweek*, and the highs and lows of uncovering some of the most consequential stories of the previous decade. The talk was hosted by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

## [Fooling America \(March 28, 1993\)](#)

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In the 1980s I was a reporter for The Associated Press. I had started with the AP back in 1974, and worked briefly in Baltimore and then in Providence, Rhode Island, where I covered some of the problems of the Democratic power structure there. Eventually, I was brought to Washington for the AP back in 1977 and covered the Carter administration. I was examining some of their, what seem like today rather minor scandals, and in 1980, after the election, I was assigned to work on the Special Assignment team for The Associated Press which was their investigative unit.

But no one told me what to work on. And it struck me one day, as I was sitting around, that this administration had a thing about Central America – it seemed like a very important area to them, one that might end up driving much of what they did, at least in terms of foreign policy and national security issues.

So I began working on it. And that experience was beyond anything I could have imagined witnessing as an American citizen. It was a case of widespread killing – political killing – of dissidents, torture, in the case of women often rape was involved; and this government was not just supporting it, not just providing the weapons and the military support, but trying to excuse it, rationalize it and essentially hide it.

This is where the press corps came in, which at the time was still the Watergate press corps, if you will. We were fairly aggressive, we were not inclined to believe what we heard from the government, and sometimes we were probably obnoxious. But we were doing our jobs as I think, more or less, as they were supposed to be done. That is to act, when necessary, in an adversarial way.

So when we began covering this topic in early 1981, we had some very brave people in the field in El Salvador particularly and throughout Central America, and some of them risked their lives to cover that story. And those of us back in Washington who obviously were not facing that kind of risk, were trying to get at things. Initially, and maybe we all sort of forget this, but I remember one of

my first stories about this had to do with how the State Department was counting up the dead in El Salvador and who they were blaming. At that time the position was that the guerrillas were killing more than half of the people dying in the political violence and that the government was less responsible.

So I went over to the State Department to review their methodology, and what I found was that the way they got their figures was that they took the total number of people who had presumably died within a period of a month or so, and then each time the guerrillas would claim on a radio broadcast that they had killed some soldiers, if there was a battle going on and they said “We killed ten soldiers” and then the battle kept going on and it was twenty, and then it was fifty, and then another one of their stations would say fifty, what the State Department did was they added up all the numbers. And so they were able to create these false figures to suggest that the government that the United States was supporting was not as culpable as the human rights groups and particularly the Catholic church in El Salvador were saying.

It began a pattern of deception from the very beginning. Even when there was something horrible happening in those countries, even when hundreds, thousands of human beings were being taken out and killed, the role of the US. government became to hide it, to rationalize it, to pretend it wasn't that serious, and to try to discredit anyone who said otherwise. And the main targets of that were the reporters in the field, the human rights groups, and to a degree, those of us in Washington who were trying to examine the policies to figure out what was really happening and what was behind this.

Reality became the greatest threat, even at that stage, to what the new administration wanted to accomplish, and what they wanted to accomplish was promoting their view that the communists were on the march, that the Soviets were an expanding power, that you had to stop every left-wing movement in its tracks and reverse it.

In El Salvador, which was my first focus and the first focus of this policy, it was to protect a very brutal government which was at that time killing literally from a thousand to two thousand people a month. These were political murders; they were done in the most offensive fashion. I think any American, any average American, would have been shocked and would have opposed what his government was doing. So it became very important to keep that secret, or to minimize it, or rationalize it or somehow sanitize it.



So what we saw, even at that early stage, was the combat that was developing and the combat in terms of the domestic situation in Washington was how do you stop the press from telling that story. And much of what the Reagan administration developed were techniques to keep those kinds of stories out of the news media.

### **El Mozote Massacre**

In late 1981 there was the massacre in El Mozote. This was a case where the first American-trained battalion was sent out over Christmas time in 1981 into rebel-controlled territory and it swept through this territory and killed everybody, everyone they could find – including the children. When two American reporters, Ray Bonner and Alma Guillermoprieto, went to the scene of this atrocity in January of 1982, they were able to see some of what was left behind and they interviewed witnesses who had survived, and came out with stories describing what they had found. This was of course extremely upsetting to the Reagan administration, which at that time was about to certify that El Salvador was showing respect for human rights, in order to get further funding and weapons for the Salvadoran military.

And I was at those hearings which occurred on Capitol Hill afterwards when Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Tom Enders gave his description of how the State Department had investigated this and had found really nothing had happened. They argued with great cleverness that the last census showed that only 200 had lived there to begin with, and many still lived there, so the massacre couldn't have happened.

Of course, it wasn't true, but in their view, it was necessary to conceal what was going on. And, it became necessary then, to also discredit the journalists, so Raymond Bonner, and Alma and others, who were not accepting this story, had to be made to seem to be liars. They had to be destroyed. And the administration began developing their PR techniques, which they always were very good at.

What we began to see was something that was unusual I think even for Washington – certainly it was unusual in my experience – a very nasty, often ad hominem attack on the journalists who were not playing along. And the case of Bonner was important because he worked for the *New York Times*, and the *New York Times* was one of those bastions of American journalism – this was not some small paper, it was not some insignificant news figure. So there began an effort to discredit him and he was attacked routinely by the State Department

and White House spokespeople. There were efforts to paint him as some kind of a communist sympathizer, someone who was anti-American and sadly, it worked.

I was in El Salvador in October of '82 to interview Roberto D'Aubuisson who was head of the death squads, accompanied by a conservative activist. After that interview we had lunch with the head of the political-military affairs office at the embassy, and on the way back to the hotel, they were boasting about how they had "gotten" Ray Bonner. "We finally got that son of a bitch," they said, and at that time his removal had not yet been announced, so it was very interesting to hear that they knew what was about to happen, and he was, in fact, removed by early 1983, and then he was sort of shunted aside at the *New York Times* and eventually left.

So the message was quite clearly made apparent to those of us working on this topic that when you tried to tell the American people what was happening, you put your career at risk, which may not seem like a lot to some people, but you know, reporters are like everybody else – they have mortgages and families and so forth and they don't really want to lose their jobs. You can often be making six figures at some of the major publications, so it's not something you readily throw away.

### **Contra War**

But what happened in and around that same time frame, was the development, secretly, of another part of the Central America story, which was, of course, the covert war in Nicaragua. William Casey and Ronald Reagan began putting this operation together, and it involved building up this paramilitary group called the Contras, who were supposed to be seen as an indigenous fighting force. It was a classic covert operation, and it was a legal one at that time – it had been authorized under the provisions of the National Security Act. But there were problems with this war from very early on, and one of the problems was that the Contras weren't very good at fighting – they would go into some villages in northern Nicaragua and commit atrocities, which began filtering back to Washington. Congress began hearing about them lining up people in villages and killing them. But it wasn't a very effective group in terms of objectives like taking territory.

Part of the problem was that the longer the fighting dragged out, the harder it was to keep all these secrets – plus the Contras were still going out and killing people left and right. So Bill Casey was stuck with a bit of a problem, and so he

sat down and developed some strategies in 1983 on what to do. One thing is they would need more time to train the Contras – they weren't going to work the way they were going. Secondly, they had to create the impression the Contras were better than they were, so people wouldn't get tired of supporting them in Congress.

So they decided the CIA would have to start sending in its own people, its own specially trained Latino assets to begin doing attacks which the Contras could then claim credit for. They would sabotage some oil pipeline in Puerto Sandino, and the agency guys would call up the Contra spokesmen, often Edgar Chamorro, and they'd say, "Now you're going to put a news release out saying that you guys have done this." The reason was to create the impression in the United States that the Contras were really quite effective – that they were now running sea assaults on Nicaragua – pretty sophisticated stuff for a paramilitary force.

And Casey had some other ideas. He began to put together what became known later as the Psychological Operations Manual or the Assassination Manual, as well as another little booklet on how Nicaraguans could sabotage their government. It was a delightful comic book that showed how you'd start off with calling in sick, then you'd build up to putting sponges in the toilet to make them back up – as if any of these things work in Nicaragua to begin with – and then moved up in your sabotage, and they taught you how to make your own Molotov cocktails. The Contras were supposed to leave them behind wherever they'd go, so the people could then start calling in sick.

So that was one of his ideas. The other one was to do this book about how the Contras should use "selective use of violence" to "neutralize civilian targets" such as civilian officials, judges, people of that sort. And the idea was, apparently, that you would kill these people or at least incapacitate them somehow, but what was the most remarkable thing about that point was that, when this was finally uncovered when I did a piece on this a year later, the CIA then argued, "Well, you don't understand. We were trying to get the Contras to be selective in their violence against civilians, not indiscriminate." And that became actually the defense that was used by the CIA to explain why they were running this booklet.

One of the most remarkable operations that he came up with at that time which is called the Public Diplomacy Apparatus. And what the Public Diplomacy Apparatus did was to make more systematic, to better staff, better finance this

campaign to shape the reality that the American public would see. They had a phrase for it inside the administration. It was called “perception management” and, with U.S. taxpayers’ dollars, they then went out and set up offices, mostly at the State Department – there was this Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America – but secretly it was being run out of the National Security Council. And the person who was overseeing it was a man named Walter Raymond, a 30-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency and was the top propaganda expert for the agency in the world. He shipped it over to essentially run similar programs aimed at the American public. And overseeing all of this was the Director of Central Intelligence, William Casey.

Now, I suppose at this point already – and this was about ‘83-84 – we were sort of losing any touch with reality in Washington. The Public Diplomacy office was escalating the pressure on the journalists who were still trying to look at this in a fairly honest way and tell the American people what they could find out. You had cases, for instance at National Public Radio, where, in sort of a classic example of this, the Public Diplomacy team from State began harassing National Public Radio for what they considered reporting that was not supportive of the American position enough.

Finally, NPR agreed to have a sit-down with Otto Reich – who was head of that office – and one of his deputies, and they were particularly irate about a story that NPR had run about how the Contras had massacred some coffee pickers in Nicaragua. The story was more about how the massacre had really destroyed this little village in Nicaragua, having lost a number of the men in the town, and Otto Reich was furious and he said, “We are monitoring NPR. We have a special consultant that measures how much time is spent on things that are pro-Contra and anti-Contra and we find you too anti-Contra and you’d better change.”

Now, the kind of effect that has is often subtle. In the case of NPR, one thing that happened was that the foreign editor, Paul Allen, saw his next evaluation be marked down, and the use of this story was cited as one of the reasons for his being marked down and he felt that he had no choice but to leave NPR and he left journalism altogether. These were the kind of prices that people were starting to pay in Washington. The message was quite clear that you were not going to make any career advancement if you insisted on pushing these stories. The White House is going to make it very, very painful for your editors by harassing them and yelling at them, having letters sent, going to your bureau

chiefs and news executives to put the pressure on, to make sure if these stories were done they were done only in the most tepid ways. And, in an underreported side of this, there were these independent organizations, who were acting as sort of the Wurlitzer organ effect for the White House attacks.

Probably the most effective one from their side was Accuracy In Media, which was actually being funded out of the White House. We have internal documents that show how the White House organized wealthy businessmen, particularly those from the conservative news media, to come into the White House's Situation Room where Charlie Wick, who was then head of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), pitched them to contribute a total of \$200,000 to be used for public diplomacy and the money was then directed to Accuracy In Media and to Freedom House and a couple of other organizations which then support the White House in its positions, and make the argument that the White House is doing the right thing and that these reporters who are getting in the way must be Sandinista sympathizers or must not be very patriotic or whatever we were supposed to be at the time.

So you had this effect of what seemed to be independent organizations raising their voice, but, the more we kept finding out, the more we found out that these weren't independent organizations at all. These were adjuncts of a White House/CIA program that had at its very heart the idea of how we reported the news in Washington and how the American people perceived what was going on in Central America. I'm not sure this has ever happened before.

The overall effect as this continued over time was cumulative. Those of us in the press who continued – who were not smart enough to seek cover – found our work more and more being discredited, and us personally being attacked, because the game really became how do you destroy the investigator. The best way to do that was to discredit the people who were doing the investigation. If you made them look like they were unpatriotic, wrongheaded, somehow subversive, the overall effect was to, first of all make it harder for them to do their job, and secondly when they did their job, people would tend not to believe it. So it worked, basically.

### **Iran-Contra**

So, as we get into the mid-80s, we're now in a situation where it's getting touchier and touchier to do these stories, but the Contras were losing congressional support because of so much bad publicity, so Congress cut the funding.

Immediately, however, the White House had a backup plan, and it was, of course, to have Ollie North become the point man. He is also being secretly supported by the CIA, the NSA, and other U.S. intelligence services, but that only comes out much later. But Ollie North is now the man who is supposedly running everything but that's all secret too, at least from the American people. And he's arranging to get weapons and raise money, and they're doing their various things they did with Saudi Arabia and so forth, to get the money, and so we end up with a lot of us in Washington really sort of knowing about this. This isn't like, all that secret, you know. I'd met Ollie North in '83 and he was actually a source for many journalists because he would tell you some sexy stuff but you protect your source, so you wouldn't really write about him.

But I was writing about him, and by the summer of '85 we had this story out for AP about Ollie North, and how he was running this Contra support operation, and how the White House was saying it wasn't happening. That led eventually over that summer to a few other stories appearing, and of course it was all denied and the pressure on the journalists was so intense that the other news organizations backed away – the *New York Times* backed away, the *Washington Post* backed away, and it was left strangely to the AP and to the *Miami Herald*, which was also following it – really the story of the decade, but no one wanted it. It was an amazing story – much better than Watergate in some ways. You had this secret war being fought, you had the government lying through its teeth every time it turned around, but no one wanted the story. The price had gotten too high.

So as much as I would like to say that I was some sort of journalistic genius who'd figured this all out, it didn't require that much. It just required sort of following the leads. They were all over the place. But we'd learned to sort of shield our eyes from the leads in Washington. And as we're doing this – I was now working with Brian Barger who we had brought on at AP – to help on this story, and we did the Contra-drug story in December of 1985, and we then proceeded to follow the North network into early '86 and we wrote the first story that there'd actually been a federal investigation in Miami, of what we knew as the North network.

So this was what was happening by the summer of '86, when Barger and I finally did a story – we had 24 sources by this point – it was getting silly, you know? You know, it wasn't like two sources, or three sources, we were up to 24 – some of them named – and we did this story where we laid a lot of it out. So

we put this story out, and finally Congress – which had been very afraid of touching this – the Democrats were extremely timid – finally Lee Hamilton, who was then Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee takes our little story with the rest of the Intelligence Committee over to the White House and they sit down with Ollie North and they say, “Colonel North – we have this story that says you’re doing these things which are kind of illegal, and uh, what about it?”

He said, “It’s not true,” they said, “Thank you,” and they went back to Capitol Hill.

And so, at that point, we were sort of done. They could have stuck a fork in us. During that summer we tried to get a longer version of this into any publication, virtually none would take it. None would take it – I mean, we even went to *Rolling Stone* and they turned us down.

So that’s where we were. This phony, dishonest, false reality had won out. And the reality had lost out, and anyone who was crazy enough to actually believe in the reality was a real loser in Washington.

And then, as it all looked like it was pretty much over, one of the last planes of Ollie North’s little rag-tag air force was chugging along over Nicaragua on October 5, 1986, and just because history is quirky like this, there was this teenager, draftee, never fired a SAM missile in his life, didn’t even know how to fire it exactly, but he described after the fact how he sort of aimed it at this plane that was sort of lumbering along through the sky, and it went off! The SAM missile went off, and it went right at the plane, which really amazed this kid, and hits it right under one of the wings and the plane starts spiraling out of control. And another little quirk of history is that – most of the guys were kind of macho on board, and they didn’t wear parachutes, but Eugene Hasenfus had just gotten a parachute sent to him by one of his relatives, and because he had the door open to start kicking out these weapons to the Contras, even though the plane spiraled out of control he could crawl to the door and pushed himself away from the plane and parachuted down to the Sandinistas.

And so, there was literally a smoking fuselage on the ground in Nicaragua, and the press corps in Washington suddenly said, “Oh gee! Maybe we had missed something after all.”

At the NSC, they were in kind of a panic, trying to figure out what to do – what their story was going to be. Later on, I talked to an NSC staffer and I said, “Gee, what did you guys think you were up to? Did you think you shouldn’t just

maybe fess up at this point?” He said, “No. We had been so successful in managing the information, we, you know, just thought we could just do anything!”

So, the “anything” they did was that they just started lying again! And it wasn’t just from the State Department anymore, it was from the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, and virtually every senior official in the position to do anything about this, came out and said there is no U.S. government connection to this flight. What was incredible about the whole thing was the arrogance that pervaded the White House at this point. They really thought they could control how everybody in this country understood the facts. They could create the reality, and the press would go along with it, and through the press the American people would either be deceived or so confused that they wouldn’t be able to do anything about it anyway. The perception management wasn’t going to give up.

But that began to cause problems when the next shoe falls, which is the disclosure of the Iran initiative in early November of ‘86, and that is also a problem legally, because what they know inside the White House which we don’t know yet, is that, in 1985 the President had authorized the first shipment of missiles to Iran through Israel without proper authorization. He had not signed a finding; he was in violation of the Arms Export Control Act – a felony.

So, they had to cover that up. And what we saw was the next remarkable stage of this. And probably this is what changed a lot of how I saw journalism. Obviously, I’d not been really too thrilled by what I was seeing up to this point, but the next phase was even more unbelievable. And the next phase is the scandal was broken – there are three parts to it basically: there’s the illegal shipments of weapons to the Contras in defiance of the law, the Boland Amendment; there is the problem of the Arms Export Control Act, which President Reagan was violating back in ‘85; and of course there’s what became the focus, the use of residuals from the arms sales in Iran for the Contras – the so-called “diversion.” So, you had these three elements.

The White House chose to make a stand on the latter one – the diversion, and proceeded to lie about the other two. They put out false chronologies on Iran to show that the President did not know about the ‘85 shipment. They insisted – even as Vice President Bush insisted until December of ‘86 that he had no idea there was a Contra operation going on – even though it had been reported in the press, he just hadn’t bothered to read it.



So you had this decision to sort of deny straightforwardly that the President knew about the diversion. And that became the focus for the press and for Congress as the investigation gears up, which is bad enough because these other questions are very important. Was the President involved in a felony under the Arms Export Control Act? Was he involved possibly in another type of crime by defying a law that he had signed into law – the Boland Amendment? Can the President just unilaterally conduct war using third country funding? All of these are very important questions to our democracy.

But the focus was on the diversion. And on that they felt they could contain it as long as John Poindexter said the buck stopped here, which of course he would do. However, what we began to see very quickly in Washington was almost a collaboration at this point to contain the scandal. Obviously, the White House and the Republicans had a very strong interest in containing this scandal; they were politically in hot water. But the Democrats and the press were also inclined to contain the scandal. As the phrase went – nobody wanted another Watergate.

And at this point, AP and I had really had some struggles over the stories that I was writing and so in 1987, I went to *Newsweek*. The first week I'm there, some stories about these phony chronologies are circulating and I call a friend of mine on the National Security Council staff and I say, "What are you doing now? You're doing false chronologies on how the Iran sales happened?" and he said, "Bob, you don't understand, these were orders from the Oval Office. Don Regan sent down word that we were to protect the President and write him out of these events." And so, *Newsweek* ran this cover story called "Cover-Up" where we recounted how, to protect the President, the NSC staffers were ordered to put these phony chronologies out. And what we didn't realize at the time was we had just broken through the last firewall. We were in the Oval Office with this story.

And the reaction was incredible. Many of my colleagues in the press attacked us. The *Wall Street Journal*, not just in its editorial pages but its news columns attacked us; Don Regan, who was one of the people of course named here attacked us; and *Newsweek* decided that they wanted to retract the story. And they sent me back to my source to get him to take it back and he wouldn't. He said, "I told you what I knew, and what do you want me to say now?" And I said "Well, we want to retract the story is what we want to do."

**Option C**

So anyway, here we are, and there were essentially three choices at this point:

Option A was to tell the truth, to say that the President had violated a variety of laws, committed felonies, and violated our constitutional safeguards about the way we carry out wars in our country, and impeach him. Option A.

Then there was Option B – to tell the truth and have Congress sort of say well, it's okay with us, which creates a dangerous precedent for the future, that is, that now presidents would say well hey, look at the Reagan example, you know, if he can wage war privately, why can't I? So that was Option B.

And then there was Option C – to pretend it didn't happen, or to pretend that, say, some Lieutenant Colonel had done it all. So Washington, I guess understandably, settled on Option C.

And what happened next is that it all played out. It played out predictably, almost with a sort of sadness. Even when Oliver North finally told the truth, which was that he was ordered to do all this stuff, that there was a fall guy planned and that there was a cover-up going on – the first cover-up that had been announced probably in front of 100 million Americans – it was still believed by Congress! Lee Hamilton again decides, as Chairman of the Iran-Contra Committee, that we all should sort of say that it was just these “men of zeal” – basically there'd been a coup d'état in the White House, a junta led by a Lieutenant Colonel and maybe an Admiral here and there who were running this policy and that somehow the CIA had missed it, the President had missed it, the NSA had missed it.

Okay, so it's not very believable – a lot of Americans didn't believe it, to tell you the truth – but in Washington we believed it. We all believed it. We pretty much had to believe it.

And at *Newsweek* and elsewhere we were told in the press this was not a story anymore, this was not to be pursued. But again, history being kind of quirky, there was this other element of the story, which was that these three Republican judges picked Lawrence Walsh to be the independent counsel on this investigation, and it turned out Lawrence Walsh was very honest and he just kept pursuing the leads. Despite all the lies and the cover-ups that went on, there were other breaks because he kept pursuing the leads. Then with the North trial more evidence comes out, and then in the Poindexter trial Reagan makes a complete fool of himself and is just all over the place with his story.

Then as they follow those leads, they find that in fact there had been an Oval Office cover-up, and that what we had seen, and what remarkably the White House had been able to successfully maintain, in the defiance of all the logic and reason that should have been brought to bear – they were able to maintain for *six years* what amounted to a felony obstruction of justice out of the White House. And they did it under the nose of the Congress, under the nose of the Washington press corps, and the way they were able to do it was essentially this acceptance in Washington of an absolutely phony reality, one which is accepted in sort of a consensus way – what you'll hear if you listen to the McLaughlin Group or these other shows is a general consensus that is in absolute contradiction to the real world. It is a false reality – it's a Washington reality.

What we have seen at the end of these 12 years, and what I guess the challenge of the moment becomes is how that gets changed. How do the American people really get back control of this – not just their government, but of their history – because it's really their history that has been taken away from them. And it's really what the Washington press corps and the Democrats in Congress as well as the Republicans are culpable of, was this failure to tell the American people their history.

And the reason they didn't was because they knew, or feared, that if the American people knew their real history – whether it goes back to the days of slaughters going on in El Salvador – if they had known about El Mozote, if they had known about the little children that were put in the house and shot to death and garroted, they wouldn't have gone along with that. And if they had known that there were felony obstructions of justice being carried out of the Oval Office, they wouldn't have gone along with that either, and there would have been a real problem – there would have been a political problem to contain. It's not the role of the Washington press corps to take part in that.

Our job was supposed to be, I thought, to kind of tell people what we could find out! We go in, we act nice, we ask a lot of questions, find some things and run out and tell you! We're sort of like spies for the people, you know, and instead, we sort of got in there and felt like we were insiders.

So I left *Newsweek* in 1990 – I was not on the best of terms with them – because I wouldn't go along with this. And I decided to write this book *Fooling America* about how Washington sort of works or doesn't work, and about how cowardly the press had behaved.

**Fooling America**

What I think is the bottom line of the book is that we are in great danger of losing our grasp of reality as a nation. Our history has been taken away from us in key ways. We've been lied to so often. And important things have been blocked from us. It was important to know that those little children were killed in El Mozote. I have four kids, and I know what they mean to me, and what's always motivated my journalism is that if any of my sons will ever be taken off to war someplace, I want it to be done for a real reason – not because somebody made something up. But I also feel for people who lose their kids anywhere. And I think that the idea that our government would be complicit, not just in the killing, but in this very cynical effort to lie about it, and hide it, and pretend it didn't happen, and attack those who find out that it did happen, is in many ways almost worse. It is something that, as a democracy, we can't really allow to happen.

The main problem, at this point, is that we have a set of establishments in Washington that have failed us, as a people. Obviously, the Executive Branch did it because it had its goal and agendas, and maybe in some cases they were right. But they shouldn't have lied to us. They shouldn't have tried to create a false reality to trick us into this. Congress failed because it didn't have the courage to stand up and do oversight and perform its constitutional responsibilities.

But what is perhaps most shocking to Americans is that the press failed. The press is what people sort of expect to be there as the watchdog, the final group to sort of warn us of danger. And the press joined it. And the press saw itself – in the Washington press corps I'm talking about – saw itself at the elite levels as part of the insider community. And as that evolved and then grew in the 1980s, the press stopped performing its oversight responsibilities. And I think we have to figure out some way, as a people, to change that.

The press has gone from being when I got there in '77 as the Watergate press corps, with its faults, with being maybe a little too overly zealous in pursuing some minor infraction, but still – it was there as the watchdog. What we have now, which is continuing into this new era, is the Reagan-Bush press corps. It's the press corps that they helped create – that they created partly by purging those, or encouraging the purging of those who were not going along, but it was ultimately the editors and the news executives that did the purging. It wasn't the White House or the State Department or the embassy in El Salvador that drove

Ray Bonner out of the *New York Times*; it was the *New York Times* executives who did it.

And throughout that whole era it wasn't the State Department or the White House that ruined Paul Allen's career at NPR, it was NPR executives. And this was the case all the way around Washington. The people who succeeded and did well were those who didn't stand up, who didn't write the big stories, who looked the other way when history was happening in front of them, and went along either consciously or just by cowardice with the deception of the American people. And I think that's what we all have to sort of look at to see what we can do to change it. I think it will take a tremendous commitment by the American people to insist on both more honest journalism, more straightforward journalism, but also maybe even new journalism. There has to be some other way – some other outlets.

In a way, I've grown to despair at the possibility of reforming some of these organizations. Maybe it can happen, but I think ultimately, we're going to have to see a new kind of media to replace this old one.

Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh turned out to be one of the few honorable actors in the Iran-Contra Affair – an honest investigator who followed the leads and pursued the case in the spirit of the legal maxim *Fiat justitia ruat caelum*, or “Let justice be done though the heavens fall.”

His integrity, however, was deemed out of step with the conventional wisdom – far too “un-Washington” for the tastes of the punditocracy, as Parry explains here.

## [Boring Details \(July/August 1993\)](#)

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Originally published in *Mother Jones* magazine

As Lawrence Walsh ends his six-year Iran-Contra investigation, Washington insiders are busy judging how big a failure the independent prosecutor has been. “The truth is that when Walsh finally goes home, he will leave a perceived loser,” concluded Marjorie Williams in a recent *Washington Post* profile.

“Loser” is only one of the epithets that the D.C. press corps has hurled at Walsh since he indicted former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger a year ago. In journal after influential journal, the eighty-one-year-old ex-federal judge has been likened to Captains Ahab and Queeg, Victor Hugo's Inspector Javert, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and even the Inquisition's Torquemada. The trashing of Lawrence Walsh has become a journalistic cottage industry – and has put the press in the disturbing role of objecting to discovery of the truth.

Washington's overt hostility to the investigation, as evidenced in commentaries by liberals as well as conservatives, has even contributed to the success of the Reagan-Bush administrations' long- running cover-up. The assaults on Walsh have served as a kind of peer-group enforcement mechanism that has limited his investigation's options.

James Brosnahan, the San Francisco trial attorney who moved to Washington last fall to prosecute Weinberger (before Bush pardoned him), came to see the unrelenting attacks against Walsh as part of the obstruction of justice. "It was all so transparent that I was disappointed more people didn't pick up on the fact that all they were really trying to do was obstruct the trial of Weinberger," he says.

"It was going to be a hell of a trial. The full story would have been told, as it pertained to the [obstruction] counts of the indictment. They [senior Reagan-Bush officials] couldn't have a trial. The cross-examination of Caspar Weinberger was going to be an event."

Walsh's team had discovered that Weinberger's handwritten notes disproved Bush's claim that he had been "out of the loop" and proved that Weinberger knew full well about \$25 million in Saudi contributions to the Contras, even as he told Congress in 1986 that the charge was "so outlandish as to be unworthy of comment."

According to Brosnahan, the trial would have shown that Weinberger knew as early as summer 1985 that President Ronald Reagan had personally authorized missile shipments to Iran in violation of the Arms Control Export Act, and that this potentially impeachable act was concealed by constructing a false record. "The August [1985] meeting [of Reagan's National Security Council] discussed having Israel send the missiles to Iran and replenishing them out of U.S. stocks," says Brosnahan. "Weinberger is responsible for all missiles. The secretary of defense is the guy."

Another guy who stood to lose his exalted standing in Washington if the trial took place was General Colin Powell, who was Weinberger's principal aide in 1985. In an affidavit, Powell said he "saw virtually all the papers that went in and out of [Weinberger's] office" and thus would have had direct access to the evidence of missile replenishment. Early in the investigation, Powell gave conflicting accounts of his knowledge of Weinberger's extensive personal notes, denying knowledge of their existence (when Weinberger was claiming he didn't

take any), and then saying in 1992 that the notes were no secret and describing them in detail (after Weinberger was forced to cough them up).

One of the prosecution's star witnesses would have been White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, who finally would have recounted the frantic Oval Office scrambling to contain the scandal in November 1986, Brosnahan says. "Regan would say that when it broke, he denied things. But there came a point when he knew it was out of control. At some point, in December [1985] or January [1986], he wanted to get the whole thing out."

But the deafening drumbeat against Lawrence Walsh drowned out any honest telling of the truth. As his days in the White House drew to a close, Bush tested the waters for a pardon. Weinberger's defense team floated trial balloons before influential media groups, including editors and writers for the *Washington Post*, and consulted with top Democrats, including House Speaker Thomas Foley and then- Representative Les Aspin (now defense secretary). It was clear that reaction to a Weinberger pardon would be mild. Bush subsequently killed the Weinberger trial (scheduled to start last January) by pardoning him and five other Iran-Contra figures.

This past spring, emboldened by anti-Walsh sentiment, former President Bush balked at an earlier understanding that he would submit to unrestricted Iran-Contra questioning after the 1992 election. Having been pummeled in the media over the length and cost (\$36 million-plus) of his investigation, Walsh shrank from the ugly battle that would have ensued if he'd tried to drag Bush before a grand jury.

Walsh lost the public-relations battle, even as he finally exposed the lies that protected the Oval Office from the consequences of President Reagan's illegal acts. Though Walsh could finally prove initial crimes and the obstruction of justice, official Washington didn't want to hear about it. Iran-Contra was too old, too complicated.

The *Washington Post's* Williams spoke for many colleagues when she criticized Walsh's "anachronistic sense" of outrage in the face of the "silent political referendum" against pursuing the Iran-Contra crimes. This was a Washington consensus that, Williams wrote, "Walsh alone ignored."

With an irony no less destructive for its sophistication, she criticized Walsh as a man out of step with expediency. "In the utilitarian political universe of Washington, consistency like Walsh's is distinctly suspect," Williams explained.

“It began to seem ... rigid of him to care so much. So un-Washington. Hence the gathering critique of his efforts as vindictive, extreme.”

But in the context of helping to pry loose proof of White House wrongdoing, Walsh has accomplished a remarkable feat: he has salvaged an important part of American history, so that future generations might understand the strange events that occurred inside the U.S. government in the 1980s. It's clear that the full truth on Iran-Contra will never be told. But considering White House dishonesty, congressional timidity, and the press corps' complacency, Lawrence Walsh did his best. He wrested from a determined White House cover-up a substantive if incomplete accounting of history. He has proven himself no loser.

By the mid-1990s, the old-fashioned journalistic tenacity of the Watergate era had been replaced by “the politics of personal destruction,” led by right-wing outlets such as the *American Spectator* and the *Washington Times*. In this article, Parry traces the Washington press corps' decline from its heyday in the 1970s to the on-bended-knee obsequiousness of the 1980s, which then morphed into a smear-mongering attack machine of the 90s.

## [The Hunters \(July/August 1994\)](#)

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Originally published in *Mother Jones* magazine

More and more, Washington is a nasty place, like Dallas 1963. The nation's capital is a city where rhetorical sniper rifles poke out of nearly every window. Character assassination has become a daily fact of life. Calumny is the new local dialect.

While all sides in Washington share blame for this epidemic of meanness, some are more responsible than others. For the well-funded conservative movement, slander has evolved into a sophisticated form of political control, a way to intimidate dissident voices during the Reagan-Bush years and now to threaten the political survival of a sitting Democratic president.

Over the past two decades, while fancying themselves the victims of some all-powerful liberal establishment, conservatives have built a well-oiled attack machine – and have shown no compunction about using it. In recent years, almost anybody who stepped into the path of the conservative agenda – politician, journalist, or investigator – has run afoul of the GOP machine.

A typical smear job might start in the right-wing *American Spectator* or the Moonie-owned *Washington Times*, then get repeated on Rush Limbaugh's liberal-bashing talk show or by the Christian Broadcasting Network. The attack might be reprised on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, repeated by the



many nationally syndicated conservative columnists, and bandied about by the multitude of conservative voices on the weekend chat shows. Soon, simply through repetition, the lies take on the ring of truth.

Since the 1970s, many of the sensible Republicans – leaders such as Barber Conable, who cared about making sense – have disappeared. Others have thrived, like Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole. A smart man with a clever wit, Dole has emerged as the preferred television spokesman for harsh Republican partisanship.

When President Bill Clinton's Whitewater troubles<sup>1\*</sup> reached flood stage in late 1993, Dole took to the Senate floor and the Sunday talk shows to demand a special prosecutor to investigate. Dole was the outraged defender of the public's right to know. He seemed to forget that he had led the Republican filibuster in 1992 – when George Bush was president – to kill the special prosecutor law.

At that time, of course, Iran-Contra Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh was unraveling the Republicans' long-running coverup of President Reagan's illegal arms sales to Iran and Bush's lies about being "out of the loop." Dole and the conservatives were desperate to block Walsh's progress, so he became a target of the machine. The conservative media seized on minor indiscretions and personal foibles to humiliate Walsh.

Dole boasted to an enthusiastic convention of conservative activists that he had "taken to the Senate floor on countless occasions to detail the dismal record of Walsh. I've discussed his violation of Washington, D.C., tax laws, his first-class air fares, the lavish office space. I've talked about his breakfasts, his paid-for room service, and dinners provided by American taxpayers." Dole bragged that he even examined the "political leanings" of Walsh's staff lawyers, some of whom subsequently faced personal attacks in the right-wing press.

A year later, without a blush for his hypocrisy, Dole excoriated the Clinton White House for any delay in appointing a special prosecutor for Whitewater.

For his part, Clinton might have expected a respite from the scandal-mongering when he entered the White House. He might have hoped for a period of political tranquility during which the nation's growing domestic problems could be addressed and debated. But he was wrong. The Republican attack machine opted instead for continuation of campaign-style opposition research, the state-of-the-art process for digging up dirt to muddy Clinton and his key liberal appointees.

The Republican attack machine took shape in the mid-1970s, initially as a defensive reaction to the Watergate scandal and domestic opposition to the Vietnam War. To punish anti-war Democrats and counter a news media that had grown suspicious about Nixonian political tactics, an embattled conservative movement launched a multipronged counterattack.

Terry Dolan's National Conservative Political Action Committee ambushed liberal senators with vicious TV ads. Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Media stepped up personal assaults on the patriotism of honest journalists. Richard Viguerie pioneered direct mail to stir up rank-and-file conservatives. Backed by well-heeled conservative foundations, new right-wing think tanks flooded the editorial pages with hard-edged rhetoric.

Then, in 1980, Reagan's victory turned the executive branch's power over to these same conservative forces. Working closely with the White House and the national security agencies, the machine accelerated attacks on the president's perceived "enemies" – in the press, Congress, and activist communities, such as those opposing Reagan's policies in Central America.

Fewer politicians and journalists dared confront the machine. Too many careers had been damaged or destroyed. The silence helped the White House keep secret illegal policies in Central America and the Middle East. By the mid-1980s, any effective oversight of Reagan's White House and William Casey's CIA had ended.

Except for a Sandinista soldier's lucky missile shot in fall 1986 that brought down one of Oliver North's supply planes, and a story published in a Beirut weekly exposing the administration's secret arms-for-hostages deal, Iran-Contra might have remained a secret. Still, in the ensuing months, the Democrats and the media failed to plumb the depths of the scandal. Then a correspondent at *Newsweek*, I encountered growing opposition from senior editors who sided with the Reagan-Bush administration's desire to bury the scandal for, as one put it, "the good of the country."

With the Clinton presidency, the machine shifted to offense. Clinton's would-be nominees quickly became victim to the machine's *modus operandi*, with Bob Dole's loyal lieutenants, Senators Orrin Hatch and Nancy Kassebaum, usually leading the charge. Lani Guinier saw her writings distorted and herself portrayed as a "quota queen." Mort Halperin, a former member of the Nixon administration who broke with Henry Kissinger over the Vietnam War, found

his nomination to a Pentagon job blocked by ugly insinuations that he was disloyal.

But Dole and the Republicans had a bigger target in their sights: the president himself. Petty administration disputes, such as replacement of the White House travel office, exploded into hot topics in the news and on the talk shows. Tawdry and graphic accounts of Clinton's alleged sexual behavior, such as described in the conservative-backed lawsuit filed by former Arkansas state employee Paula Jones, received wide publicity. The Vince Foster suicide fueled rumors about the Clintons' marriage and speculation over their 15-year-old Whitewater real estate investment.

Whatever Clinton's other shortcomings, his destruction by the conservative machine would be a stunning development. It would mean that the machine even has the power to dislodge a president. Even fewer politicians and journalists would dare venture into the machine's path then.

Those of us too young to remember the adversarial journalism of the 1960s and 70s might have a hard time believing that there was a time when the media was motivated by a healthy skepticism of the power structure and a desire to get the story right no matter what the costs, but in fact this generally was the situation up until a major shift during the 1980s. In this article, written for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Parry traces this devolution in journalism to a pet project launched by Richard Nixon in the early 1970s.

## [The Rise of the Right-Wing Media Machine \(March 1, 1995\)](#)

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Originally published in FAIR's *Extra!* magazine

In 1970, angered by critical reporting on the Vietnam War, President Nixon told his men what needed to be done. Nixon was "pushing again on [his] project of building OUR establishment in [the] press," his chief of staff H.R. Haldeman wrote in his diaries.

It was a theme that Nixon would repeat often. The president was convinced that "the press and TV don't change their attitude and approach unless you hurt them," Haldeman recorded on May 29, 1971. As dozens of Haldeman diary entries make perfectly clear, Nixon was never one to miss a chance to "screw" his "enemies" in the media. "The only way we can fight the whole press problem, Nixon feels, is through the [Charles] Colson operation, the nutcutters, forcing our news and in a brutal vicious attack on the opposition," Haldeman wrote.

Yet even Nixon, the grand strategist, could never have guessed how well his plans would have worked out a quarter century later – and how much of his chip-on-the-shoulder paranoia would still resonate today in a powerful conservative press establishment.

In the 25 years since Nixon started “pushing” this project, the conservatives have constructed a truly intimidating media machine. It ranges from nationwide radio talk shows by Rush Limbaugh and scores of Limbaugh-wannabes, to dozens of attack magazines, newspapers, newsletters and right-wing opinion columns, to national cable television networks propagating hardline conservative values and viewpoints, to documentary producers who specialize in slick character assassination, to mega-buck publishing houses and even to narrowly focused organizations that exist simply to hurt the surviving mainstream journalists who still won’t toe the line.

This conservative media machine now rivals – and may well surpass – the power and the influence of the old-line press. Both directly and indirectly, this right-wing media machine holds sway over much of the national agenda, deciding which ideas and individuals are accepted and which are marginalized.

In the past two years alone, through constant repetition, the machine has focused public anger on welfare recipients, on ghetto residents, on immigrant populations and, most notably, on Bill and Hillary Clinton. The machine has churned out conspiracy theories about Vincent Foster’s suicide and spread lurid tales about the Clintons’ personal lives. In doing so, the right-wing news outlets have shaped the parameters of the national debate and contributed mightily to the Republican congressional victories last November.

“Rush [Limbaugh] is as responsible for what happened here as much as anyone,” conservative Vin Weber commented at a celebration of the Republican congressional victory. Since Clinton’s election in 1992, Limbaugh had dedicated his daily three-hour radio show, airing on more than 650 stations and reaching a reported 20 million people a week, almost exclusively to tearing down the Clintons. The Republicans rewarded Limbaugh by naming him an honorary member of the GOP freshman class.

### **The Myth of the ‘Liberal’ Press**

Yet, despite the power of the right-wing media, conservatives still espouse the Nixonian notion that they are picked-upon victims, persecuted by some all-powerful “liberal” press. Indeed, for the past 25 years, this oft-repeated claim of

a liberal media has been a catechism of conservative faith. Limbaugh rejects pleas for “balance” on the grounds that he is “the balance” to a “liberal” media.

But the supposedly liberal press is, in reality, not liberal in any partisan sense at all. The vast majority of journalists in the mainstream press either operate as they should – that is, with nonideological “objectivity” – or they demonstrate a center-right political orientation.

Some conservatives cite ABC’s Cokie Roberts as the embodiment of this “liberal” press. In a speech to the freshmen Republicans last December, Limbaugh singled Roberts out as one of the journalists who “will never ever be their friends.” But the “liberal” Roberts was the election-night analyst who blurted out that President Clinton should “move to the right, which is the advice that somebody should have given him a long time ago.”

Initially, the conservative accusation of “liberal” bias had rested on the thesis that an unpatriotic news media had “lost” the war in Vietnam. But this accusation was disproved by, among many other analysts, the US Army itself. In a book-length study, Army historian William Hammond blamed the defeat on a poorly designed military strategy and the public revulsion at the numbers of American dead. As for the media’s role, Hammond wrote, “press reports were... more accurate than the public statements of the administration.”

Next came dubious polling data, which claimed that most press respondents voted for Democrats in national elections. But even if those figures were not cooked, there is an illogical assumption at the heart of the argument: that each respondent has equal power in setting editorial policy.

If, for instance, the woman who writes obituaries and the guy who does the sports column voted Democratic, and the publisher voted Republican, that would mean that the newspaper was dominated two-to-one by Democrats. Journalism is not a one-person-one-vote sort of place. The truth about the news industry has always been that rich businessmen (and a few rich women) own it. Media moguls – from Rupert Murdoch to Katharine Graham to Laurence Tisch to the executives of General Electric – may not exactly be “movement” conservatives. But neither are they “liberals.”

Still, the myth of the liberal press remains a motive that drives what the right-wing press does and how meanly it does it. Take, for example, the following statement by David Brock, the *American Spectator*’s smearmeister, who, for the record, insists that his journalism is guided not by ideology but by an honest pursuit of the truth.

Addressing the Conservative Political Action Conference on February 12, 1994, Brock said: “The [Arkansas] trooper story and the growing scandals surrounding Whitewater and the death of Vincent Foster as well, I think, violate an unspoken rule of the elite liberal media in this town since Watergate – that is, only Republican presidents can be hounded out of office by ethics scandals. And I think in the coming months, we are going to show that that rule is quite wrong.”

Yet none of the three Republican presidents since Watergate – Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George Bush – was “hounded out of office.” Brock relies on this paranoid fantasy to justify what he clearly wants to do to President Clinton.

The right’s persecution complex is the psychological basis for how it treats political opponents. In addressing the GOP freshmen in December, Limbaugh advocated only enough mercy to “leave some liberals alive” as artifacts so that “we can show our children what they were.”

### **Building the Machine**

To make Nixon’s media “project” a reality over the past quarter century, conservatives spent hundreds of millions of dollars from a variety of deep-pocket patrons. Though precise figures are hard to come by, the Unification Church-founded *Washington Times* alone is estimated to have lost well over \$100 million since its start in 1982. The origin of that money remains a mystery, but it is believed to come primarily from right-wing industrialists on Asia’s Pacific Rim who might want to influence U.S. government policies.

To subsidize other publications, such as the *American Spectator* and the *New Criterion*, hundreds of thousands of dollars came from right-wing foundations, such as the John M. Olin Foundation and other wealthy business families.

During the Reagan-Bush years, this emerging conservative media served as a kind of praetorian guard for the White House. It rallied, time and again, to defend administration policies, even when that meant supporting outright lies. In one notable case, Raymond Bonner of the *New York Times* reported on Salvadoran army massacres of men, women and children around a remote village named El Mozote at Christmastime 1981.

The Reagan administration denied Bonner’s stories, suggesting that Bonner had been duped by Communist disinformation. The right-wing press swung into action, with the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page and Accuracy In Media

amplifying the denunciations against Bonner, whose career at the *New York Times* soon ended. A United Nations excavation of the massacre site a decade later uncovered hundreds of skeletons – including those of many small children – and corrected the conservatives’ false historical record.

The conservative media struck another blow for deception when human rights groups began cataloging atrocities – rapes, torture and murder – by the CIA-backed Contra rebels in Nicaragua. Accuracy In Media, the *Washington Times*, *New Republic* and other conservative outlets aided the Reagan administration in smearing the truthful human rights investigators who had discovered these inconvenient facts.

The Reagan administration also created a domestic “public diplomacy” bureaucracy, which collaborated with the conservative press. This unprecedented operation was based in the National Security Council, was overseen personally by CIA Director William J. Casey (a business partner of Olin’s William Simon), and was staffed in part by psychological warfare specialists from Fort Bragg. For White House friends, the public diplomacy apparatus granted government contracts and raised money. In 1983, United States Information Agency director Charles Wick solicited donations for Accuracy In Media from wealthy donors brought to the White House situation room.

But for its critics, the “public diplomacy” team inflicted only pain, often through whispering campaigns against out-of-step reporters in Central American and Washington, or through high-pressure lobbying trips to their editors. In a March 1986 internal memo, Otto Reich, who ran the “public diplomacy” outpost at the State Department, boasted his office “generally did not give any quarter in the debate,” so that “attacking the president was no longer cost free.”

The right-wing media and their Reagan administration allies confronted an even tougher challenge when a few reporters began pursuing a story about a White House aide named Oliver North. Sources in and around the Contra movement were citing North as the point man for an extraordinary White House effort to funnel money and guns to the Contras in defiance of federal law.

The White House knew that North’s exposure could disrupt President Reagan’s goal of restoring CIA funding for the Contras in 1985-86. So the few stories about North needed to be discredited. Typically, the conservative press did its part to dirty up journalists who were on the trail.

It was during this period that my AP colleague Brian Barger and I were tarred as “liberals,” reporters more suited to the “advocacy press.” Attacks launched by administration officials were popularized in the right-wing media: in April 1986, when Barger and I discovered that federal officials had launched a criminal probe of North’s Contra network in Miami, the *Washington Times* lambasted us in a front-page article. Like Bonner and others before us, we saw our honest reporting portrayed as politically motivated propaganda.

When Barger and I pressed ahead with our investigation, the stories eventually shamed the congressional Democrats into investigating. But many Democrats were also scared of the right-wing attack machine. So when Rep. Lee Hamilton trooped his House Intelligence Committee over to the White House in August 1986, the Indiana Democrat quickly accepted the word of North and National Security Adviser John Poindexter, who both insisted that the AP stories were false. A Democratic staff aide called me with the bad news. “Congressman Hamilton had the choice of accepting the word of these honorable men or the word of your sources,” the aide said. “It wasn’t a close call.”

With that debunking, the AP investigation ended. Barger left the AP and I was left with the bitter taste that the White House had succeeded with its cover-up. Only the crash of a Contra resupply plane over Nicaragua on October 5, 1986, and the subsequent disclosure in Beirut of the secret arms deal with Iran, saved some of the historical record from the masterworks of liars. But salvaging the truth would not be a complete success.

### **The Iran-Contra Test**

For the next six years, the Reagan-Bush administration would fight a fierce rear-guard action to conceal the true history of the Iran-Contra scandal. After moving to *Newsweek* in early 1987, I provided the key reporting for the first story that traced the Iran-Contra cover-up into the Oval Office and described the cover-up’s motivation: “to protect the president.”

But this disclosure also was attacked by the conservatives and dismissed by many mainstream journalists. The official line was already forming that North and a few “men of zeal” had carried out the Contra war behind the backs of senior White House officials, the Pentagon and the CIA. I also took flak for reporting that Vice President Bush was lying when he claimed that he and his office were “out of the loop” on Iran-Contra.

Though publicly North testified in 1987 that he was the “fall guy” in a White House cover-up plan, the Democrats and many journalists still fell for it.



Effectively cleared of a role in the Iran-Contra scandal, Bush won the presidency in 1988. In 1990, I left *Newsweek*.

As the Iran-Contra scandal entered its final phase, the Reagan loyalists saw one last enemy on the battlefield: independent counsel Lawrence Walsh. Though plodding, Walsh had conducted a serious investigation into the Iran-Contra crimes and cover-ups. In 1992, Walsh finally broke through the White House stonewall with his indictment of former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. It was a moment when America could have reclaimed an important part of its history.

Instead, Walsh came under another barrage of attacks. The conservative media, especially the *Washington Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, harassed Walsh at every turn. They tried to impede his progress with petty complaints about first-class air travel and technical mistakes in filing Washington, D.C., taxes.

The anti-Walsh onslaught grew even fiercer when, in the final days of the 1992 presidential campaign, Walsh released Republican documents that finally destroyed Bush's cover story that he had been "out of the loop." After losing to Bill Clinton, Bush struck back on Christmas Eve 1992 by pardoning half-dozen Iran-Contra figures, including Weinberger. But the final media attack on Walsh was still to come.

In early 1993, the *American Spectator* summed up the case against Walsh in a long article by Michael Ledeen, who did not bother to identify himself as a principal character in the Iran-Contra scandal. To Ledeen, Walsh was Captain Queeg, "a sly, quirky, righteously rigid individual who has long been ready to stretch the rules to the limit and has not hesitated to go beyond the boundaries of the law itself in order to achieve his objectives."

A month later, Ledeen's mean-spirited profile demonstrated its influence over the mainstream view of Walsh when many of its points were reprised by the *Washington Post*'s Marjorie Williams. She saw Walsh violating "a vast, silent political referendum" in Washington that had judged Iran-Contra not bad. "Only Walsh, with his anachronistic sense of duty, slogged on, insisting that it was a serious matter – a serious crime," Williams wrote. "it began to seem – rigid of him to care so much."

James Brosnahan, an experienced trial attorney hired by Walsh to handle the aborted Weinberger trial, came to see the attacks as almost themselves an

obstruction of justice. “It was all so transparent that I was disappointed more people didn’t pick up on the fact,” Brosnahan told me.

Contrary to the conservative-sponsored image of Walsh as a dangerous radical, the 82-year-old former federal judge actually had been a life-long Republican with close ties to the Nixon administration. Ironically, Walsh had been Nixon’s first choice to be Watergate special prosecutor in 1973, but was passed over because he had served as counsel to ITT, which had a hand in some of Nixon’s political troubles.

But the conservative media’s success in containing the Iran-Contra scandal and turning the mainstream press against those who sought the truth marked a significant shift in national power. It could now be said that Washington’s Watergate-era press corps – Richard Nixon’s great “enemy” – was dead. So too was any commitment within the leadership of the Democratic Party to fight for the exposure of Republican wrongdoing.

Just as Watergate had proved, painfully, that the constitutional system worked and that not even the president was above the law, the outcome of the Iran-Contra scandal established the opposite. With enough money and meanness, at least a conservative president could violate the law – and get away with it.

### **The Clinton Calamity**

Perhaps Bill Clinton’s first major blunder as president was his failure to recognize this altered terrain of the Washington political/journalistic battlefield. Following the advice of bipartisan-seeking congressional Democrats, Clinton opposed any serious re-examination of the longstanding Reagan-Bush scandals.

Not only were the Iran-Contra crimes and the unprecedented Bush pardons ignored, but the “Iraqgate” and “October Surprise” allegations were swept under the rug with a bipartisan broom. According to some Clinton associates, the new president thought that investigation into the old Republican scandals would distract from his domestic agenda. He apparently had taken to heart the words of his Fleetwood Mac campaign song: “Yesterday’s gone, yesterday’s gone.”

Clinton’s decision, however, left him vulnerable to a conservative counter-attack. No longer tied down by the need to defend Reagan and Bush, the conservative press could safely shift from playing an aggressive defense to a very nasty offense. The conservative press would give Clinton no breaks and no mercy.

Clinton's people, for instance, were right to worry about the improper money transfers at the White House travel office. (In late 1994, the money diversions led to the indictment of the former office director.) But the travel office story was portrayed as a Clinton abuse of power. The *Wall Street Journal's* harsh editorials on the case contributed to deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster's depression and possibly to his suicide. That suicide then gave the right-wing media more ammunition to fire at the Clintons.

By the end of Clinton's first year, the conservative media – particularly Rush Limbaugh, the Christian Broadcasting Network, *Washington Times*, *American Spectator* and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page – had sparked what mounted to a press riot that was trampling Clinton's presidency. Stories abounded about Clinton's marital infidelity, the “mystery” around Foster's death and the Clintons' 14-year-old real estate investment called Whitewater. (At least the conservatives were smart enough to see that yesterday wasn't really gone.)

Though Clinton's dalliances and business deals did raise legitimate questions about his personal ethics, the stories were blown wildly out of proportion. Similar concerns about past business investments by Reagan and Bush – not to mention rumors of sexual liaisons – had prompted no comparable scrutiny after the two Republicans were in office. Indeed, no president in memory had undergone the intense personal scrutiny directed at Clinton.

And many “investigative” Whitewater stories were either misleading or downright wrong. An example was the front-page article in the *New York Times* suggesting that the Rose Law Firm improperly shredded documents. The story touched off another media firestorm. But the couriers who did the shredding actually said the documents had nothing to do with the Whitewater case, a fact that was buried deep in the *Times* story.

### **What Can Be Done?**

These rightward journalistic trends of the past 25 years show no sign of abating. The conservative press is more powerful and more pervasive than ever – and the mainstream press is more acquiescent in following the conservative lead.

There also are no easy answers for getting honest journalism back on track. To a degree, much depends on how many risks mainstream journalists will take in the name of their profession. But those who do will surely encounter strong pressure to go with the conservative flow.

For a turnaround to happen, there must be a more vibrant alternative media – dedicated not to partisan politics, but to the principles of honest investigative journalism. A model for this might be Seymour Hersh's *Dispatch News*, which started in 1969, at a time when the mainstream press was still hesitant to challenge the official word on the Vietnam War.

To overcome that mainstream self-censorship, *Dispatch News* printed articles on a mimeograph machine and sold them to newspapers for a small fee. Though short-lived, *Dispatch News* earned its place in American journalism history by providing a vehicle for exposing the horrific story of a US military massacre of Vietnamese civilians in a small hamlet called My Lai – a story mainstream outlets had shunned for 18 months. Hersh's news service also distributed accounts of chemical warfare experimentation by the US military.

By publishing these tough stories, *Dispatch News* and other alternative press outlets of the late '60s/early '70s helped achieve a secondary benefit: They opened space in the mainstream press for serious investigative reporting. Suddenly, Hersh's work could appear in the *New York Times* – and the national press corps experienced a brief golden age. For a fleeting time, the American people could count on the press to act as a constitutional watchdog to warn the nation about government wrongdoing. The crimes of Watergate, lies about the Vietnam War and abuses by the CIA were brought to light.

But, not coincidentally, Nixon saw this newly awakened press as his enemy and retaliated. His conservative allies set about building their own press establishment and intimidating honest journalists in the mainstream media. Now, a quarter century later, the U.S. press needs to be challenged again to resume its constitutional mission.

## PART II

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### TOWARDS A NEW NEWS MEDIA

*“Without strong news outlets willing to tell the truth on important topics, the U.S. democratic republic has little hope of climbing out of the pit of political ignorance where many Americans find themselves mired.”*

- Robert Parry

Parry’s motivations for launching the Consortiumnews.com website in 1995 were essentially two-fold: one, as he later recalled, he had grown “distressed by the silliness and downright creepiness that had pervaded American journalism” by the mid-1990s, and two, also in the mid-90s, “documents were emerging that put the history of the 1980s in a new – and more troubling – light.”<sup>3</sup>

Many of these documents related to the “October Surprise” controversy from Election 1980, namely the allegations that Reagan’s campaign team had colluded with the Iranians to hold 52 American hostages in Tehran until after Carter had been defeated. Parry had investigated this mystery for PBS “Frontline” and wrote a book about it called *Trick or Treason*, but it wasn’t until after that book came out that he discovered documents that eliminated reasonable doubt that the allegations were true. By then, however, most U.S. media outlets had moved on from the story, satisfied that it had been effectively debunked by a congressional investigation.

Parry founded *Consortium News*, along with a hard-copy newsletter and a bi-monthly sister publication called *I.F. Magazine*, to enable journalism that could examine tough, controversial stories such as these. As he described it in 2004, the website “was meant to be a home for important, well-reported stories that weren’t welcome in the O.J. Simpson-obsessed, conventional-wisdom-driven national news media of that time.”

Among the first articles that he published at this newly established media outlet, branded as “the Internet’s first investigative ‘Zine,” was the “October Surprise X-Files” series, of which we publish an excerpt here.<sup>2†</sup>

### October Surprise X-Files (1995-96)

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#### **Russia’s Report**

On Jan. 11, 1993, the nation’s capital was readying itself for the Inauguration of President Bill Clinton, the first Democrat to sit in the Oval Office in a dozen years. Temporary grandstands were going up along

Pennsylvania Avenue. The city brimmed with a celebratory air that fills the capital whenever a grand event like an Inauguration takes place. But in an obscure set of offices near the U.S. Capitol, a congressional task force was coping with another problem, one that had seeped out over those same 12 years to stain the Republican victory that had last changed party power at the White House, in 1980.

The House task force was concluding a year-long investigation into claims that Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign had interfered with President Carter's negotiations to free 52 Americans held hostage in Iran. A mixed bag of Iranian officials, foreign intelligence agents and international arms dealers had alleged a Republican deal behind Carter's back. But the task force had decided there was "no credible evidence" to support allegations that the Reagan campaign had blocked Carter's possible "October Surprise" of an election-eve hostage return.

Carter's failure to free those hostages over 444 days had sealed his political doom and boosted Reagan from a neck-and-neck race to a resounding electoral victory. The hostages' release, as Reagan was completing his Inaugural Address on Jan. 20, 1981, opened a floodgate of patriotic fervor that reshaped the political landscape and made Reagan a hero.

The possibility that this pivotal moment in modern American history had resulted from a nearly treasonous dirty trick had drawn understandably angry denials from Reagan-Bush loyalists – and even from Democrats who feared that the public would lose faith in politics if the charges proved true.

So, with a collective sigh of relief, the House task force debunked the charges by adopting an elaborate set of alibis for the key players, particularly the late CIA director William J. Casey, who had run Reagan's campaign. One of the Casey alibi dates was nailed down, according to the task force, because a Republican operative had written Casey's home phone number on a piece of paper that day, although the operative admitted that he had no recollection of reaching Casey at home.

Nevertheless, with a host of such dubious alibis, the 968-page report was shipped off to the printers, with a public release set for Jan. 13, 1993. Washington journalists, already briefed on the task force findings, were preparing to praise the report as "exhaustive" and "bipartisan."

But two days before the news conference, a cable arrived from Moscow. It was a response to a query dated Oct. 21, 1992, that Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., who headed the House task force, had sent to Sergey Vadimovich Stepashin, then chairman of the Supreme Soviet's Committee on Defense and Security Issues. Hamilton asked Stepashin – whose job was roughly equal to chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee – what information the Russian government had about the so-called “October Surprise” charges.

The Supreme Soviet's response was delivered to the U.S. embassy in Moscow by Nikolay Kuznetsov, secretary of the subcommittee on state security. Kuznetsov apologized for the “lengthy preparation of the response.” It was quickly translated by the U.S. embassy and forwarded to Hamilton.

### **Carter vs. Reagan**

To the shock of the task force, the six-page Russian report stated, as fact, that Casey, George Bush and other Republicans had met secretly with Iranian officials in Europe during the 1980 presidential campaign. The Russians depicted the hostage negotiations that year as a two-way competition between the Carter White House and the Reagan campaign to outbid one another for Iran's cooperation on the hostages. The Russians asserted that the Reagan team had disrupted Carter's hostage negotiations after all, the exact opposite of the task force conclusion.

As described by the Russians, the Carter administration offered the Iranians supplies of arms and unfreezing of assets for a pre-election release of the hostages. One important meeting had occurred in Athens in July 1980 with Pentagon representatives agreeing “in principle” to deliver “a significant quantity of spare parts for F-4 and F-5 aircraft and also M-60 tanks,” according to the Russian report. The Iranians “discussed a possible step-by-step normalization of Iranian-American relations [and] ... the release of American hostages.”

But the Republicans were making separate overtures to the Iranians, also in Europe, the Russians claimed. “William Casey, in 1980, met three times with representatives of the Iranian leadership,” the Russians wrote. “The meetings took place in Madrid and Paris.”

At the Paris meeting in October 1980, “R[obert] Gates, at that time a staffer of the National Security Council in the administration of Jimmy Carter and former CIA director George Bush also took part,” the Russians said. “In Madrid and Paris, the representatives of Ronald Reagan and the Iranian leadership discussed the question of possibly delaying the release of 52 hostages from the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran.”

According to the report, the Republicans won the bidding war.

“After the victory of R. Reagan in the election, in early 1981, a secret agreement was reached in London in accord with which Iran released the American hostages, and the U.S. continued to supply arms, spares and military supplies for the Iranian army,” the report continued. The deliveries were carried out by Israel, often through private arms dealers, the Russians said.

“Through the Israeli conduit, Iran in 1983 bought surface-to-surface missiles of the ‘Lance’ class plus artillery of a total value of \$135 million,” the report said. “In July 1983, a group of specialists from the firm, Lockheed, went to Iran on English passports to repair the navigation systems and other electronic components on American-produced planes.” Then, in 1985, the weapons tap opened wider, into the Iran-Contra shipments.

### **The Russian ‘Bomb’**

The matter-of-fact Russian report was stunning. It also matched other information the task force had. The Israelis, for example, had shipped U.S. military spares to Iran in the early 1980s, with the acquiescence of senior Reagan administration officials. But the Russians weren’t clear about where their information came from or how reliable it was.

After receiving the Russian report in January 1993, a U.S. embassy political officer speculated that Moscow’s report might have been “based largely on material that has previously appeared in the Western media.”

But apparently, there was no serious follow-up – even though Moscow, the communist enemy in the 1980s, claimed to possess incriminating evidence about two CIA directors (Casey and Gates) and two U.S. Presidents (Reagan and Bush). Though the Russian claims about Carter’s negotiations



with Iran might cause embarrassment, Carter, as President, possessed the constitutional authority to negotiate with a foreign power. The Republicans did not.

Task force investigators felt the Russian report could be safely dismissed because one section took seriously the allegations of former Israeli intelligence official Ari Ben-Menashe, an Iranian-born Jew. Ben-Menashe had testified to Congress that, as an Israeli intelligence officer, he participated in Paris meetings between senior Iranians and Republican emissaries in October 1980. Ben-Menashe had placed Casey, Bush and Gates at those meetings as well.

But Bush, who was Reagan's vice presidential running mate in 1980 and President during the task force investigation, denied being in Paris. So did Gates, who was Casey's deputy director at CIA and Bush's CIA director.

The House task force also rejected Ben-Menashe as lacking credibility.

After finding the Russian report in a remote storage room on Capitol Hill, I contacted one well-placed official in Europe who checked with the Russian government. "This was real information based on their own sources and methods," the official told me. As for the possibility that the report was blowback from the U.S. media, the official insisted that the Russians "would not send something like this to the U.S. Congress at that time, if it was bullshit."

Instead, the Russians considered their report "a bomb" and "couldn't believe it was ignored," the official said. Not only did the House task force keep the extraordinary Russian report secret, it ended up in a cardboard box among hundreds of documents, some unclassified and others "secret." The document boxes were piled, ingloriously, on the floor of a former Ladies' Room which had been converted into storage space, deep inside a parking garage of the Rayburn House Office Building.

Stored away in a converted Ladies' Room on Capitol Hill, dusty boxes contained startling evidence of Republican dirty tricks in the 1980 presidential campaign – and of a bipartisan cover-up that continues to this day.

From secret payments to an Iranian banker to incriminating CIA discussions, the documents painted a picture of political deceit at the highest levels of national power and of a fraud perpetrated on American history: another chapter of the October Surprise X-Files.

### **The Ladies' Room Secrets**

After its release on Jan. 13, 1993, the House task force report on the October Surprise controversy quickly hardened into historical concrete. Its conclusion that there was “no credible evidence” to support the allegations of Republican sabotage in the 1980 Iran hostage crisis won acclaim across the political spectrum.

No one, it seemed, examined the quality of the investigation or listened to the few dissenting voices.

But in the months following the task force’s findings, more foreign leaders in positions to know told other Americans that there was more to the October Surprise story than the task force found. Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasir Arafat, for example, said that senior Republicans had traveled to Beirut in 1980 seeking avenues to the Iranian leadership, while former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir confirmed the conspiracy in a May 1993 interview.

In another interview, retired Israeli General Yehoshua Saguy, who was head of Israeli military intelligence in 1980, said Prime Minister Menachem Begin suggested the Reagan team had greenlighted Israel’s secret 1980 weapons shipments to Iran.

### **The French Spymaster**

Alexandre deMarenches, the man who ran French intelligence in 1980, privately mocked the House task force findings and let stand the sworn testimony of his biographer, David Andelman, that deMarenches had arranged meetings between Reagan’s campaign chief William Casey and Iranians in Paris in October 1980.

Though the task force had concluded that Andelman’s testimony was “credible,” it paradoxically lacked “probative value.”

These newer witnesses also were corroborating longstanding claims about Republican interference that had been made by top Iranians of the period,

including Iran's President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, Foreign Minister Sadeq Ghotzbadah and Defense Minister Ahmed Madani. Other testimony supporting the October Surprise charges had come from intelligence agents with confirmed ties to Israel, France and the United States.

But the dismissive House task force report effectively buried the October Surprise story as an historical issue. Washington's conventional wisdom readily accepted that there had been no Republican contacts to Iran in 1980; that Casey, George Bush and other Reagan campaign officials had been falsely accused.

Then, last year, senior representatives of Iran's current government held informal talks in Europe with Americans close to President Clinton. Like deMarenches, these Iranians were amused at how wrong the House task force had been. Casey indeed had made secret overtures to Iran during the hostage crisis of 1980, these Iranians said.

The new Iranian claims were relayed to the highest levels of the Clinton administration. But fearing how a reopened October Surprise investigation might look, the White House refused to reconsider the House task force findings. For reasons perhaps explained best by Washington's acute sense for sniffing career danger, the October Surprise story had become one of the capital's most powerful taboos.

Given that reality, I hesitated before seeking access to the task force's raw files, but having learned of the new Iranian claims, I decided to go ahead. I obtained permission from the House International Relations Committee to examine the task force's unclassified papers.

To reach the files required taking the Rayburn building's elevator to a sub-basement floor and then winding through the musty underground garage almost to the car exit at the building's south side. To the right, behind venetian-blind-covered windows was a small locked office. Inside were a few desks, cloth-covered partitions, phones and a rumbling old copying machine.

At the rear of the office was a converted Ladies' Room, now used for storage. The task force's taped boxes sat against the wall, under an empty tampon dispenser which still hung from the salmon-colored tiles. I began pulling the tape off the boxes and poring through the files. Not only did I

find unclassified notes and documents about the task force's work, but also "secret" and even "top secret" papers that had been left behind, apparently in the haste to wrap up the investigation.

A few "secret" depositions were there, including one of a senior CIA officer named Charles Cogan. Cogan testified that he had attended a 1981 meeting at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., in which a high-ranking Republican commented to Casey about their success in disrupting Carter's "October Surprise."

### **FBI Wiretaps**

Another box contained a "secret" summary of FBI wiretaps placed on phones belonging to Cyrus Hashemi, an Iranian financier who had worked for the CIA in 1980. Hashemi also was a key Carter intermediary in the hostage talks. But in fall 1980, the wiretaps showed Hashemi receiving a \$3 million deposit arranged by a Houston lawyer who claimed to be associated with then-vice presidential candidate George Bush.

Shortly after President Reagan's Inauguration, a second mysterious payment to Hashemi arrived from London by Concorde, via a courier for the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI).

There were notes, too, describing Bush's active involvement in monitoring President Carter's Iran hostage negotiations. According to one set of notes, dated Oct. 27, 1980, Bush instructed foreign policy adviser Richard Allen to funnel last-minute information about the negotiations back to him via Theodore Shackley, the CIA's former associate deputy director for operations.

Still another file contained a summary of all "secret" and "top secret" State Department records on arms sales to Iran in the 1980s. One "top secret/sensitive" document recounted private meetings that Secretary of State Alexander Haig had with Middle Eastern leaders during a trip in May 1981. The leaders told Haig about the continuing secret flow of weapons from Israel to Iran.

I also found a "confidential" October Surprise report that had been sent by Russia's Supreme Soviet informing the task force that Moscow's national

security files contained evidence that Casey, Bush and other Republicans had negotiated secretly with Iranians in Europe in 1980.

All of this information had been excluded from the House task force report.

### **‘A Trap Door’**

Other task force papers in the boxes revealed how flimsy the report’s October Surprise debunking had been. Even task force chief counsel E. Lawrence Barcella was nervous about the weaknesses. On Dec. 8, 1992, he instructed his deputies “to put some language in, as a trap door” in case later disclosures disproved parts of the report or if complaints arose about selective omission of evidence.

The boxes of documents revealed that the task force used false alibis on Casey’s whereabouts for key October Surprise dates; withheld relevant documents and testimony that clashed with its conclusions; dismissed credible witnesses who supplied unwelcome support for the allegations; and accepted dubious – if not blatantly false – testimony from Republicans.

In addition, the task force’s files contained new evidence of conflicts of interest for the House investigators, particularly chief counsel Barcella. In the 1980s, he had been a lead attorney for the corrupt international bank, BCCI, which paid his firm more than \$2 million to shield it from press and governmental investigations. At that time, Barcella also was a law partner of Paul Laxalt, who had been chairman of the Reagan-Bush campaign in 1980.

Indeed, the Ladies’ Room files showed that a fascinating chapter of recent American history – the story of the pivotal 1980 election – had been seriously miswritten. Even if one still judges that the evidence falls short of proving an explicit Republican-Iranian “deal” to delay the release of the 52 American hostages, the facts do point to significant GOP interference in President Carter’s negotiations during the campaign.

Much of that missing history was there in the documents.

### **Where’s Bill Casey?**

“We found a photograph from the Bohemian Grove for the last weekend of July,” the congressional investigator boasted to me over the phone. I was stunned.

“You found a photograph from the Bohemian Grove?” I stammered.

The announcement might not have sounded that unusual. But for the few reporters who were investigating the October Surprise controversy, the statement that the House task force had located a photograph from the Bohemian Grove for the last weekend of July 1980 was big news. It was exactly the kind of hard evidence that we had been seeking to show whether William Casey was at that exclusive men’s retreat in northern California or at a secret meeting with Iranian emissaries in Spain.

From the investigator’s confident tone, it sounded as if the House task force finally had the smoking-gun evidence to disprove the allegation that Casey, as Reagan’s campaign director in 1980, had disrupted President Carter’s Iranian hostage negotiations.

As the October Surprise story belatedly heated up, in 1991-92, investigators had tried to fix Casey’s whereabouts on a handful of days when several witnesses placed the Republican campaign chief at meetings in Madrid and Paris. Two of those mystery days were July 27 and 28, 1980, a Sunday and a Monday, when Iranian CIA agent Jamshid Hashemi testified that he was with Casey in Madrid at a two-day meeting with radical Iranian mullah Mehdi Karrubi.

But nailing down the whereabouts of Casey, a wily old World War II spymaster, had proved difficult. Documents and news clips did show that going into that late July weekend in 1980 Casey was in Arlington, Va., at the Republican campaign headquarters. He disappeared from public view on Saturday, July 26; was missing Sunday and Monday morning; and then turned up late on Monday afternoon, July 28, at a World War II historical conference in London.

But where had Casey been from Saturday until Monday afternoon? Could he have gone to Madrid for a two-day meeting before flying to London?

### **A Debunking Hysteria**

At a pivotal moment in the October Surprise investigation (in November 1991), two national magazines, *Newsweek* and *The New Republic*, published matching cover stories declaring that records at the historical conference revealed that Casey arrived in London Sunday evening, July 27,

and attended the next morning's session, July 28. That proved, the magazines declared in unison, that a two-day meeting in Madrid was impossible. The October Surprise story was declared a "myth."

The impact of those two magazine stories cannot be overstated. They convinced most of the Washington news media and many members of Congress that the longstanding suspicions of Casey's skullduggery were false. A kind of debunking hysteria followed, with other publications joining in a stampede that trampled any careful examination of the October Surprise facts.

But *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* were wrong; they had completely misread the London evidence. When more thorough interviews were done with Americans who had attended the London conference with Casey, it became clear that Casey was not there on either Sunday night or Monday morning. He arrived late Monday afternoon, as a notation on the attendance sheet corroborated. It said Casey "came at 4 p.m."

Typically, however, neither magazine corrected the major journalistic error that they had committed. The new information also received almost no mention in the rest of the national media. So millions of Americans were left believing that the two magazines had established a correct alibi for Bill Casey and that the October Surprise story had been disproved.

Though inclined to join in the debunking, the House task force, which started work in 1992, was forced to recognize the glaring mistake by the two magazines. But instead of blowing the whistle, the congressional investigators simply began a quiet search for a new alibi to slip into the place of the old.

By fall 1992, the task force had settled on a new location for Casey's late July weekend whereabouts. The task force put him in the Parsonage cottage at the Bohemian Grove encampment in northern California.

According to this new alibi, Casey flew from Los Angeles to San Francisco on Friday, July 25, with Republican operative Darrell Trent. Casey then drove with Trent to the Bohemian Grove, arriving sometime late Friday evening. Casey stayed at the Grove until Sunday morning, July 27. He then went to San Francisco, boarded a British Airways flight, flew all night, and landed about lunchtime the next day, Monday, July 28, in London.

That itinerary left no time for a side trip to Spain, so Jamshid Hashemi's allegations of a secret two-day meeting in Madrid could be declared false a second time. The October Surprise charges were again dismissed as a "myth."

But there were problems, too, with this Bohemian Grove alibi. I and other reporters at Public Broadcasting System's "Frontline" program had already investigated this possibility for Casey's whereabouts and found it to be untrue. We discovered clear documentary evidence that Casey actually attended the Grove on the following weekend, Aug. 1-3, not the last weekend of July.

### **Evidence in the Way**

Indeed, the House task force's own evidence countered the Bohemian Grove alibi. According to Grove records obtained by the House investigators, Casey's host, Darrell Trent, was already at the Grove on Friday, July 25, while Casey was still in Washington. So they could not have traveled together from Los Angeles.

Further, the task force found a plane ticket for a flight that Casey did take that day. But it was not to the West Coast. It was a ticket for the Washington-to-New York shuttle. A Casey calendar entry then showed a meeting on Saturday morning, July 26, with a right-to-life activist who said she met Casey at his home in Roslyn Harbor, N.Y.

Other records supported the interpretation that Casey had attended the Grove the following weekend. Republican campaign records revealed that on Aug. 1, Casey did travel to Los Angeles, where he hooked up with Darrell Trent. Also on Aug. 1, Grove financial records documented Casey and Trent making purchases at the Grove. In addition, there was a diary entry from Matthew McGowan, one of the Grove members at the Parsonage cottage. He wrote on Aug. 3 that "we had Bill Casey, Gov. Reagan's campaign mgr., as our guest this last weekend."

Still, regardless of these facts, the House task force insisted on the Bohemian Grove alibi. The congressional investigators showed a similar bias in handling the alibi for Casey on the other crucial date, Oct. 19, 1980. That's when witnesses claimed they saw the campaign director in Paris at another round of meetings with Karrubi.



To overcome the Paris evidence, the task force relied on the decade-old memory of Casey's nephew, Larry Casey, who claimed he remembered his late father placing a telephone call to Bill Casey who was at the Republican headquarters in Arlington. Though Larry Casey had no corroboration for that memory, the task force accepted it as "credible."

But again, "Frontline" reporters had been down that road – and found it to be a dead end. I had interviewed Larry Casey in 1991, a year before his House testimony. In that interview, Larry Casey offered a completely different alibi, insisting that he vividly remembered his parents having dinner with Bill Casey at the Jockey Club in Washington on Oct. 19, 1980.

"It was very clear in my mind even though it was 11 years ago," Larry Casey said. But then I showed Larry Casey the sign-in sheets for the GOP headquarters. The entries recorded Larry Casey's parents picking up Bill Casey for the dinner on Oct. 15, four days earlier. Larry Casey acknowledged his error, and indeed an American Express receipt later confirmed Oct. 15 as the date of the Jockey Club dinner.

In 1992, however, Larry Casey testified before the House task force and offered the phone call alibi, which he had not mentioned in the "Frontline" interview. Though I notified the House task force about this discrepancy, the task force was undeterred. It still used the phone call alibi to debunk the Paris allegations.

### **The Bohemian Grove Photo**

This pattern of accepting silly alibis for Bill Casey had convinced me that the House investigation was little more than a whitewash. Clearing the late Bill Casey and Ronald Reagan's campaign pleased Republicans who wanted to protect the legitimacy of the 12-year Reagan-Bush reign. The Democrats, too, seemed eager to go along, frightened of a head-on fight with the Republicans.

But my confidence was shaken by the House investigator on the phone and his photograph. A formal group photo of the Bohemian Grove members and guests at the Parsonage cottage on the last weekend of July 1980 would be the clincher. It would prove, finally, that Jamshid Hashemi was a liar and that the Madrid allegation was a myth.

“You found a photograph of Bill Casey at the Bohemian Grove?” I choked. A lightheadedness swept over my mind as I tried to reconcile how the seemingly ironclad evidence against the Bohemian Grove alibi could have been so wrong.

But I sensed an uncertainty, maybe even embarrassment, at the other end of the line.

“Well,” the investigator answered hesitantly, “Bill Casey’s not in the photograph. Everyone else is. Darrell Trent, his host, is there. But Bill Casey’s not in the picture.”

“Bill Casey’s not there?” I exclaimed in amazement.

“No, Bill Casey’s not in the picture.”

Still, in its published report, the task force ditched the photograph and other documents putting Casey at the Grove only on the first weekend of August 1980. The task force relied instead on one piece of paper, a notation written by Republican foreign policy adviser Richard Allen. On a note page dated Aug. 2, Allen had scribbled down Casey’s Long Island home phone number.

That act of writing down the number proved, the task force sleuths concluded, that Casey was at home that day – and thus not at the Grove. That, in turn, meant that Casey must have attended the Grove the last weekend of July. The task force embraced this strange argument even though Allen testified that “I can’t tell you whether or not I got through” on Casey’s number when he dialed it Aug. 2.

In other words, the seasoned House investigators decided that writing down a person’s home phone number proved the person was at home, even if the phone went unanswered. Armed with such “logic,” the task force completed its debunking of the October Surprise allegations.

On the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, the task force chairman, Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., cited the solid Casey alibis as a key reason why the task force report “should put the controversy to rest once and for all.” Hamilton’s article was aptly entitled “Case Closed.”

And so it stayed, until I learned that senior Iranian officials had informed intermediaries close to President Clinton in 1993-94 that the House task

force had gotten the story all wrong. These Iranians asserted that they indeed had collaborated with Casey and other Republicans in 1980. But the Clinton administration, at its highest levels, chose not to reopen the “closed” investigation. President Clinton apparently felt the old fight was too risky and might detract from his domestic agenda.

It was then that I tracked down the House task force records in a barren storage room off the House Rayburn parking garage.

In one of the dozens of boxes, I found a color photograph of the 16 men who spent that pivotal last weekend of July 1980 in the Parsonage cottage at the Bohemian Grove. They were posed in a formal setting, with some older gentlemen seated in front and the other members and guests standing in elevated rows behind them. I looked at one man after another, searching for the tall, stooped, large-headed figure of Bill Casey. He was nowhere to be seen.

Since its founding in 1946, the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas (now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) has trained tens of thousands of security forces, including some of the worst human rights abusers on the continent. A list of graduates was released in 1993, confirming that “dictators, death squad operatives, and assassins” had been educated at the SOA. This led to unsuccessful congressional efforts to cut funding to the school in 1993 and 1994, and growing public pressure that compelled the Pentagon to release the SOA training manuals on September 20, 1996. These documents confirmed that the DoD had trained students in counterinsurgency tactics including torture, extortion, blackmail, and the targeting of civilian populations, as Parry explains here.

## [‘Project X’ & School of Assassins \(Oct. 14, 1996\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

For years, human rights activists have accused the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas of teaching torture and assassination techniques to military officers from around the Western Hemisphere. For just as long, the Pentagon has denied the charge.

Then, late on Friday afternoon, Sept. 20, the Pentagon released a report admitting that some of those concerns were well-founded. From 1982-91, the School of the Americas used seven U.S. Army intelligence training manuals, written in Spanish, which advocated executions, torture, blackmail

and other forms of coercion, including the kidnapping of a target's family members.

But the Pentagon was still grudging in its admissions. The investigation into the offending manuals actually took place more than four years ago – in 1992 – and had been kept under wraps since then. Even more disturbing, many of the historical records that would shed light on the origins of the human rights abuse training were shredded by order of top Defense Department officials before the end of the Bush administration.

In the Pentagon's investigative report, dated March 10, 1992, Werner E. Michel, then assistant secretary of defense for intelligence oversight, disclosed that seven Spanish-language manuals had been compiled from "old material dating back to the 1960's from the Army's Foreign Intelligence Assistance Program, entitled 'Project X'." Michel wrote that the "Project X" material "had been retained in the files of the Army Intelligence School at Fort Huachuca, Arizona."

The mysterious "Project X" apparently was a program for developing advanced counter-insurgency techniques for allied armies. It could have been the rationale for human rights violations practiced by anti-communist militaries during the last 25 years of the Cold War. From the context of the Pentagon report, it was clear that the project at least was the source for the abuses recommended in the seven Spanish-language training manuals. But Michel's report gave little additional information about "Project X."

Future historians also will find little more in the Pentagon's files. One of Michel's proposals in 1992 was to retain only one copy each of the seven offending manuals. "All other copies of the manuals and associated instructional materials, including computer disks, lesson plans and 'Project X' documents, should be destroyed."

Senior Defense Department officials approved Michel's recommendation and all documents relating to "Project X" were destroyed in 1992, according to Pentagon spokesman, Lt. Col. Arne Owens. "We didn't see any need to have these things floating around," explained Owens.

### **Reagan Legacy**

The Pentagon report portrayed the production of the new manuals in 1982 as a mistake. But their use to train Latin American officers fit with the

Reagan administration's hardening stance against leftist insurgents in Central America in the early 1980s. In winning the election in 1980, President Reagan had publicly renounced President Carter's strong emphasis on human rights.

In the months immediately after Reagan's election, right-wing Salvadoran "death squads" went on a rampage of political slaughter, including the rape-murder of four American churchwomen. In 1981-82, the "death squads," often consisting of plain-clothes soldiers, butchered thousands of perceived leftists with little criticism from a White House that was drawing a line against communism. In December 1981, a U.S.-trained Salvadoran battalion swept through the remote village of El Mozote and massacred about 800 men, women and children.

The Reagan administration also warmed up to the Guatemalan army as it launched extermination campaigns against suspected leftist strongholds among that country's Indian population. Most controversial of all, the CIA began organizing the Nicaraguan Contra rebel army to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government. The Contras, too, gained a quick reputation for human rights atrocities during raids into northern Nicaragua.

Simultaneously, to improve the professionalism of the Central American armies and to appease congressional concerns about human rights, the Reagan administration began to send more and more of the region's soldiers through the School of the Americas at the Panama Canal Zone and later at Fort Benning, Ga. It was during this period in the early 1980s that the manuals containing "objectionable material" – in the Pentagon phrase – were published.

As an insurgent army, the Contras did not qualify for School of the Americas training. But in summer 1983, CIA director William Casey proposed giving them their own training manual. During a trip to Honduras, Casey ordered production of a "psychological operations" manual for the Contras. It would teach them many of the same intelligence strategies contained in the seven school manuals.

The 90-page Contra manual also was cobbled together from past Special Forces training booklets. It, too, counseled the Contras in a variety of questionable tactics. One passage recommended the "selective use of

violence” to “neutralize” civilian Nicaraguan officials. Others suggested creating a “martyr” for the cause by arranging the death of a Contra supporter and assigning “special jobs” to criminals.

### **Lenin vs. Jefferson**

In September 1984, while with The Associated Press, I obtained a copy of the Contra manual and managed to confirm its CIA authorship. My story touched off a furor in Washington, with Democrats accusing the CIA of adopting tactics more fitting a totalitarian state than a democracy. “It espouses the doctrine of Lenin, not Jefferson,” charged Rep. Edward P. Boland, D-Mass.

When I interviewed Contra director Edgar Chamorro about the manual, he admitted misgivings about the language in the booklet, but added that the Contras did “practice” the execution of Sandinista officials who were deemed “criminals.” Chamorro told me that “in a guerrilla war, if you have to exact justice immediately, sometimes you have to do it.”

After several weeks of embarrassment over the manual flap, Casey ordered the disciplining of several mid-level CIA officials. Chamorro was punished, too, by being ousted from the Contra leadership, apparently for his frankness. President Reagan pronounced the controversy over. “It’s much ado about nothing,” he declared.

The CIA manual controversy apparently did not prompt a broader investigation of where the abusive language originated. Similar advice remained in the teaching course at School of the Americas for another seven years, according to the 1992 Pentagon study. Those booklets were still recommending the “neutralizing” of various “targets” and “executions” for political purposes.

For critics, the disclosure of the training manuals will reinforce the image of School of the Americas as School of Assassins. Without doubt, the school has graduated some of the most infamous human rights abusers in the modern history of the Western Hemisphere. The late Salvadoran Maj. Roberto D’Aubuisson passed through the school before presiding over the notorious Salvadoran “death squads.” The school also trained the 19 Salvadoran soldiers blamed for the murder of six Jesuit priests in 1989. Panama’s dictator Manuel Noriega was another graduate.

Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II, D-Mass., one of the school's leading critics, has called for its closing. But the Pentagon continues to insist that overall the school imparts valuable lessons for professionalizing the region's armed forces and for teaching respect for human rights.

The belated disclosure of the manual report will make that an even harder sell. And the destruction of the "Project X" documents may prevent the public from ever knowing just how far this human rights scandal went.

In late summer 1996, the *San Jose Mercury News* published an explosive three-part series by journalist Gary Webb entitled "Dark Alliance," which traced the origins of the nation's crack epidemic to the massive amounts of cocaine that government-connected drug traffickers imported into the United States. The story began with the lines, "For the better part of a decade, a San Francisco Bay Area drug ring sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of Los Angeles and funneled millions in drug profits to a Latin American guerrilla army run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency." It concluded that this influx of cocaine "helped spark a crack explosion in urban America."

The series sent shockwaves through African-American communities, in particular, which had been devastated by the impact of the highly addictive smokable form of cocaine. Amplified by black talk radio stations, which gave the allegations substantial daily coverage, the series spawned the formation of a network called the Crack the CIA Coalition, which organized protests in Los Angeles and around the country demanding justice and accountability.

After remaining silent about the story for over a month, the *Washington Post* finally covered it in an October 4, 1996, feature that downplayed the allegations and dismissed the African-American outrage as little more than black paranoia. But as Parry explained in an article on October 28, the irony was that the *Post* was, in its own disingenuous way, finally acknowledging the underlying reality of Contra-cocaine trafficking. Having broken the story in the mid-1980s, Parry intimately knew how hostile the *Post* had been to the initial allegations, as he explains here.

## [Contra-Crack Story Assailed \(Oct. 28, 1996\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

More than a decade after the first public disclosures linking CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contra rebels to cocaine trafficking, the story finally splashed dramatically onto the front page of the *Washington Post*. With side-bars, the story on Oct. 4, 1996, also covered two full pages inside.

This investigative report, however, did not castigate the Contras for shipping tons of cocaine into the United States in the 1980s, nor did it explore how the U.S. government covered up the criminal enterprise.

Instead, the *Post* devoted that extraordinary space to criticizing the *San Jose Mercury News*, its reporter Gary Webb, and America's black community for supposedly overreacting to new Contra drug evidence.

In August 1996, Webb and the *Mercury News* had traced the origins of Los Angeles' crack epidemic to the delivery of cheap cocaine by Nicaraguans who were raising money for the Contras in the early 1980s. The *Mercury News* stories, backed by court records and documents from the National Archives, also touched a raw nerve in black communities which have been devastated by crack and related violence.

The *Post*, which had long minimized the Contra drug allegations, continued that practice by putting down the *Mercury News*. The *Post* story by Roberto Suro and Walter Pincus did acknowledge that Contra-connected drug smugglers had brought tons of cocaine into the United States, but the paper concluded that the Contras had not "played a major role in the emergence of crack" cocaine.

The *Post* argued that one of the Nicaraguan smugglers, Oscar Danilo Bandon, "handled only about five tons of cocaine." The *Post* conceded that another pro-Contra Nicaraguan, Norwin Meneses, "who was Bandon's original supplier, may have handled more cocaine than Bandon." But the *Post* insisted that no single drug network could be blamed for touching off the crack explosion.

To complete this debunking, a second *Post* story supplied a rationale for why blacks could be easily misled by charges about U.S. government complicity in Contra cocaine: African-Americans are easily duped by "conspiracy fears," the *Post* explained. The *Post* had thus neatly answered the growing public concern about the Reagan administration's blind eye toward Contra cocaine smuggling in the 1980s – it wasn't "major" and blacks are paranoid.

The irony of the *Post* story, however, was that the newspaper was finally accepting the reality of Contra cocaine trafficking, albeit in a backhanded way. The *Post*, which swung behind the Contra cause in the late 1980s, had long pooh-poohed earlier allegations that the Contras were implicated in drug shipments. When Brian Barger and I wrote the first story about Contra-cocaine smuggling for The Associated Press in December 1985, the



*Post* waited a week, added some fresh denials and then stuck the story near the back of the national news section.

### **Official Confirmation**

The *Post* even gave short shrift to the charges when an official Senate investigation was documenting the Reagan administration's cozy relationships with Contra-connected drug smugglers in 1987-89. That investigation, directed by Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., established that the administration gave Contra-supply contracts to four companies that were either under indictment for drug trafficking or listed as suspected smugglers in law enforcement computers. Kerry's probe also confirmed that pilots used for Contra arms flights carried cocaine into the United States as well as guns to Central America. And Kerry found that drug kingpins had contributed heavily to the Contra cause, in hopes of gaining favor with Washington.

"It is clear that individuals who provided support for the Contras were involved in drug trafficking, the supply network of the Contras was used by drug trafficking organizations, and elements of the Contras themselves knowingly received financial and material assistance from drug traffickers," the Kerry report said. "In each case, one or another agency of the U.S. government had information regarding the involvement either while it was occurring, or immediately thereafter."

When this important report was issued in April 1989, the *Post* buried the information in a scant 700-word article on page A20. And most of that story, by Michael Isikoff, was devoted to Republican criticisms of Kerry, rather than to the serious evidence of Contra wrongdoing. Other establishment publications took the cue that it was safe to mock Kerry. *Newsweek* dubbed him a "randy conspiracy buff."

The *Post* only briefly changed its tune in 1991, when some of Kerry's findings were dusted off by the federal government in the drug-trafficking trial of Panama's Manuel Noriega. In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration had recruited the little general to assist the Contras despite his well-known links to the drug trade. But in 1989, the United States invaded Panama to arrest Noriega on drug charges.

In Noriega's 1991 trial, the government called one drug kingpin, Carlos Lehder, who confirmed that the Medellin cartel had given \$10 million to the Nicaraguan Contras, a claim that one of Kerry's witnesses had made years earlier. For once, the *Post* praised Kerry for his earlier investigation. "The Kerry hearings didn't get the attention they deserved at the time," a *Post* editorial said on Nov. 27, 1991 – without noting that one of the principal reasons for the neglect was the *Post*'s own poor reporting on the scandal.

But five years later, the *Post* had resumed its protection of the Contras by attacking the *Mercury News* series. After the two-page-plus take-out, an Oct. 9, 1996, editorial reprised those findings, that the CIA-connected Nicaraguans had not "played a major role" in the crack epidemic. But the editorial did adjust the newspaper's bias slightly by admitting the obvious: that for any "CIA-connected characters to have played even a trivial role in introducing Americans to crack would indicate an unconscionable breach by the CIA."

### **Contra Press Agents**

Still, the *Post*'s new journalistic negligence recalls the worst of the mainstream media's defense of the Contras in the mid-1980s. Granted, the Reagan administration did distort the facts about Central America and lambaste the reporters who uncovered critical information about the Contras. But too often, the star Washington journalists acted like little more than press agents for the Contra war.

The disinformation began even before Ronald Reagan took office. In December 1980 when right-wing Salvadoran troops raped and murdered four American churchwomen, the incoming Republicans tried to blame the women for their own fate. In the following years, the Reagan administration struggled to conceal the Salvadoran government's hand in the thousands of civilian murders that left bodies rotting along the country's roadways.

In December 1981, when U.S.-trained Salvadoran troops butchered about 800 men, women and children in the town of El Mozote, the administration denied the story and pro-Reagan media outlets attacked the reporters who discovered the atrocity. The same PR protection was afforded the CIA-backed Contras when they rampaged through northern Nicaragua, killing

civilians, raping women and torturing captives. President Reagan hailed the Contras as the “moral equals of the Founding Fathers.”

With this *carte blanche* from the White House, the Contra war became a perfect cover for cocaine traffickers. For both ideological and commercial reasons, drug traffickers got close to the Contras. Noriega thought his Contra assistance gave him political protection. So did corrupt military officers in El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica, many of whom also joined in the lucrative cocaine trade.

As federal drug agent Celerino Castillo has said, warnings from the field went unheeded in Washington. U.S. embassy staff in Central America knew that cabling negative information about the Contras was a quick route to career oblivion. The same was true of state-side prosecutors, FBI agents and even members of Congress. In spring 1986, when a federal investigation started in Miami into illegal gun-running and drug trafficking by Contra backers, the prosecutor found his report urging a grand jury rewritten to recommend the opposite. When Sen. Kerry tried to examine the drug allegations, the Republicans put him under a Senate ethics committee inquiry.

### **The ‘Wanda’ Tale**

Prospective witnesses encountered similar troubles. Typical was the case of 31-year-old Wanda Palacio, who broke with the Medellin cartel in 1986 and approached Kerry with an account of pilots for a CIA-connected airline, Southern Air Transport, flying cocaine out of Barranquilla, Colombia, as part of the Contra support operation. She claimed to have witnessed two such flights, one in 1983 and the other in October 1985. She quoted drug lord Jorge Ochoa as claiming the flights were part of an arrangement to exchange “drugs for guns.”

On Sept. 26, 1986, Kerry took Palacio’s 11-page “proffer” statement to William Weld, then assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division. According to contemporaneous notes of the meeting, Weld chuckled that he was not surprised about the allegations of “bum agents, former and current CIA agents” involved in corrupt dealings with the cartel. But on Oct. 3, Weld’s office informed Kerry that it was rejecting Palacio as

a witness on the grounds that there were some minor contradictions in her testimony.

Then, two days later, on Oct. 5, 1986, one of Oliver North's secret Contra-supply planes was shot down over Nicaragua, killing three crew members. Only a cargo handler, Eugene Hasenfus, survived. That week, Palacio was in Kerry's Senate office when a photo of the dead co-pilot Wallace Sawyer flashed onto a TV screen. She excitedly exclaimed that Sawyer was one of the pilots she had seen loading cocaine onto the Southern Air plane in Barranquilla in early October 1985. Her claim was greeted with skepticism by Kerry's staff.

But I had flown to Managua for the AP after the crash and had gained access to Sawyer's flight logs that had been aboard the plane. Sawyer had written down the airport codes of the cities he had visited as well as the tail numbers of the planes he had flown. When I returned to Washington, I deciphered the IDs of the sometime obscure airports where Sawyer had landed. I also cross-checked the tail numbers with federal aviation records which identify the owners of the plane.

Sawyer had scribbled down three entries for Oct. 2, 4 and 6, 1985, listing himself flying a Southern Air Transport plane into Barranquilla, just as Palacio had alleged. Yet, despite the corroboration – and a supportive polygraph exam – Weld still rejected Palacio. Her fate was similar to other witnesses who dared to link the Contras, the CIA and cocaine.

### **'Randy Conspiracy Buff'**

Cruel assessments were also in store for investigators who took the Contra drug stories too seriously. On Feb. 24, 1987, Keith Schneider of the *New York Times* wrote a dismissive story about Kerry's probe. Schneider quoted "law enforcement officials" as saying that the Contra allegations "have come from a small group of convicted drug traffickers in South Florida who never mentioned Contras or the White House until the Iran-Contra Affair broke in November" 1986.

The *Times* statement, of course, was false: the AP Contra-drug story had appeared almost a full year before the Iran-Contra scandal broke and Kerry's initial witnesses had surfaced in early 1986, not after November

1986. But the *Times* report was part of what would become a pattern, a reflexive mainstream media defense of the Contras.

The current media assault on Gary Webb and the *San Jose Mercury News* is an ugly echo of that earlier shouting down of honest investigators who had uncovered an inconvenient truth: the connections between the CIA, Contras, and cocaine.

Despite the CIA's charter prohibiting it from operating within the United States, it has long done just that – with a sordid history of clandestine operations carried out against U.S. citizens such as the MK/ULTRA program, which ran mind control experiments using drugs such as LSD on unsuspecting Americans in the 1950s and 60s, Operation CHAOS, which infiltrated leftist organizations from 1967 to 1974, and a campaign in the 1970s to systematically attack critics of the Warren Commission's "lone gunman" theory of President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

In the 1980s, the CIA ran a "public diplomacy" campaign aimed at managing the perceptions of the American people regarding U.S. involvement in Central America, as Parry explains here.

## [CIA's Perception Management \(Dec. 9, 1996\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

William J. Casey was a quick study, always looking for an edge whether in business or in the ideological struggles that consumed the last years of his life. So in early August 1983, the balding CIA director hunched over a desk at the old Executive Office Building and scribbled down notes from five public relations experts who were brainstorming how to sell Ronald Reagan's Central American policies to the American people.

Earlier that day, a national security aide had warmed the PR men to their task with dire predictions that leftist governments would send waves of refugees into the United States and cynically flood America with drugs. The PR executives jotted down some thoughts over lunch and then pitched their ideas to the CIA director in the afternoon.

"Casey was kind of spearheading a recommendation" for better public relations for Reagan's Central America policies, recalled William I. Greener Jr., one of the ad men. Two top proposals arising from the meeting were for a high-powered communications operation inside the White House and

private money for an outreach program to build support for U.S. intervention.

The ideas from that session and other meetings held during the Reagan administration's first years still resonate today. Through the mid-1980s, Casey's domestic propaganda campaign would descend into scandal-generation and disinformation against opponents, tactics that are now generic to American politics.

But few Americans know about Casey's "public diplomacy" apparatus which refined this approach in the 1980s – or that the operation was overseen by CIA propagandists and military psychological warfare experts steeped in an Orwellian concept called "perception management."

Scores of documents about this operation poured out during the Iran-Contra scandal. The documents made clear that the driving force behind these aggressive PR tactics was Casey, the World War II spymaster who understood the power of information and the value of deception. But the documents received little attention in the mainstream press.

As the Washington media grew bored with the Iran-Contra story, articles focused on the celebrity of Lt. Col. Oliver North and narrow questions, such as who authorized a diversion of Iran arms sales profits to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels. Yet, the "public diplomacy" campaign was a dramatic tale, too. It was the story of how the top level of the CIA had circumvented law and manipulated U.S. public opinion in support of CIA covert operations in Central America. Although the CIA is legally barred from influencing domestic politics, no one was held accountable for the apparent violations of law.

At the start of the Reagan administration, Casey's challenge had seemed daunting. The administration saw Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as another Cuba and Daniel Ortega as another Castro. But in late 1980, the American people saw El Salvador's right-wing military engaged in a bloodbath against leftist political opponents. To make matters worse, Salvadoran soldiers even raped and murdered four American churchwomen. The public also retained fears of "another Vietnam."

So, Reagan's initial strategy of bolstering the Salvadoran army required defusing the negative publicity and somehow rallying the American people

to the anti-communist cause. As deputy assistant secretary to the Air Force, J. Michael Kelly, put it, “the most critical special operations mission we have ... is to persuade the American people that the communists are out to get us.”

A “public diplomacy strategy paper,” dated May 5, 1983, summed up the problem. “As far as our Central American policy is concerned, the press perceives that: the USG [U.S. government] is placing too much emphasis on a military solution, as well as being allied with inept, right-wing governments and groups. ...The focus on Nicaragua [is] on the alleged U.S.-backed ‘covert’ war against the Sandinistas. Moreover, the opposition ... is widely perceived as being led by former Somozistas.”

The administration’s difficulty with most of these press perceptions was that they were correct. But the strategy paper recommended ways to influence various groups of Americans to “correct” the impressions anyway, what another planning document would call “perceptual obstacles.” “Themes will obviously have to be tailored to the target audience,” the strategy paper said.

So, with Casey personally consulting experts, a “public diplomacy” apparatus took shape to carry out this “perception management.” The operation was based in the NSC and was directed by Walter Raymond Jr., the CIA’s top propaganda expert until transferring to the NSC in 1982.

### **A le Carre Spy**

Raymond, a 30-year veteran of CIA clandestine services, was a slight, soft-spoken New Yorker who reminded some of a character from a John le Carre spy novel, an intelligence officer who “easily fades into the woodwork,” according to one acquaintance. Raymond formally resigned from the CIA in April 1983 so, he said, “there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this.”

But from the beginning, Raymond fretted about the legality of Casey’s involvement. Raymond confided in one memo that it was important “to get [Casey] out of the loop,” but Casey never backed off and Raymond continued to send progress reports to his old boss well into 1986.

It was “the kind of thing which [Casey] had a broad catholic interest in,” Raymond shrugged during his Iran-Contra deposition. He then offered the excuse that Casey undertook this apparently illegal interference in domestic politics “not so much in his CIA hat, but in his adviser to the president hat.”

Repeatedly, Raymond lectured his subordinates on the chief goal of the operation: “in the specific case of Nica[ragua], concentrate on gluing black hats on the Sandinistas and white hats on UNO [the Contras’ United Nicaraguan Opposition].” There was no space for the fact that both sides wore gray hats. So Reagan’s speechwriters dutifully penned descriptions of Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as a “totalitarian dungeon” and the Contras as the “moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers.”

As one NSC official told me, the campaign was modeled after CIA covert operations abroad where a political goal is more important than the truth. “They were trying to manipulate [U.S.] public opinion ... using the tools of Walt Raymond’s trade craft which he learned from his career in the CIA covert operation shop,” the official admitted.

Another administration official gave a similar description to the *Miami Herald*’s Alfonso Chardy. “If you look at it as a whole, the Office of Public Diplomacy was carrying out a huge psychological operation, the kind the military conduct to influence the population in denied or enemy territory,” that official explained.

## **No Quarter**

The operation’s most visible arm was a new office at the State Department called the Office of Public Diplomacy. It was headed by Cuban exile Otto Reich, whose job included selecting “hot buttons” that would anger Americans about the Sandinistas. He also browbeat correspondents who produced stories that conflicted with the administration’s “themes.” Reich once bragged that his office “did not give the critics of the policy any quarter in the debate.”

Another part of the office’s job was to plant “white propaganda” in the news media through op-eds secretly financed by the government. In one memo, Jonathan Miller, a senior public diplomacy official, informed White House aide Patrick Buchanan about success placing an anti-Sandinista piece



in the *Wall Street Journal*'s friendly pages. "Officially, this office had no role in its preparation," Miller wrote.

Other times, the administration put out "black propaganda," outright falsehoods. In 1983, one such theme was designed to anger American Jews by portraying the Sandinistas as anti-Semitic because much of Nicaragua's small Jewish community fled after the revolution in 1979. However, the U.S. embassy in Managua investigated the charges and "found no verifiable ground on which to accuse the GRN [the Sandinista government] of anti-Semitism," according to a July 28, 1983, cable. But the administration kept the cable secret and pushed the "hot button" anyway.

The administration's public diplomacy also followed up on one idea heard by the PR men who met with Casey in August 1983 – to promote the theme that leftist governments would ship narcotics to the United States. The obstacle to that argument, however, was that the Drug Enforcement Administration knew of no drugs that had transited Nicaragua since the Sandinistas took power.

The reason was simple: it made little sense for traffickers to smuggle drugs through a country with almost no trade with the United States while the CIA was monitoring all planes leaving Nicaraguan air space. The Reagan administration solved that PR problem by arranging a "sting" operation overseen by Oliver North and the CIA.

In 1984, convicted narcotics trafficker Barry Seal, who was cooperating with the DEA, arranged for a plane to fly a load of cocaine into Nicaragua. But the plane was shot down by Sandinista air defenses. Seal then flew in a second plane, a C-123 transport. He snapped some grainy photos of men, supposedly Nicaraguans and Colombians, loading bales of cocaine onto the plane. Seal then flew the load back to the United States where the story was leaked to the *Washington Times* and quickly spread onto front pages across America. The desired image was achieved.

### **Poisoning America's Youth**

In a TV address, President Reagan then accused top Sandinistas of "exporting drugs to poison our youth." Even today, Seal's photos are cited by conservative journalists to counter evidence of cocaine smuggling by the Contras, the guys in the glued-on white hats.

Yet, in the Seal-Sandinista drug case, only one Nicaraguan, a shadowy figure named Federico Vaughan, was ever indicted. Vaughan supposedly worked for the Nicaraguan Interior Ministry. But strangely, Vaughan had been calling his American drug contacts from a phone located at either the U.S. or other Western embassies. It was never clear for whom Vaughan was working. DEA officials stated that they had no evidence that any other Nicaraguan official, besides Vaughan, had participated in drug smuggling.

The DEA also complained that the White House blew the smuggling investigation prematurely to embarrass the Sandinistas before a Contra aid vote. The bigger fish sought by the DEA had included the leaders of the Medellin drug cartel. But the administration had sacrificed that probe to gain a propaganda edge.

A year later, in 1985, the evidence would build that the Contras were engaged in real drug trafficking. In reaction, the administration again would put PR ahead of law enforcement. The public diplomacy team would activate, to attack the journalists and investigators who revealed this evidence.

Even after the Iran-Contra scandal unraveled in 1986-87 and Casey died of brain cancer, the Republicans fought to keep secret the remarkable story of this public diplomacy apparatus. As part of a deal to get three moderate Republican senators to join Democrats in signing the Iran-Contra report, Democratic leaders dropped a draft chapter on the CIA's domestic propaganda role.

The American people were thus spared the chapter's troubling conclusion: that a covert propaganda apparatus had existed, run by "one of the CIA's most senior specialists, sent to the NSC by Bill Casey, to create and coordinate an inter-agency public-diplomacy mechanism [which] did what a covert CIA operation in a foreign country might do. [It] attempted to manipulate the media, the Congress and public opinion to support the Reagan administration's policies."

It had succeeded.

Iran-Contra prosecutor Lawrence Walsh published a book in June 1997 that explained how deceit and weakness by Congress and the press enabled the Reagan-Bush administrations' cover-up. In this book review, Parry contrasts how Iran-Contra differed from Watergate, noting that in the earlier scandal, the system basically worked – with the press and Congress

playing their parts in ensuring accountability from the country's highest elected officials. In Iran-Contra, however, the system failed at every level.

## [Firewall: Inside the Iran-Contra Cover-up \(June 16, 1997\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

In crucial ways, Watergate, the signature scandal of the 1970s, and Iran-Contra, the signature scandal of the 1980s, were opposites. Watergate showed how the constitutional institutions of American democracy – the Congress, the courts and the press – could check a gross abuse of power by the Executive. A short dozen years later, the Iran-Contra scandal demonstrated how those same institutions had ceased to protect the nation from serious White House wrongdoing.

Watergate had been part of a brief national awakening which exposed Cold War abuses – presidential crimes, lies about the Vietnam War and assassination plots hatched at the CIA. The Iran-Contra cover-up marked the restoration of a Cold War status quo in which crimes, both domestic and international, could be committed by the Executive while the Congress and the press looked the other way.

That Iran-Contra reality, however, is still little understood for what it actually was: a victory of weakness and deceit over integrity and courage. On one front, the Washington media wants to perpetuate the myth that it remains the heroic Watergate press corps of *All the President's Men*. On another, the national Democratic establishment wants to forget how it crumbled in the face of pressures from the Reagan-Bush administrations. And, of course, the Republicans want to protect the legacy of their last two presidents.

Those combined interests likely will lead to very few favorable reviews of a new book by a man who put himself in the way of that cover-up – Iran-Contra independent counsel Lawrence Walsh. In a remarkable new book, *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-up*, Walsh details his six-year battle to break through the “firewall” that White House officials built around President Reagan and Vice President Bush after the Iran-Contra scandal exploded in November 1986.

For Walsh, a lifelong Republican who shared the foreign policy views of the Reagan administration, the Iran-Contra experience was a life-changing one, as his investigation penetrated one wall of lies only to be confronted with another and another – and not just lies from Oliver North and his cohorts but lies from nearly every senior administration official who spoke with investigators.

According to *Firewall*, the cover-up conspiracy took formal shape at a meeting of Reagan and his top advisers in the Situation Room at the White House on Nov. 24, 1986. The meeting's principal point of concern was how to handle the troublesome fact that Reagan had approved illegal arms sales to Iran in fall 1985, before any covert-action finding had been signed. The act was a clear felony – a violation of the Arms Export Control Act – and possibly an impeachable offense.

Though virtually everyone at the meeting knew that Reagan had approved those shipments through Israel, Attorney General Edwin Meese announced what would become the cover story. According to Walsh's narrative, Meese

told the group that although [NSC adviser Robert] McFarlane had informed [Secretary of State George] Shultz of the planned shipment, McFarlane had not informed the president. ...

[White House chief of staff Don] Regan, who had heard McFarlane inform the president and who had heard the president admit to Shultz that he knew of the shipment of Hawk [anti-aircraft] missiles, said nothing. Shultz and [Defense Secretary Caspar] Weinberger, who had protested the shipment before it took place, said nothing. [Vice President George] Bush, who had been told of the shipment in advance by McFarlane, said nothing. Casey, who [had] requested that the president sign the retroactive finding to authorize the CIA-facilitated delivery, said nothing. [NSC adviser John] Poindexter, who had torn up the finding, said nothing. Meese asked whether anyone knew anything else that hadn't been revealed. No one spoke.

When Shultz returned to the State Department, he dictated a note to his aide, Charles Hill, who wrote down that Reagan's men were "rearranging the record." They were trying to protect the president through a "carefully thought-out strategy" that would "blame it on Bud" McFarlane.

### **'Fall Guy'**

As part of that strategy, virtually all of Reagan's top advisers, including Shultz, gave false and misleading testimony to Congress and prosecutors. Their accounts essentially blamed the illegalities on Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North and his bosses at the National Security Council, McFarlane and

Poindexter. Pretty much everyone else – at the CIA, Defense Department, the Vice President’s Office and the White House – claimed ignorance.

Even though Oliver North testified in 1987 that he was the “fall guy” in this implausible scenario, the Democrats and much of the press corps still fell for it. There was a clicking of wine glasses around Washington as the “men of zeal” cover story was enshrined as the official history of the Iran-Contra affair. A painful Watergate-style impeachment battle had been averted.

The story might have stopped there but for the work of Walsh and his small team of lawyers. Yet Walsh’s investigation was hampered from the start by congressional rashness and hostility from key elements of the media. Congress was so ready to accept the theory of a rogue operation that it rushed ahead with televised hearings designed to make North and his NSC superiors, McFarlane and Poindexter, the primary culprits. Without even questioning North ahead of time, the Iran-Contra committee granted the charismatic Marine officer and his pipe-smoking boss, Poindexter, limited immunity.

Three years later, that immunity came back to haunt Walsh’s hard-won convictions of North and Poindexter. Conservative judges on the federal appeals court, particularly Reagan loyalists Laurence Silberman and David Sentelle, exploited the immunity opening to reverse North’s conviction. Sentelle, a protege of Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., also joined in the decision to wipe out Poindexter’s conviction. (Since then, Sentelle has taken over the three-judge panel which selects independent counsels.)

In his book, Walsh described the GOP majority on the U.S. Appeals Court for the District of Columbia as “a powerful band of Republican appointees [who] waited like the strategic reserves of an embattled army, ... a force cloaked in the black robes of those dedicated to defining and preserving the rule of law.”

Still, despite the legal and political obstacles, Walsh’s investigation broke through the White House cover-up in 1991-92. Almost by accident, as Walsh’s staff was double-checking some long-standing document requests, the lawyers discovered hidden notes belonging to Weinberger and other senior officials. The notes made clear that there was widespread knowledge

of the 1985 illegal shipments to Iran and that a major cover-up had been orchestrated by the Reagan and Bush administrations.

### **The Pounding Begins**

The belated discovery led to indictments against senior CIA officials and Weinberger. Congressional Republicans, led by Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., reacted by angrily denouncing Walsh and calling for an end to his investigation. The Washington press corps also had grown hostile, complaining that Walsh's probe had taken too long and had cost too much.

The conservative *Washington Times* and the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page fired near-daily barrages at Walsh often over trivial matters, such as first-class air fare and room-service meals. Key columnists and editorial writers for the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* – along with television pundits David Brinkley and Christopher Matthews – joined in the Walsh bashings. Walsh was mocked as a modern-day Captain Ahab.

In his book, however, Walsh compared his trying experience to another maritime classic, Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. In that story, an aging fisherman hooks a giant marlin and, after a long battle, secures the fish to side of his boat. On the way back to port, the marlin is attacked by sharks who devour its flesh and deny the fisherman his prize. "As the independent counsel, I sometimes felt like the old man," Walsh wrote, "more often, I felt like the marlin."

More seriously, the congressional and media attacks effectively limited Walsh's ability to pursue what appeared to be other false statements by senior administration officials. Those perjury inquiries could have unraveled other major national-security mysteries of the 1980s and helped correct the history of the era. But Walsh could not overcome the pack-like hostility of official Washington.

For instance, the Walsh team had strong suspicions that Bush's national security adviser, ex-CIA officer Donald Gregg, had lied when he testified that he was unaware of North's Contra resupply operation, although Gregg's close friend, Felix Rodriguez, was working with North in Central America and called Gregg after each Contra delivery.

There already had been problems with Gregg's story, including the discovery of a vice presidential office memo describing a planned meeting with Rodriguez about "resupply of the Contras." Gregg bizarrely explained the memo away as a typo that should have read, "resupply of the copters."

### **More Cracks**

In *Firewall*, Walsh disclosed that Gregg's stonewall experienced another crack when Col. James Steele, U.S. military adviser to El Salvador, flunked a polygraph test when he denied his own role in shipping weapons to the Contras. Confronted with those results and incriminating notes from North's diaries, "Steele admitted not only his participation in the arms deliveries but also his early discussion of these activities with Donald Gregg," Walsh wrote.

Gregg also failed his own polygraph when he denied knowledge of the Contra supply operation.

Despite the doubts about Gregg's veracity, Walsh felt compelled to set aside those allegations as he struggled to finish several pending perjury cases against Weinberger and CIA officials, Clair George and Duane Clarridge. As those cases moved haltingly forward, anti-Walsh attacks multiplied in Congress and in the Washington media.

The Republican independent counsel also infuriated the GOP when he submitted a second indictment of Weinberger on the Friday before the 1992 elections. The indictment contained documents revealing that President Bush had been lying for years with his claim that he was "out of the loop" on the Iran-Contra decisions. The ensuing furor dominated the last several days of the campaign and sealed Bush's defeat at the hands of Bill Clinton.

Walsh had discovered, too, that Bush had withheld his own notes about the Iran-Contra Affair, a discovery that elevated the president to a possible criminal subject of the investigation. But Bush had one more weapon in his arsenal. On Christmas Eve 1992, Bush destroyed the Iran-Contra probe once and for all by pardoning Weinberger and five other convicted or indicted defendants.

"George Bush's misuse of the pardon power made the cover-up complete," Walsh wrote. "What set Iran-Contra apart from previous political scandals

was the fact that a cover-up engineered in the White House of one president and completed by his successor prevented the rule of law from being applied to the perpetrators of criminal activity of constitutional dimension.”

But the cover-up likely could not have worked if the other institutions of Washington – Congress, the courts and the press – had not helped. Those institutions aided and abetted the White House both directly, through decisions that undermined the cases or reversed convictions, or indirectly, through incessant heckling of Walsh’s investigators over trivial complaints.

Like the cover-up, the historic reversal – from the constitutional protections of Watergate to the flouting of law in Iran-Contra – was complete.

Increasingly concerned by the growing dominance of a conservative – and deceptive – media empire that included talk radio, Fox News, and a wide array of magazines and newspapers, Parry started examining the background of the wealthy South Korean financier Sun Myung Moon, who bankrolled the influential *Washington Times* newspaper and other right-wing causes.

Parry discovered that Moon, the leader of a controversial cult called the Unification Church, had many unsavory ties, including longstanding alliances with anti-communist crime figures connected to the Japanese yakuza and the U.S. mafia. He also found disturbing practices and beliefs in Moon’s Unification Church, which belied the conservative values that the *Washington Times* supposedly championed. What follows is the first article from Parry’s series “The Dark Side of Rev. Moon,” which appeared in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News* from 1997 to 1998.<sup>3††</sup>

## [Dark Side of Rev. Moon: Hooking George Bush \(July 28, 1997\)](#)

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Originally published in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News*

In fall 1996, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s latest foray into the high-priced world of media and politics was in trouble. South American journalists were writing scathingly about Moon’s plan to open a regional newspaper that the 77-year-old founder of the Korean-based Unification Church hoped would give him the same influence in Latin America that the ultra-conservative *Washington Times* had in the United States.

As opening day ticked closer for Moon’s *Tiempos del Mundo*, leading South American newspapers were busy recounting unsavory chapters of Moon’s history, including his links with South Korea’s feared intelligence service



and with violent anti-communist organizations that some commentaries said bordered on neo-fascist. “The local press was trying to undermine the event,” complained the church’s internal newsletter, *Unification News*.

But Moon had a trump card to play in his bid for South American respectability: the endorsement of an ex-president of the United States, George Bush. Agreeing to speak at the newspaper’s launch, Bush flew aboard a private plane, arriving in Buenos Aires on Nov. 22, 1996.

Moon’s followers gushed that Bush had saved the day, as he stepped before about 900 Moon guests at the Sheraton Hotel. “Mr. Bush’s presence as keynote speaker gave the event invaluable prestige,” wrote the *Unification News*. “Father [Moon] and Mother [Mrs. Moon] sat with several of the True Children [Moon’s offspring] just a few feet from the podium.”

Bush lavished praise on Moon and his journalistic enterprises. “I want to salute Reverend Moon, who is the founder of the *Washington Times* and also of *Tiempos del Mundo*,” Bush declared. “A lot of my friends in South America don’t know about the *Washington Times*, but it is an independent voice. The editors of the *Washington Times* tell me that never once has the man with the vision interfered with the running of the paper, a paper that in my view brings sanity to Washington, D.C. I am convinced that *Tiempos del Mundo* is going to do the same thing” in Latin America.

Bush then held up the colorful new newspaper and complimented several articles, including one flattering piece about Barbara Bush. Bush’s speech was so effusive that it surprised even Moon’s followers.

“Everyone was delighted to hear his compliments,” the *Unification News* exulted. “We knew he would give an appropriate and ‘nice’ speech, but praise in Father’s presence was more than we expected.”

Bush’s endorsement of the *Washington Times* editorial independence also was not truthful. Almost since it opened in 1982, a string of senior editors and correspondents have resigned, citing the manipulation of the news by Moon and his subordinates. The first editor, James Whelan, resigned in 1984, confessing that he had “blood on his hands” for helping the church achieve greater legitimacy.

## **Money Talks**

But Bush's boosterism was just what Moon needed in South America. "The day after," the *Unification News* observed, "the press did a 180-degree about-turn once they realized that the event had the support of a U.S. president." With Bush's help, Moon had gained another beachhead for his worldwide business-religious-political-media empire.

After the event, Argentine President Carlos Menem told reporters that Bush had claimed privately to be only a mercenary who did not really know Moon. "Bush told me he came and charged money to do it," Menem said.<sup>4</sup> But Bush was not telling Menem the whole story. Bush and Moon had been working in political tandem for at least a decade and a half.

In September 1995, Bush and his wife, Barbara, gave six speeches in Asia for the Women's Federation for World Peace, a group led by Moon's wife, Hak Ja Han Moon. In one speech on Sept. 14 to 50,000 Moon supporters in Tokyo, Bush insisted that "what really counts is faith, family and friends." Mrs. Moon followed the ex-president to the podium and announced that "it has to be Reverend Moon to save the United States."<sup>5</sup>

In summer 1996, Bush was lending his prestige to Moon again. Bush addressed the Moon-connected Family Federation for World Peace in Washington, an event that gained notoriety when comedian Bill Cosby tried to back out of his contract after learning of Moon's connection. Bush had no such qualms.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout these public appearances, Bush's office has refused to divulge how much Moon-affiliated organizations have paid the ex-president. But estimates of Bush's fee for the Buenos Aires appearance alone ran between \$100,000 and \$500,000. Sources close to the Unification Church have put the total Bush-Moon package in the millions, with one source saying that Bush stood to make as much as \$10 million.

### **Foreign Influence**

Still, the Bush-Moon alliance is not strictly about money – and it did not start in Bush's post-presidency. It dates back at least to the start of the Reagan-Bush era – when Moon was a VIP guest at the first Reagan-Bush inauguration.

A silent testimony to Moon's clout is the fact that his vast spending of billions of dollars in secretive Asian money to influence U.S. politics – spanning nearly a quarter century – has gone virtually unreported.

Moon's jingle of deep-pocket cash has led conservatives to turn a deaf ear toward Moon's anti-American diatribes. With growing virulence, Moon has denounced the United States and its democratic principles, often referring to America as "Satanic."

"America has become the kingdom of individualism, and its people are individualists," Moon preached in Tarrytown, N.Y., on March 5, 1995. "You must realize that America has become the kingdom of Satan."

In similar remarks to followers on Aug. 4, 1996, Moon vowed that the church's eventual dominance over the United States would be followed by the liquidation of American individualism. "Americans who continue to maintain their privacy and extreme individualism are foolish people," Moon declared. "The world will reject Americans who continue to be so foolish. Once you have this great power of love, which is big enough to swallow entire America, there may be some individuals who complain inside your stomach. However, they will be digested."

During the same sermon, Moon decried assertive American women. "American women have the tendency to consider that women are in the subject position," he said. "However, woman's shape is like that of a receptacle... Does woman contain the seed of life? ['No.'] Absolutely not. Then if you desire to receive the seed of life, you have to become an absolute object. In order to qualify as an absolute object, you need to ... negate yourself 100 percent."

### **Evil Hamburgers**

These pronouncements contrast with Moon's lavish praise of the United States disseminated for public consumption during his early forays to Washington. On Sept. 18, 1976, at a flag-draped rally at the Washington Monument, Moon declared that "the United States of America, transcending race and nationality, is already a model of the unified world." He called America "the chosen nation of God" and added that "I not only respect America, but truly love this nation."

Yet, even as Moon has soured on America, his recruiters continue to use that flag-draped scene of the Washington Monument to lure new followers. The patriotic image struck powerfully with John Stacey when the college freshman watched a video of that speech while undergoing Unification Church recruitment in 1992.

“American flags were everywhere,” recalled Stacey, a thin young man from central New Jersey. “The first video they showed me was Reverend Moon praising America and praising Christianity.” In 1992, Stacey considered himself a patriotic American and a faithful Christian. He soon joined the Unification Church.

Stacey became a Pacific Northwest leader in Moon’s Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles. “They liked to hang me up because I’m young and I’m American,” Stacey told me. “It’s a good image for the church. They try to create the all-American look, where I think they’re usurping American values, that they’re anti-American.”

At a 1995 leadership conference at a church compound in Anchorage, Alaska, Stacey met face-to-face with Moon who was sitting on a throne-like chair while a group of American followers, many middle-aged converts from the 1970s, sat at his feet like children.

“Reverend Moon looked at me straight in the eye and said, ‘America is Satanic. America is so Satanic that even hamburgers should be considered evil, because they come from America’,” recalled Stacey. “Hamburgers! My father was a butcher, so that bothered me. ... I started feeling that I was betraying my country.”

Moon’s criticism of Jesus also unsettled Stacey. “In the church, it’s very anti-Jesus,” Stacey said. “Jesus failed miserably. He died a lonely death. Reverend Moon is the hero that comes and saves pathetic Jesus. Reverend Moon is better than God. ... That’s why I left the Moonies. Because it started to feel like idolatry. He’s promoting idolatry.”

### **One-World Theocracy**

Despite growing disaffection among many longtime followers and other problems, Moon’s empire still prospers financially, backed by vast sources of mysterious wealth. “It’s a multi-billion-dollar international conglomerate,” noted Steve Hassan, a former church leader who has written

a book about religious cults, entitled *Combatting Cult Mind Control*. At his website, Hassan has a 31-page list of organizations connected to the Unification Church, many secretively.

“Here’s a man [Moon] who says he wants to take over the world, where all religions will be abolished except Unificationism, all languages will be abolished except Korean, all governments will be abolished except his one-world theocracy,” Hassan said in an interview. “Yet he’s wined and dined very powerful people and convinced them that he’s benign.”

A couple of years ago, Moon shifted his personal base of operation to a luxurious estate in Uruguay. The church has been investing tens of millions of dollars in that nation since the early 1980s when Moon was close to the military government. In a sermon on Jan. 2, 1996, Moon was unusually blunt about how he expected the church’s wealth to buy influence among the powerful in South America, just as it did in Washington.

As part of his business strategy, Moon explained that he would dot the continent with small airstrips and construct bases for submarines which could evade Coast Guard patrols. His airfield project would allow tourists to visit “hidden, untouched, small places” throughout South America, he said.

“Therefore, they need small airplanes and small landing strips in the remote countryside. ... In the near future, we will have many small airports throughout the world.” Moon wanted the submarines because “there are so many restrictions due to national boundaries worldwide. If you have a submarine, you don’t have to be bound in that way.”

Moon also recognized the importance of media in protecting his curious operations, which sound like an invitation to drug traffickers. He boasted to his followers that with his vast array of political and media assets, he will dominate the new Information Age. “That is why Father has been combining and organizing scholars from all over the world, and also newspaper organizations – in order to make propaganda,” Moon said. Central to that success in South America is *Tiempos del Mundo*.

### **Iran-Contra Cover-up**

Moon pursued a similar strategy in the United States. In the early 1980s, Ronald Reagan hailed the *Washington Times* as his favorite newspaper and

Moon's editors rewarded the Reagan-Bush administration with unwavering loyalty.

In the mid-1980s, for instance, when journalists and Congress began prying into Oliver North's secret support for the Nicaraguan Contras and their ties to drug trafficking, Moon's paper led the counter-attack. "Story on drug smuggling denounced as political ploy" was the subtitle of a front-page *Washington Times* article criticizing a piece that Brian Barger and I had written for The Associated Press about a Miami-based federal probe into gun- and drug-running by the Contras.

When Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., uncovered more evidence of Contra drug trafficking in 1986, the *Washington Times* denounced him. The newspaper first published articles suggesting that Kerry was on a wasteful political witch hunt. "Kerry's anti-contra efforts extensive, expensive, in vain," announced one *Times* article.<sup>7</sup>

But when Kerry exposed more and more Contra wrongdoing, the *Washington Times* changed tactics. In 1987, it began intimidating Kerry's staff with front-page accusations that they were obstructing justice. "Kerry staffers damaged FBI probe," declared one *Times* article. It opened with the assertion that "congressional investigators for Sen. John Kerry severely damaged a federal drug investigation last summer by interfering with a witness while pursuing allegations of drug smuggling by the Nicaraguan resistance [the Contras], federal law enforcement officials said."<sup>8</sup>

As the Iran-Contra scandal continued to spread and threatened Bush's public insistence that he was "out of the loop," Moon's paper turned its fire on special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh. Over and over, the paper attacked Walsh for allegedly wasting money with first-class air fare and room-service meals.

When former CIA clandestine services chief Clair George was on trial for false statements, the *Washington Times* published a front-page story with the two-column headline, "GOP Questions Walsh Spending."<sup>9</sup> That morning, George's CIA supporters held the headline up so the jury could see the anti-Walsh allegations. Throughout the Iran-Contra scandal, the paper played a crucial role in protecting the cover-up.

Time and again, Moon's *Washington Times* went to bat for Bush. When Bush lagged behind Michael Dukakis in the early days of the 1988 presidential race, the *Times* falsely implied that Dukakis had undergone psychiatric care. The story drew national attention and raised early doubts about Dukakis's fitness for the White House.

In 1992, the newspaper promoted Bush's re-election by running stories about Bill Clinton's collegiate trip to Moscow. Those stories suggested that the Rhodes scholar was a spy for the KGB. Four years later, with the Republicans hoping to oust Clinton, the *Washington Times* reversed field with a contradictory banner story: "Was Bill Clinton a junior spy for the CIA?"<sup>10</sup>

For Moon's part, the self-proclaimed Korean messiah has succeeded in hooking many big fish in Washington – "the bigger the fish, the bigger the mouth" – but none bigger than former President George Bush.

In 1954, the CIA initiated a coup in Guatemala that ousted President Jacobo Arbenz and strangled the country's nascent democracy. In the subsequent decades, the CIA made Guatemala a "killing field" for suspected communists, as Parry explained in this 1997 article.

Two years after this article was published, President Bill Clinton would offer an apology to the Guatemalan people for the U.S. government's support for "widespread repression" in Guatemala's 36-year reign of terror. "For the United States," Clinton said, "it is important that I state clearly that the support for military forces or intelligence which engaged in violent and widespread repression ... was wrong."

## [CIA Death Lists & Guatemala's 'Killing Fields' \(July 14, 1997\)](#)

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The topic of assassination is a touchy one for the CIA. In the past, the spy agency occasionally has admitted plotting to kill foreign leaders. But the CIA then insists that the schemes went awry or were terminated before execution. Even when CIA targets have died violently, the agency sloughs off the deaths as coincidences, not attributable to the plots hatched at Langley. The Congo's Patrice Lumumba was such a case.

The CIA offered up a similar argument recently when it acknowledged drawing up death lists of suspected communists in Guatemala who were meant to die in a CIA-sponsored coup. In releasing a sliver of formerly secret documents from that early Cold War operation, the CIA acknowledged drafting the death lists but not implementing the grisly scheme.

More broadly, however, the documents offer a rare look into a covert activity that ousted Guatemala's elected president Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1954. Arbenz's land reform and tolerance of left-wing political dissent had made him politically suspect in Washington.

In the years that followed the coup, tens of thousands of politically suspect Guatemalans died at the hands of the CIA-assisted security forces. But a reader of the new CIA report can't know for sure how many of those victims might have been on the CIA death lists.

In releasing the report, the CIA deleted the names of the proposed victims as well as the CIA officers. The CIA insisted that the murder campaign was only a "contingency plan" that never was passed on to the Guatemalan coup-makers for implementation.

Most of the major U.S. newspapers have accepted these CIA assurances at face value. But the available public record suggests that the CIA indeed did go forward with the assassination plots. Not only did U.S. officials apparently give a death list to the Guatemalan military but even forced out of power Guatemalan officers who balked at the murder assignments. That account of the coup's aftermath was reported 15 years ago in the well-documented book, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer.

### **The 'A' List**

As the CIA's Guatemala operation gained strength in late spring 1954 – with an invading force from Honduras and psychological warfare at work in Guatemala City – Arbenz relinquished power and sought refuge in the Mexican embassy. His successor, Col. Carlos Enrique Diaz, then went on the radio and vowed to protect Guatemala's independence in the face of the CIA-sponsored rebel army.



“The two top CIA operatives in Guatemala reacted angrily to Diaz’s radio remarks,” Schlesinger and Kinzer reported. “An irate John Doherty, the CIA station chief, and an exasperated Enno Hobbing – the former *Time* Paris bureau chief who had just arrived in Guatemala to help shape a new ‘constitution’ for the incoming regime – met and decided they would overthrow Diaz themselves. In his place, they planned to install Colonel Elfegio Monzon, an officer who had worked with them in the past as a secret leader of anti-Arbenz forces within the military.”

U.S. Ambassador John Peurifoy had reached a similar conclusion about Diaz. Peurifoy pounded his desk during the radio talk and declared: “O.K., now I’ll have to crack down on that s.o.b.” So with Peurifoy’s approval, the two CIA men confronted Diaz.

With Monzon in tow, the CIA officers lectured Diaz about the problems with Arbenz’s “communist” policies. Hobbing told Diaz bluntly, “Colonel, you’re just not convenient for the requirements of American foreign policy.”

Diaz demanded to hear these ouster instructions directly from the U.S. ambassador. So at 4 a.m., Peurifoy joined the CIA officers at Diaz’s headquarters and insisted that Monzon be made the new president. According to Diaz (as later recounted to Guatemalan Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello), Peurifoy also wanted a number of suspected communists executed.

“Peurifoy waved a long list of names of some leaders,” Toriello wrote. “He was going to require Diaz to shoot those who were on that list within twenty-four hours. ‘That’s all, but why?’ Diaz asked. ‘Because they’re communists,’ replied Peurifoy.

“Diaz refused absolutely to soil his hands and soul with this repugnant crime and rejected the pretensions of Peurifoy to come and give him orders. ‘It would be better in that case,’ he [Diaz] went so far as to tell him [Peurifoy], ‘that you actually sit on the presidential chair and that the stars and stripes fly over the palace.’ Saying too bad for you, Peurifoy left.”

According to *Bitter Fruit*, officials in Washington had supplied Peurifoy with the death list that he had handed to Diaz, although it is not clear whether the list was identical to the CIA’s earlier version.

The confrontation with Diaz spilled into the next day, with Diaz favoring a general amnesty and release of political prisoners to ease tensions inside Guatemala. Since the release would mean freedom for some communist organizers, Peurifoy and the CIA men decided to send Diaz a blunter message: a CIA plane flew over Guatemala City and dropped a few bombs.

Diaz finally succumbed to the pressure. Within a few weeks, Carlos Castillo Armas, who had led the CIA's rebel band, was installed in the presidential palace as Guatemala's new leader.

### **'Safe Conduct'**

But even with Castillo Armas, the Americans had trouble pressing their more violent plans. Washington wanted the new president to invade foreign embassies where Arbenz and about 700 of his followers were hiding. These Arbenz followers were then to be imprisoned under criminal law as "communists."

But Castillo Armas would not go that far. One of Castillo Armas's cabinet ministers angered Peurifoy by arguing that being a "communist" did "not provide legal basis for prosecution." And later that summer, Castillo Armas let Arbenz and several hundred other Guatemalans quietly use safe-conduct passes to go into exile.

Before allowing Arbenz to board a plane, however, Castillo Armas ordered that Arbenz be stripped of his clothes in front of a jeering crowd. But that final humiliation of Arbenz did not go far enough for Peurifoy who complained that Castillo Armas had "double-crossed us" by granting the safe-conduct passes.

In the years that followed, harder-edged anti-communists would gain power in Guatemala. They would not be as reluctant to execute suspected leftists. As guerrilla warfare flared periodically in the countryside, the Guatemalan army butchered tens of thousands.

By the 1970s, Guatemala's reputation as a Central American "killing field" had made the nation an international pariah state. Under pressure from human rights activists, President Carter cut off military aid to the Guatemalan army. But President Reagan reestablished close ties once again

in the early 1980s, a period that saw the bloodiest of Guatemala's massacres.

In the name of anti-communism, the Guatemalan army launched scorched-earth warfare against Mayan Indian villages considered sympathetic to leftist guerrillas. The slaughter took on the look of genocide.

By then, the Guatemalan army needed no more coaching.

At the CIA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1997, Parry explained how badly it had become compromised by the "politicization of intelligence," which began in earnest under CIA Director William Casey and continued under subsequent directors. This trend had prevented the agency from fulfilling its intended role of providing honest appraisals of foreign threats, which would later play out in the false narratives surrounding Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction, providing the pretext for George W. Bush to launch a disastrous war in 2003. Parry faults President Bill Clinton for missing an opportunity to correct this politicization in the 1990s.

## [CIA at 50, Lost in the 'Politicization' Swamp \(Sept. 29, 1997\)](#)

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Originally published in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News*

Through its first three decades, the CIA prided itself on maintaining an intellectual integrity in its analysis of world events. CIA analysts often delivered to the White House data that conflicted with what presidents wanted to hear. President Eisenhower was challenged on the bomber gap and President Kennedy on the missile gap. Presidents Johnson and Nixon didn't like many of the discouraging words on the Vietnam War.

The CIA's "operations" branch may have stumbled into bloody controversies from time to time. But the CIA's "analytical" division maintained a relatively good – though by no means perfect – reputation for supplying straightforward intelligence to policymakers. Like so much else at the CIA, however, that tradition changed in the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan's determination to enforce his "Evil Empire" vision of the Soviet Union.

To make Reagan's apocalyptic vision stick – to blame Moscow for the world's terrorism, Yellow Rain chemical warfare in Indochina, the Pope assassination attempt and virtually all revolutionary movements in the Third

World – Reagan and his CIA director, William J. Casey, set out to purge the CIA analytical division of those who wouldn't toe the party line, those who saw the Soviet Union as a declining empire still interested in détente with the West.

The CIA purge helped Reagan and Casey in another way, too. It cut off the potential for reliable CIA information reaching Congress and the public about the overt-covert paramilitary operations in Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Casey's domestic "perception management" campaigns which sought to influence the U.S. public debate on these issues would be strengthened by ensuring only favorable CIA-blessed propaganda.

So out of view, in the closed community of the CIA, Casey elevated Robert Gates, one of the hardest of anti-Soviet hardliners, to head the Directorate of Intelligence, the analytical side. In the summer 1997 issue of *Foreign Policy*, former CIA senior analyst Melvyn Goodman described the effect: "The CIA's objectivity on the Soviet Union ended abruptly in 1981, when Casey became the DCI – and the first one to be a member of the president's Cabinet. Gates became Casey's deputy director for intelligence (DDI) in 1982 and chaired the National Intelligence Council."

Gates restructured the DI from a subject-matter framework to a geographical one. That allowed Gates to jump his allies, who became known as "Gates clones," into key positions. Some of those who rose were David Cohen, David Carey, George Kolt, John McLaughlin, Jim Lynch, Winston Wiley and John Gannon.

With the Gates regime in place, career analysts in sensitive positions soon found themselves the victims of bare-knuckle bureaucratic pummelings. Some were verbally berated into changing their analyses; some faced job threats and allegations of psychiatric unfitness; others experienced confrontations with supervisors who literally threw papers in the analysts' faces.

### **Hyping the 'Evil Empire'**

Early on, the Reagan administration pressed the CIA to adopt an analysis that accepted right-wing media reports pinning European terrorism on the Soviets. The CIA analysts knew that these charges were false, in part because they were based on "black" or false propaganda that the CIA itself

had been planting in the European media. But the “politicization” tide was strong.

In 1985, Gates closeted a special team to push through another pre-cooked paper arguing that the KGB was behind the 1981 wounding of Pope John Paul II. CIA analysts again knew that the charge was bogus, but could not block the paper from leaving CIA.

On another ideologically sensitive front, analysts faced pressure to back off an assessment that Pakistan was violating nuclear proliferation safeguards. That was sensitive because Pakistan’s military government was aiding the Afghan mujahedeen rebels fighting Soviet troops.

Reagan also wanted analyses that exaggerated Soviet strength and Moscow’s expansionist tendencies. Again, the analysts found the evidence lacking, but the administration prevailed in hyping threat analyses. Analysts grew so fearful of reporting on Soviet weaknesses that the CIA fell way behind the curve in recognizing the coming Soviet collapse.

On many levels, the Casey-Gates assault on the CIA analysts was a dramatic behind-the-scenes story that contributed to historic developments in the 1980s: the brutal anti-communist tactics in Central America, tolerance of human rights abusers and drug traffickers among U.S. allies, false CIA reports about “moderates” in Iran that justified the Iran-Contra arms sales, and scary assessments of Soviet might which bloated U.S. defense budgets.

But this intimidation of the CIA analysts and its consequences are still little understood in Washington. The story surfaced briefly in 1991 during Robert Gates’s confirmation hearings when a handful of analysts braved the Bush administration by protesting the “politicization of intelligence.”

Led by Goodman, these dissidents fingered Gates as a key player in the campaign. The “politicization” testimony added more doubts about Gates, who already was under fire for his dubious testimony on the Iran-Contra scandal. But President Bush lined up solid Republican backing and enough accommodating Democrats, particularly Sen. David Boren, the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, to shove Gates through as CIA director.

### **Clinton’s Opening**

There was, however, a brief window for change with Bill Clinton's election – and the issue was put before Clinton's incoming national security team. Former CIA analyst Peter W. Dickson explained the problem bluntly in a two-page memo to Samuel "Sandy" Berger, who is now Clinton's national security adviser.

Dickson, an analyst who suffered retaliation for refusing to rewrite a 1983 assessment that noted Soviet restraint on nuclear proliferation, urged Clinton to appoint a CIA director who understood "the deeper internal problems relating to the politicization of intelligence and the festering morale problem within the CIA." In this Dec. 10, 1992, memo, Dickson saw a housecleaning at the top as crucial:

This problem of intellectual corruption will not disappear overnight, even with vigorous remedial action. However, the new CIA director will be wise if he realizes from the start the dangers in relying on the advice of senior CIA office managers who during the past 12 years advanced and prospered in their careers precisely because they had no qualms about suppressing intelligence or slanting analysis to suit the interest of Casey and Gates. This is a deep systemic problem. ...

The lack of accountability also became a systemic problem in the 1980s under Casey and Gates. ... A recent CIA inspector general investigation confirms the near total breakdown in confidence among employee[s] that management is willing to deal honestly and objectively with their complaints. Many of them concern the lack of professional ethics and in some cases personal abuse at the hands of senior officer managers – a group of individuals beholden and therefore loyal to Gates.

Dickson recommended that Clinton focus on "intellectual integrity and accountability" in selecting a new CIA director. But Clinton instead was focusing "like a laser beam" on domestic policy, as he promised during the campaign. He seemed to have little interest in CIA reform.

Clinton did oust Gates but avoided confronting the problem head-on by installing James Woolsey, a neoconservative Democrat who had worked closely with the Reagan-Bush administrations. Under Woolsey, the Gates crowd, sans Gates, further consolidated its bureaucratic power. That trend continued during the brief tenure of Clinton's second CIA director, John Deutch.

### **The 'Gates Clones'**

Now, Clinton's new CIA director, George Tenet, also has chosen to surround himself with many of Gates's former allies. Tenet did oust Cohen, whom the analysts considered one of Gates's most aggressive enforcers.

But other Gates-connected officials – McLaughlin, Carey, Wiley and Gannon – remain in high positions inside the CIA. Over the past 15 years, the Casey-Gates allies also have trained a younger generation of analysts who are now moving into mid-level positions.

Seeing the Casey-Gates crowd still dominating the senior levels of the CIA has discouraged many of the analysts who went public to protest the “politicization.” In interviews, these former CIA analysts complained that Clinton has allowed the CIA’s drift from the Reagan-Bush years to carry the analytical division even deeper into a backwater of shoddy scholarship and low morale.

“Clinton missed an opportunity to get the CIA on the right track,” said Goodman. “The CIA’s in a hell of a lot of trouble.”

“He blew it,” declared Dickson. “He threw it away. It’s too late now.”

Dickson predicted that the CIA, just passing its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will continue on a path of gradual decline and growing irrelevance.

“I don’t see any improvement,” added John A. Gentry, an analyst who resigned in 1991 with a letter that read: “I can no longer work in an organization in which satisfaction of bureaucratic superiors is more important than superior analysis.”

Gentry, a former Army Special Forces officer and economist, compiled his criticisms in a 1993 book, *Lost Promise: How CIA Analysis Misserves the Nation*. One recommendation stated that “the destructiveness of some managers’ meanness, dishonesty and lack of intellectual integrity is so great that significant numbers – including many senior officers – should be fired from the Agency.”

But Gentry has concluded that Clinton will not reverse the damage. “You’re 15 years into decay,” Gentry said. Clinton’s CIA appointees have “fussed around at the margins, but they haven’t made the cultural, leadership and even moral changes that are needed.”

### **Ducking a Fight**

Clinton seems to have thought that as long as he pumped money into the intelligence budget – about \$30 billion a year – and took no stern actions against the Langley power structure, the CIA would make no trouble for

him. His attitude apparently was colored by the perception that President Carter's shake-up of the CIA in the late 1970s drove a small clandestine army of furious spooks into the Bush and Reagan campaigns of 1980.

With Clinton's sensitivity over his Vietnam draft avoidance, he also saw a messy clash over restructuring the CIA as a distraction from his domestic agenda. "I see no indication anywhere that Clinton has taken any interest in anything that has occurred," said Gentry. "Clinton is quite content to have a weak intelligence community."

Still, Clinton found that his hands-off strategy did not save him from getting burned in fall 1993 when he was seeking to restore Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. The CIA analytical division, built by Casey and Gates, sent a report to Congress which claimed, apparently falsely, that Aristide had undergone psychiatric care in Canada. The report was seized upon by conservatives in Congress who considered Aristide a dangerous leftist.

Woolsey's tenure was marred, too, by the discovery that CIA counter-intelligence officer Aldrich Ames sold secrets to Moscow for almost a decade. Congress turned on Woolsey for supposedly not acting decisively enough to discipline senior officers who had supervised Ames.

Deutch, a brilliant but prickly scientist from MIT, succeeded Woolsey but made few significant changes at the CIA, either. Then after a failed attempt by Clinton to place his national security adviser Anthony Lake in the CIA's top spot, the president settled on Tenet, who had served as Deutch's deputy and before that as Boren's top aide on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Ironically, Tenet oversaw Boren's half-hearted confirmation review of Gates in 1991. From the start, that investigation was limited by Boren's commitment to Gates's confirmation. Boren accepted Gates's excuses about his less-than-candid Iran-Contra testimony. The chairman also failed to pursue allegations linking Gates to secret U.S.-arranged arms sales to Iraq in the 1980s and to the so-called "October Surprise" case in which Reagan's campaign was alleged to have undermined President Carter's attempts to free 52 U.S. hostages held in Iran in 1980.

The failure to vet Gates now may come back to haunt Tenet as the policies and personnel pushed by Gates continue to dominate the CIA's analytical



division, as CIA morale sags further and its reputation as an intelligence agency deteriorates more. Because the Boren-Tenet inquiry gave Gates a pass on the “politicization” charges, along with almost everything else, the intellectual corruption of the Casey-Gates era at CIA still is not widely understood.

With no recognition of the rot, Tenet has no mandate to take the radical steps needed to solve the problem.

In late summer 1997, Diana, Princess of Wales, died in a car crash in the Pont de l’Alma tunnel in Paris, France. According to press reports, the aggressive and erratic behaviour of paparazzi chasing the car for lucrative snapshots of the princess and her partner, Dodi Fayed, had contributed to the accident.

The photographers who allegedly pursued Princess Diana were widely excoriated for their reckless actions, with many “serious” journalists in the mainstream media distancing themselves from their unscrupulous colleagues in the paparazzi. But while the paparazzi bore the brunt of world criticism, Parry pointed out that “respectable” news outlets have also played with people’s lives, often exploiting human tragedy at the expense of principled journalism on truly important stories.

In this article he explores how the media had lost its way.

## [Princess Diana’s Death & the Media Monster \(Sept. 29, 1997\)](#)

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Originally published in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News*

Princess Diana’s death in a car that careened out of control as it fled photographers on motorcycles has brought another picture into focus, almost as ugly as the twisted wreckage of her car in a Paris tunnel. This troubling image is one of a news media that seems to feast on human vulnerability while eschewing any nobler public mission. Amid the grief over Diana’s violent end, there has been this backdrop: a worldwide disgust over the way the news media does business.

In the days after her death, graffiti artists honored the late princess under the words, “Media Overkill.” Reporters covering everyday accidents found themselves upbraided by citizens. The grieving crowd outside Diana’s funeral at Westminster Abbey in London broke into spontaneous applause when Diana’s brother denounced media excesses.

Not only decrying the intrusive paparazzi, Earl Spencer questioned why the media corporations had financed the hunt of his sister and why newspapers ridiculed Diana's charity work. In an angry-sad voice, Spencer said:

I don't think she ever understood why her genuinely good intentions were sneered at by the media, why there appeared to be a permanent quest on their behalf to bring her down. It is baffling. My own and only explanation is that genuine goodness is threatening to those at the opposite end of the moral spectrum.

Many stalwarts from mainstream journalism took pains to distance themselves from the noisome paparazzi and the carnage they may have caused. With characteristic hyperbole, *New York Times* columnist A.M. Rosenthal compared "the gang of photographers" to "rapists and pimps."<sup>11</sup>

Others spread the blame to the broader public. "Yes, we – or rather the consumers of royalist photographs – certainly created the market that provided the incentive for those photographers to snap at any cost," wrote E.J. Dionne of the *Washington Post*.<sup>12</sup> "People, who are intoxicated by synthetic significance, are complicit in her death," judged George F. Will.<sup>13</sup>

One of the more thoughtful assessments came from a former star paparazzo, Francois Apesteguy, who quit the celebrity photo beat out of conscience. He chose not to fault the larger public for its fascination with the rich and famous. "At the top of the pyramid, enormous profits are made" by people "who drug the public" with celebrity gossip and candids, Apesteguy observed. "If there were no drug dealers, there would be no addicts."<sup>14</sup>

In years past, as a journalist myself, I would have been inclined to join those defending the news media, especially the working photographers, even while acknowledging some excesses in the profession. My defense would have been that the photographers' behavior in the Diana case was simply part of an often untidy – sometimes cruel – process that is vital to a free society.

To restrict photographers in their work, I would have argued, might cost the world other valuable photos that would be important for the public in understanding events. For instance, who would protest a photographer clandestinely clicking a picture of a politician meeting on a yacht with an underworld figure? One person's intrusion can be another's enterprise.

I would have said that it is impossible to draw clear lines about what should be allowed and what crosses over into the irresponsible. Sometimes news events move so quickly that a measured judgment is not even possible. Journalists react instinctively to what is “news.”

I would have argued, too, that reporters and photographers sometimes must perform unpleasant tasks, from publishing disclosures that can destroy a person’s reputation to capturing horrendous events on film. In the 1980s, I took no joy in exposing government officials engaged in criminal actions around the Iran-Contra scandal. I knew that some were doing what they thought right. I knew that some were in personal pain. Former national security adviser Robert McFarlane attempted suicide.

But what they had done in the name of the U.S. government was important and newsworthy. They had sustained a war in Nicaragua over a legal prohibition passed by Congress. They had supplied sophisticated weapons to an outlaw state in Iran. They had undermined important constitutional principles by silently asserting unlimited presidential prerogatives over foreign policy.

### **Exploit, Not Educate**

Yet, I find the argument of journalistic necessity hard to make anymore – and not only because of the tragedy surrounding Diana’s death. The claim of a grander journalistic mission rings tinny to me now. I believe that the news media, especially in Washington, largely has forsaken its profound duty to serve the public’s vital interest: that is, democracy’s need for an informed electorate.

The news media now appears to care excessively about exploiting people’s personal tragedies or chattering about political trivia. Which politician is up and which one is down? What clever, counter-intuitive argument can be advanced about the style, rather than the substance, of public policy?

Then, of course, there is the obscene profiteering that drives journalism on the corporate and personal level. After wiping off the TV make-up, the pundits scurry off to what *Time*’s Margaret Carlson calls the “gravy train” of lucrative speaking engagements, often from special interests wanting to influence the opinion circles of Washington.

Other times, the Washington news media has demonstrated mindless zeal in exposing minor personal flaws. In one breathless pursuit of a micro-scandal, *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas and David Hackworth drove to the home of Adm. Jeremy Boorda in 1996 to confront him over his apparent error in wearing two "V" pins on Vietnam-era ribbons. Aware how this planned humiliation would strike at his personal honor, Boorda denied *Newsweek* its scoop by shooting himself.

Though bemoaning the death, *Newsweek* likened its exposure of Boorda's pins to Watergate and wrapped itself in a bloody flag. "It is simply unthinkable an experienced officer would wear decorations he is not entitled to, awards that others bled for," pontificated Hackworth, a retired Army colonel who modestly calls himself the most decorated American soldier alive. Hackworth, however, saw no contradiction when he was caught earlier this year wearing a Distinguished Flying Cross and an Army Ranger service badge that he had not earned.<sup>[15](#)</sup>

In the early days of the Clinton administration, the Washington media hopped aboard another tiny ship of scandal known as "Travelgate." The newly arrived Clinton team had found funds missing from the travel office account. Clumsily, the White House fired the travel office staff and called in the FBI. The Washington press corps spun the story into a White House abuse of power. In particular, the *Wall Street Journal's* right-wing editorial page hounded one Clinton newcomer, deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster.

### **A Mystery Death?**

Foster grew depressed about the harsh criticism. According to several federal investigations, Foster drove to Fort Marcy Park in Virginia on July 20, 1993, and shot himself in the mouth. Conservative media outlets soon began spreading wild rumors suggesting that Foster had been murdered at the park or died elsewhere and was carried to the park. There was no positive evidence to support such a wildly implausible scenario, but right-wing media activist Reed Irvine made much of the fact that semen was found in Foster's underpants.

Even more troubling than what the major media does cover is what it doesn't cover or what it covers up. Last year, *San Jose Mercury News*

reporter Gary Webb highlighted new evidence that the Reagan-Bush administration had tolerated cocaine trafficking by the Nicaraguan Contras. First, the arch-conservative *Washington Times* rallied to the CIA's defense. Then, the Big Media – the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* – piled on. The combined assault, which served to obscure the widespread evidence of Contra-connected drug trafficking, had the look of the press protecting a serious crime of state.

Similarly, in the early 1990s, the Washington media effectively harassed independent counsel Lawrence Walsh into ending his Iran-Contra probe just as he had broken through the stonewall of lies that the Reagan-Bush administrations had built around those crimes of state. Again the combined attacks from right-wing and mainstream media helped the government conceal important historical truth.

### **‘Debunking’ Honest Journalism**

The same was true in 1991-92 when new evidence began to emerge about Republican attempts to undercut President Carter's hostage negotiations with Iran in 1980, as a way to ensure Ronald Reagan's election victory. A decade after the alleged events, I was recruited by PBS "Frontline" to examine these so-called "October Surprise" allegations.

Our documentary on the case aired in April 1991. Simultaneously, former White House aide Gary Sick, a respected expert on Middle Eastern affairs, laid out the case for believing that prominent Republicans had committed a near act of treason.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

But later that year, as there appeared a chance to get at the truth, the right-wing and mainstream media again launched a counter-attack. Though the *Washington Times* and the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page spearheaded the GOP defense, *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* published major "debunking" stories in fall 1991 that effectively killed any hope of a thorough investigation.

Those stories, however, were based on what turned out to be false alibis for the whereabouts of Reagan's campaign manager, William Casey, on key days in 1980. Still, even after the magazines' alibis for Casey were themselves debunked, there was no effort by the two publications or any mainstream publication to correct the record.

Then, in 1994, I discovered other classified government documents supporting the allegations of a Republican “October Surprise” scheme in 1980. I prepared a summary of the new evidence. But I could find no takers among editors at even left-of-center publications. The taboo about the October Surprise story was so strong that it seemed journalists at all levels feared that it would endanger their careers.

These new documents – which I began to call “The October Surprise X-Files” – led me to create *The Consortium* newsletter/website as a means of dealing with important issues that had been shunned by the Washington press. These taboos had grown kudzu-like, especially around CIA wrongdoing and the 12-year secret history of the Reagan-Bush administrations.

### **An Ugly Trashing**

In November and December 1995, I began publishing the October Surprise X-Files stories and the accompanying documents. In January 1996, I was asked by Texas columnist Sarah McClendon to speak about my findings to a small group of interested citizens who met periodically in the lobby of her Washington apartment building.

McClendon, who was then 85, was an independent thinker and a Washington institution known for her impertinent questions at presidential news conferences. I did not agree with some of McClendon’s journalistic assessments, but I respected her as an honorable person with iconoclastic views. I agreed to speak to her group.

A few days before the engagement, McClendon called me with news that a *Washington Post* Style writer named Richard Leiby was preparing a profile of her and wanted to attend my talk. Having worked for the *Post-Newsweek* company for several years, I instinctively knew what was in store.

“Sarah,” I warned, “he’s going to trash you.” But she assured me that the reporter seemed a respectful young man. I left the decision up to her as to whether he would be invited. She decided that he should come.

The winter of 1996 had been a harsh one, and I made my way over to McClendon’s apartment building on Connecticut Avenue along roads narrowed by snow drifts. Only about a half dozen members from her

discussion group were there, along with Leiby. McClendon sat in a wheelchair next to me near the center of the room.

In my talk, I recounted how the Iran-Contra investigation had been contained in the late 1980s and what the new October Surprise evidence showed. I had discovered the classified documents in congressional records that had been left behind by a 1992 investigation. Apparently, I had been given access to secret records by accident.

The documents included an extraordinary report that the Russian government had submitted to the U.S. Congress. The report stated that Moscow's intelligence files confirmed that Republicans had held secret hostage talks with Iranians in Europe during 1980.

### **Afflicting the Afflicted**

But the *Post's* article on McClendon turned out as I had expected. My discussion of the October Surprise taboo was made into a sneering anecdotal lead-in to a snide article entitled "The Pest Years of Her Life." Leiby ridiculed the 85-year-old woman as a loony eccentric. Making no substantive comment about the government documents discussed at the meeting, Leiby simply dismissed me as a "disgruntled loner," though I'm married with four children.<sup>17</sup>

After the article appeared, McClendon called me to apologize for any embarrassment she had caused me. She sounded as if she were crying. I told her that she had nothing to apologize for, that it was the *Post* that should be ashamed of itself. Privately, I wondered how the *Post* could justify assigning a reporter to hunt down a small group of American citizens who didn't think "right" – and subject an 85-year-old woman to such personal pain.

There had been a time when journalists liked to see their job as "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable." But that had changed. The McClendon experience – and the obvious lack of intellectual interest in important historical events – convinced me that the Washington media was no longer a champion for decency or truth. It had become the enemy. By and large, the news media now stood as the enforcement mechanism for an often mindless "conventional wisdom."

With fewer and fewer exceptions, the mainstream press had grown as thoughtless and as irresponsible as any paparazzo revving up his motorcycle to chase after one more photo of a fleeing princess. I could no longer make the defense that we in journalism were serving a larger good.

### **Diana & Land Mines**

One of Princess Diana's most substantive issues before her death was the abolition of land mines which kill and maim thousands of non-combatants around the world. In pressing that cause, however, Diana encountered some of her strongest opposition in the Clinton administration.

Washington argued against a universal ban in large part because the United States wanted to maintain a land-mine buffer zone between North and South Korea. In 1996, the Pentagon had argued that the mines were vital to prevent North Korea from overrunning U.S. and South Korean troops and capturing Seoul.

A group called Demilitarization for Democracy noted in a recent report that the Pentagon has quietly backed away from that dire vision. The Pentagon's new war-game analysis concludes that North Korea would be defeated but that the land mines are needed to prevent "tens of thousands" of allied casualties.

However, even those assumptions may be too pessimistic, according to the report, which has been endorsed by retired Army Lt. Gen. James F. Hollingsworth, a former commander of U.S. troops in Korea. The study concludes that the Pentagon is projecting an unrealistic advance rate for North Korean mechanized forces. They are presumed to be capable of matching the lightning attack speed of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf War.

The report argues that "it is far more likely that narrow mountain passes, wide rivers, and complete U.S. and South Korean control of the air will quickly force North Korean tank units to a crawl before they are destroyed." Further, the report states that the Pentagon's fear of monsoons, which might eliminate U.S. air cover, does not take into account how the rain would slow down the tanks.

"A lot of people in the Pentagon seem to know that President Clinton is getting misleading advice on land mines in Korea, but nobody seems to be



able to tell him,” said the group’s director, Caleb Rossiter. “It’s up to the National Security Council and State Department to get the straight story, and then get it to the president.”

Some prominent columnists, however, have warned against letting sentimentality over Diana’s death lead to a land-mine prohibition. Neoconservative pundit Charles Krauthammer called the ban advocates unrealistic “do-gooders” who are “enthralled with their own goodness.” Krauthammer maintained that a treaty would be unenforceable and that new “smart” land mines, which deactivate after a specified time, could eliminate civilian deaths.<sup>18</sup>

It seems likely that Diana’s last grand cause may miss her humanitarian commitment.

Mass deception has become such a standard practice in U.S. politics, it is difficult to say whether politicians and their spokespeople have always lied so routinely or whether it is a development that can be traced back to a certain historical moment. In this article, Parry examines the phenomenon of disinformation as a political weapon – and particularly its liberal use by the Republican Party – arguing that one of the most informative case studies in this regard is the ill-fated Korean Air Lines flight 007.

## [GOP & KAL-007: ‘The Key Is to Lie First’ \(May 28, 1998\)](#)

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Originally published in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News*

It’s not entirely clear when the Republican Party made disinformation a political weapon of choice.

Some trace the pattern back to the late 1940s when Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon used an exaggerated Red Scare to throw the Truman administration on the defensive and clear the way for the GOP’s Cold War dominance of the White House.

Others argue, however, that Republican lying is nothing special; that it’s just the nature of politics; that it’s always been that way; that the Democrats are no better.

But I believe there are shades of gray in politics, that a disingenuous “spin” or a defensive equivocation are not the same as an outright falsehood

intended to defame an enemy or to inflame the public. It seems to me that the modern Republican Party is unusual in that it not only steps across the line from time to time, but has relocated on the wrong side. Distortion and character assassination have become almost a political way of life.

My personal experience with this disturbing trend started in December 1980, when I worked for The Associated Press and was part of the AP's Special Assignment Team. In my earlier reporting career – covering state politics in Rhode Island and congressional politics in Washington – I had seen lots of the lighter forms of lying from both parties. Indeed, most of my early investigative stories were about Democratic misdeeds and damage control.

But in covering the emerging U.S. policy toward Central America in late 1980, I encountered a systematic strategy of lying. The incoming Reagan administration apparently saw “disinformation” as just one more ideological weapon in the Cold War arsenal, with the ends justifying the means.

The victorious Republicans didn't blink, for instance, in protecting political murderers in El Salvador, even when the victims were four American churchwomen who were raped and butchered by a right-wing military.

Coming as he did from movies, President Reagan seemed to have only a casual relationship with the truth anyway. But his persistent acts of deception over his eight years in the White House cannot be so glibly explained or excused. In his handling of foreign policy, in particular, Reagan routinely misled the American people.

### **The KAL Deception**

One of the baldest – and now admitted – lies was the case of Korean Air Lines flight 007. On the night of Aug. 30, 1983, the KAL 747 jumbo jet strayed hundreds of miles off-course and penetrated some of the Soviet Union's most sensitive air space, by flying over military facilities in Kamchatka and Sakhalin Island.

Over Sakhalin, KAL-007 was finally intercepted by a Soviet Sukhoi-15 fighter. The Soviet pilot tried to signal the plane to land, but the KAL pilots apparently did not see the repeated warnings. Amid confusion about the

plane's identity – a U.S. spy plane had been in the vicinity hours earlier – Soviet ground control ordered the pilot to fire. He did, blasting the plane out of the sky and killing all 269 people on board.

The Soviets soon realized they had made a horrendous mistake. U.S. intelligence also knew from sensitive intercepts that the tragedy had resulted from a blunder, not from a willful act of murder (much as on July 3, 1988, the USS Vincennes fired a missile that brought down an Iranian civilian airliner in the Persian Gulf, killing 290 people, an act which Reagan explained as an “understandable accident”).

But in 1983, the truth about KAL-007 didn't fit Washington's propaganda needs. The Reagan administration wanted to portray the Soviets as wanton murderers, so it brushed aside the judgment of the intelligence analysts. The administration then chose to release only snippets of the taped intercepts packaged in a way to suggest that the slaughter was intentional.

“The Reagan administration's spin machine began cranking up,” wrote Alvin A. Snyder, then-director of the U.S. Information Agency's television and film division, in his 1995 book, *Warriors of Disinformation*.

USIA director Charles Z. Wick “ordered his top agency aides to form a special task force to devise ways of playing the story overseas. The objective, quite simply, was to heap as much abuse on the Soviet Union as possible,” Snyder recalled.

In a boastful but frank description of the successful disinformation campaign, Snyder noted that “the American media swallowed the U.S. government line without reservation. Said the venerable Ted Koppel on the ABC News ‘Nightline’ program: ‘This has been one of those occasions when there is very little difference between what is churned out by the U.S. government propaganda organs and by the commercial broadcasting networks.’”

Of course, if the journalists hadn't gone along, they could have expected to be flogged for disloyalty. So, most Washington reporters ran with the pack. *Newsweek* published a cover line: “Murder in the Sky,” exactly the “theme” that the White House wanted conveyed to the public.

## **Mistranslation**

At the AP, I made a small contribution to questioning the official story. I felt the released intercepts were suspicious. So I took the English language translation, as well as the original Russian, to Russian language experts, including one who taught Pentagon personnel how to translate Russian military transmissions.

The Russian language experts noted one important error in the English translation released by the State Department. In the context of the Soviet pilot trying to communicate with the KAL plane, the administration translated the Russian word “zapros,” or inquiry, as “IFF” for “identify: friend or foe.” The AP’s experts, however, said “zapros” could mean any kind of inquiry, including open radio transmissions or physical warnings.

The significance of the mistranslation was central to the administration’s case. U.S. officials had extrapolated from “IFF” to advance the “murder in the sky” argument. Since an IFF transmission can only be received by Soviet military aircraft, that was further proof that the Russians made no attempt to warn the civilian airliner.

Still, the mistranslation was only one of the ways the tapes were doctored, as Snyder discovered when the intercepts were delivered to his office for transfer into a video presentation that was to be made at the United Nations.

“The tape was supposed to run 50 minutes,” Snyder observed. “But the tape segment we [at USIA] had ran only eight minutes and 32 seconds. ... ‘Do I detect the fine hand of [Nixon’s secretary] Rosemary Woods here?’ I asked sarcastically.”

But Snyder had a job to do: producing the video that his superiors wanted. “The perception we wanted to convey was that the Soviet Union had cold-bloodedly carried out a barbaric act,” Snyder noted.

Only a decade later, when Snyder saw the complete transcripts – including the portions that the Reagan administration had hidden – would he fully realize how many of the central elements of the U.S. presentation were false.

The Soviet pilot apparently did believe he was pursuing a U.S. spy plane, according to the intercepts, and he was having trouble in the dark identifying the plane. At the instructions of Soviet ground controllers, the

pilot had circled the KAL airliner and tilted his wings to force the aircraft down. The pilot said he fired warning shots, too. “This comment was also not on the tape we were provided,” Snyder stated.

It was clear to Snyder that in the pursuit of its Cold War aims, the Reagan administration had presented false accusations to the United Nations, as well as to the people of the United States and the world. To these Republicans, the ends of smearing the Soviets had justified the means of falsifying the historical record.

In his book, Snyder acknowledged his role in the deception and drew an ironic lesson from the incident. The senior USIA official wrote, “The moral of the story is that all governments, including our own, lie when it suits their purposes. The key is to lie first.”

Following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, U.S. neoliberal economists and “transition experts” promoted “shock therapy” policies in Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s government. Focused on massive privatization, lifting price controls, and the pursuit of free trade, the policies resulted in economic chaos and stalled efforts at democratization.

As Parry explains here, by the end of the 1990s – and particularly following the Russian financial crash in 1998 – some in the Clinton administration were beginning to have doubts about the path that had been pursued in Russia, warning that it could lead to a new Cold War.

## [Russia’s Crash Sounds Clinton Alarm \(March 11, 1999\)](#)

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Originally published in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News*

The economic collapse in Russia, with its collateral threat of a revived Cold War, finally has stirred some second thoughts within the Clinton administration over the wisdom of unrestrained, worldwide free markets.

The dissent is still a minority voice barely audible over the cheerleading of President Clinton’s dominant financial advisers at the Treasury Department.

But the toppling of financial dominoes from Asia through Russia to Latin America has emboldened some administration officials who believe that the invisible hand of the market place cannot alone give the world a stable international economy.

The argument for at least greater government regulation of transnational financial institutions was made most strikingly by the deputy assistant

secretary of state overseeing narcotics and law enforcement, Jonathan M. Winer, in a speech last Sept. 14 in Cambridge, England. Though covered in Europe, the speech received little notice in the United States.

Winer cited the weakness of government supervision over a global system that moves vast sums of money electronically, often through poorly regulated offshore banks. These money flows hide capital flight that can leave a nation near bankruptcy overnight, Winer said.

Winer also argued that the new financial technologies for moving money have dangerously outstripped the abilities of banking regulators to detect fraud, money laundering and other corruption – part of the problem in the recent Russian crack-up.

“We have had a major crash in the middle of the financial services electronic highway,” Winer said, “and hundreds of millions of people are already feeling the shock from the impact, even if they were nowhere near the site of the impact in Moscow.”

Winer added that the Russian shortcomings were recognized years ago, but were not addressed sufficiently.

“Analysts have suggested that the viability of the Russian reforms was threatened by Russia’s lack of transparency, inadequate regulation, inadequate law enforcement, corruption and organized crime,” he said.

In 1997, the State Department warned that Russia’s “shadow economy is a breeding ground for corruption, money laundering and a source for further criminality, criminals and organized crime,” he noted.

The warnings, however, failed to dampen the zeal of many neoliberal financial enthusiasts who saw the top priority in Russia as dismantling the old state-controlled economy. The message from Washington remained cold-turkey market “reform,” rather than an effective government civil service to regulate the emerging financial and business markets.

The crisis in Russia is not unique, nor “even that unusual,” Winer said. “The global raging bear market (of summer 1998) is merely the freshest reminder that global capital flows and global technologies have out-paced the ability of governments either to discourage or to respond effectively to sudden, wild gyrations in financial markets.”

Winer pointed to similar shortcomings in the financial systems of Mexico, Japan and tottering Asian economies.

“As technology globalized financial markets beyond national borders, governments, regulators and law-enforcement agencies stayed at home,” Winer said. “We created a financial services electronic highway without enforceable speed limits and without highway patrols.”

For example, Winer cited a State Department review of offshore banks located on Pacific atolls known as the Cook Islands. These lightly populated islands of 18,000 residents hosted 3,000 anonymous trusts. Many of these trusts were connected to organized crime, Russian businessmen and some of the most notorious financial players in the Asia-Pacific region, Winer said.

Winer recommended that an initial reform would be to establish stiffer regulations against money laundering.

A model for this strategy, he said, was the case of the Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean. Seychelles banks tried to attract deposits with promises of immunity from foreign laws.

In response, Western law enforcement asked countries to treat all Seychelle money transfers as “suspicious transactions” with immediate referrals to investigative agencies. The Seychelles’ banking customers found a down side to their immunity.

Similar cooperation could target transnational organized crime and improve local financial regulation, Winer said. But he admitted such steps alone would not make economies “crash proof, nor will we wipe out financial crime.”

Still, with tougher regulations, “we will have hardened our targets to the attacks of the unscrupulous [and] made it harder for criminals and terrorists to get away with financial crimes,” he said.

Though Winer’s speech drew little interest in the U.S. media last year, recently even the *New York Times*, a leading backer of “free-market reform,” published a four-part series on the “global contagion” of currency speculation.

“It was bankers and investors in Moscow and the Thai capital, Bangkok, who speculated wildly on stocks and real estate and thus built up catastrophic bubble economies,” the *Times* reported. “But it was American officials who pushed for the financial liberalization that nurtured the speculation.”<sup>19</sup>

Unrestrained capital flows also went hand-in-hand with government corruption. Russia is awash in new disclosures about insiders moving government funds around the world.

According to Russia’s prosecutor general Yuri Skuratov, the Central Bank pumped \$50 billion in cash reserves over five years through a mysterious offshore company named Financial Management Co. Ltd. in Britain’s Channel Islands. Skuratov was ousted soon after initiating an investigation into who may have earned lucrative fees and commissions from managing the money.

While insisting the total was much less than \$50 billion, Central Bank officials defended the curious arrangement as “a necessary measure to defend the economic safety of the nation.”<sup>20</sup>

Another danger from worldwide dislocations is that the instability could rekindle old political conflicts and possibly re-start the Cold War.

Last Sept. 2, Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov warned that extreme “free market” economic strategies had pushed nuclear-armed Russia to the brink of chaos.

In an interview on ABC’s “Nightline,” Zyuganov sketched a stark scenario for the future – one in which ambitious generals backed by unpaid soldiers with starving families would battle for control of Russia’s nuclear and chemical arsenals.

“Each area could have its own chemical, its own nuclear weapons, their own military units and all of this will end with that apocalyptic event that’s so well described in the Bible,” Zyuganov said.

In Election 2000, Parry had identified a “media deficit” as the single biggest challenge to Al Gore’s candidacy. The press, it seemed, had decided that Gore was unfit to be president and essentially manufactured controversies that painted him as a serial liar – controversies, as Parry demonstrated, that relied on misquoting Gore and twisting his words. Parry attributed the media’s unabashed hostility to the Vice President to its residual anger over Bill Clinton



surviving the impeachment battles of 1998-99, combined with a general view among the punditocracy that Bush's election would "put the adults back in charge."

## Al Gore v. the Media (Feb. 1, 2000)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

To read the major newspapers and to watch the TV pundit shows, one can't avoid the impression that many in the national press corps have decided that Vice President Al Gore is unfit to be elected the next president of the United States.

Across the board – from the *Washington Post* to the *Washington Times*, from the *New York Times* to the *New York Post*, from NBC's cable networks to the traveling campaign press corps – journalists don't even bother to disguise their contempt for Gore anymore.

At one early Democratic debate, a gathering of about 300 reporters in a nearby press room hissed and hooted at Gore's answers. Meanwhile, every perceived Gore misstep, including his choice of clothing, is treated as a new excuse to put him on a psychiatrist's couch and find him wanting.

Journalists freely call him "delusional," "a liar" and "Zelig." Yet, to back up these sweeping denunciations, the media has relied on a series of distorted quotes and tendentious interpretations of his words, at times following scripts written by the national Republican leadership.

In December, for instance, the news media generated dozens of stories about Gore's supposed claim that he discovered the Love Canal toxic waste dump. "I was the one that started it all," he was quoted as saying. This "gaffe" then was used to recycle other situations in which Gore allegedly exaggerated his role or, as some writers put it, told "bold-faced lies."

But behind these examples of Gore's "lies" was some very sloppy journalism. The Love Canal flap started when the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* misquoted Gore on a key point and cropped out the context of another sentence to give readers a false impression of what he meant.

The error was then exploited by national Republicans and amplified endlessly by the rest of the news media, even after the *Post* and *Times* grudgingly filed corrections.

Almost as remarkable, though, is how the two newspapers finally agreed to run corrections. They were effectively shamed into doing so by high school students in New Hampshire and by a website called *The Daily Howler*, edited by a stand-up comic named Bob Somerby.

The Love Canal quote controversy began on Nov. 30 when Gore was speaking to a group of high school students in Concord, N.H. He was exhorting the students to reject cynicism and to recognize that individual citizens can effect important changes.

As an example, he cited a high school girl from Toone, Tenn., a town that had experienced problems with toxic waste. She brought the issue to the attention of Gore's congressional office in the late 1970s.

"I called for a congressional investigation and a hearing," Gore told the students. "I looked around the country for other sites like that. I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. Had the first hearing on that issue, and Toone, Tennessee – that was the one that you didn't hear of. But that was the one that started it all."

After the hearings, Gore said, "we passed a major national law to clean up hazardous dump sites. And we had new efforts to stop the practices that ended up poisoning water around the country. We've still got work to do. But we made a huge difference. And it all happened because one high school student got involved."

The context of Gore's comment was clear. What sparked his interest in the toxic-waste issue was the situation in Toone – "that was the one that you didn't hear of. But that was the one that started it all."

After learning about the Toone situation, Gore looked for other examples and "found" a similar case at Love Canal. He was not claiming to have been the first one to discover Love Canal, which already had been evacuated. He simply needed other case studies for the hearings.

The next day, the *Washington Post* stripped Gore's comments of their context and gave them a negative twist. "Gore boasted about his efforts in Congress 20 years ago to publicize the dangers of toxic waste," the *Post* reported. "I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal," he said, referring to the Niagara homes evacuated in August 1978 because of

chemical contamination. ‘I had the first hearing on this issue.’ ... Gore said his efforts made a lasting impact. ‘I was the one that started it all,’ he said.”<sup>21</sup>

The *New York Times* ran a slightly less contentious story with the same false quote: “I was the one that started it all.”

The Republican National Committee spotted Gore’s alleged boast and was quick to fax around its own take. “Al Gore is simply unbelievable – in the most literal sense of that term,” declared Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson. “It’s a pattern of phoniness – and it would be funny if it weren’t also a little scary.”

The GOP release then doctored Gore’s quote a bit more. After all, it would be grammatically incorrect to have said, “I was the one that started it all.” So, the Republican handout fixed Gore’s grammar to say, “I was the one who started it all.”

In just one day, the key quote had transformed from “that was the one that started it all” to “I was the one that started it all” to “I was the one who started it all.”

Instead of taking the offensive against these misquotes, Gore tried to head off the controversy by clarifying his meaning and apologizing if anyone got the wrong impression. But the fun was just beginning.

The national pundit shows quickly picked up the story of Gore’s new exaggeration.

“Let’s talk about the ‘love’ factor here,” chortled Chris Matthews of CNBC’s “Hardball.” “Here’s the guy who said he was the character Ryan O’Neal was based on in ‘Love Story.’ ... It seems to me ... he’s now the guy who created the Love Canal [case]. I mean, isn’t this getting ridiculous? ... Isn’t it getting to be delusional?”

Matthews turned to his baffled guest, Lois Gibbs, the Love Canal resident who is widely credited with bringing the issue to public attention. She sounded confused about why Gore would claim credit for discovering Love Canal, but defended Gore’s hard work on the issue.

“I actually think he’s done a great job,” Gibbs said. “I mean, he really did work, when nobody else was working, on trying to define what the hazards

were in this country and how to clean it up and helping with the Superfund and other legislation.”<sup>22</sup>

The next morning, *Post* political writer Ceci Connolly highlighted Gore’s boast and placed it in his alleged pattern of falsehoods. “Add Love Canal to the list of verbal missteps by Vice President Gore,” she wrote. “The man who mistakenly claimed to have inspired the movie ‘Love Story’ and to have invented the internet says he didn’t quite mean to say he discovered a toxic waste site.”<sup>23</sup>

That night, CNBC’s “Hardball” returned to Gore’s Love Canal quote by playing the actual clip but altering the context by starting Gore’s comments with the words, “I found a little town...”

“It reminds me of Snoopy thinking he’s the Red Baron,” laughed Chris Matthews. “I mean how did he get this idea? Now you’ve seen Al Gore in action. I know you didn’t know that he was the prototype for Ryan O’Neal’s character in ‘Love Story’ or that he invented the internet. He now is the guy who discovered Love Canal.”

Matthews compared the Vice President to “Zelig,” the Woody Allen character whose face appeared at an unlikely procession of historic events. “What is it, the Zelig guy who keeps saying, ‘I was the main character in ‘Love Story.’ I invented the internet. I invented Love Canal.”

Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, who favors Gore’s rival, former Sen. Bill Bradley, added, “I don’t know why he feels that he has to exaggerate and make some of this stuff up.”

The following day, Rupert Murdoch’s *New York Post* elaborated on Gore’s pathology of deception. “Again, Al Gore has told a whopper,” the *Post* wrote. “Again, he’s been caught red-handed and again, he has been left sputtering and apologizing. This time, he falsely took credit for breaking the Love Canal story. ... Yep, another Al Gore bold-faced lie.”

The editorial continued:

Al Gore appears to have as much difficulty telling the truth as his boss, Bill Clinton. But Gore’s lies are not just false, they’re outrageously, stupidly false. It’s so easy to determine that he’s lying, you have to wonder if he wants to be found out.

Does he enjoy the embarrassment? Is he hell-bent on destroying his own campaign? ... Of course, if Al Gore is determined to turn himself into a national laughingstock, who are we to stand in his way?

On ABC's "This Week" pundit show, there was head-shaking amazement about Gore's supposed Love Canal lie.

"Gore, again, revealed his Pinocchio problem," declared former Clinton adviser George Stephanopoulos. "Says he was the model for 'Love Story,' created the internet. And this time, he sort of discovered Love Canal."

A bemused Cokie Roberts chimed in, "Isn't he saying that he really discovered Love Canal when he had hearings on it after people had been evacuated?"

"Yeah," added Bill Kristol, editor of Murdoch's *Weekly Standard*. Kristol then read Gore's supposed quote: "I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. I was the one that started it all."<sup>24</sup>

The Love Canal controversy soon moved beyond the Washington-New York power axis.

On Dec. 6, the *Buffalo News* ran an editorial entitled, "Al Gore in Fantasyland," that echoed the words of RNC chief Nicholson. It stated, "Never mind that he didn't invent the internet, serve as the model for 'Love Story' or blow the whistle on Love Canal. All of this would be funny if it weren't so disturbing."

The next day, the right-wing *Washington Times* judged Gore crazy. "The real question is how to react to Mr. Gore's increasingly bizarre utterings," the *Times* wrote. "Webster's New World Dictionary defines 'delusional' thusly: 'The apparent perception, in a nervous or mental disorder, of some thing external that is actually not present ... a belief in something that is contrary to fact or reality, resulting from deception, misconception, or a mental disorder.'"

The editorial denounced Gore as "a politician who not only manufactures gross, obvious lies about himself and his achievements but appears to actually believe these confabulations."

But the *Washington Times*' own credibility was shaky. For its editorial attack on Gore, the newspaper not only printed the bogus quote, "I was the

one that started it all,” but attributed the quote to The Associated Press, which had actually quoted Gore correctly, (“That was the one...”).

Yet, while the national media was excoriating Gore, the Concord students were learning more than they had expected about how media and politics work in modern America.

For days, the students pressed for a correction from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. But the prestige papers balked, insisting that the error was insignificant.

“The part that bugs me is the way they nitpick,” said Tara Baker, a Concord High junior. “[But] they should at least get it right.”<sup>25</sup>

When the David Letterman show made Love Canal the jumping off point for a joke list: “Top 10 Achievements Claimed by Al Gore,” the students responded with a press release entitled “Top 10 Reasons Why Many Concord High Students Feel Betrayed by Some of the Media Coverage of Al Gore’s Visit to Their School.”<sup>26</sup>

The website, *The Daily Howler*, also was hectoring what it termed a “grumbling editor” at the *Post* to correct the error.

Finally, on Dec. 7, a week after Gore’s comment, the *Post* published a partial correction, tucked away as the last item in a corrections box. But the *Post* still misled readers about what Gore actually said.

The *Post* correction read: “In fact, Gore said, ‘That was the one that started it all,’ referring to the congressional hearings on the subject that he called.”

The revision fit with the *Post*’s insistence that the two quotes meant pretty much the same thing, but again, the newspaper was distorting Gore’s clear intent by attaching “that” to the wrong antecedent. From the full quote, it’s obvious the “that” refers to the Toone toxic waste case, not to Gore’s hearings.

Three days later, the *New York Times* followed suit with a correction of its own, but again without fully explaining Gore’s position. “They fixed how they misquoted him, but they didn’t tell the whole story,” commented Lindsey Roy, another Concord High junior.

While the students voiced disillusionment, the two reporters involved showed no remorse for their mistake. “I really do think that the whole thing has been blown out of proportion,” said Katharine Seelye of the *Times*. “It was one word.”

The *Post*’s Ceci Connolly even defended her inaccurate rendition of Gore’s quote as something of a journalistic duty. “We have an obligation to our readers to alert them [that] this [Gore’s false boasting] continues to be something of a habit,” she said.<sup>[27](#)</sup>

The half-hearted corrections also did not stop newspapers around the country from continuing to use the bogus quote.

A Dec. 9 editorial in the Lancaster, Penn., *New Era* even published the polished misquote that the Republican National Committee had stuck in a press release: “I was the one who started it all.”

*The New Era* then went on to psychoanalyze Gore. “Maybe the lying is a symptom of a more deeply-rooted problem: Al Gore doesn’t know who he is,” the editorial stated. “The vice president is a serial prevaricator.”

In the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, writer Michael Ruby concluded that “the Gore of ‘99” was full of lies. He “suddenly discovers elastic properties in the truth,” Ruby declared. “He invents the internet, inspires the fictional hero of ‘Love Story,’ blows the whistle on Love Canal. Except he didn’t really do any of those things.”<sup>[28](#)</sup>

*The National Journal*’s Stuart Taylor Jr. cited the Love Canal case as proof that President Clinton was a kind of political toxic waste contaminant. The problem was “the Clintonization of Al Gore, who increasingly apes his boss in fictionalizing his life story and mangling the truth for political gain. Gore – self-described inspiration for the novel *Love Story*, discoverer of Love Canal, co-creator of the internet,” Taylor wrote.<sup>[29](#)</sup>

On Dec. 19, GOP chairman Nicholson was back on the offensive. Far from apologizing for the RNC’s misquotes, Nicholson was reprising the allegations of Gore’s falsehoods that had been repeated so often that they had taken on the color of truth: “Remember, too, that this is the same guy

who says he invented the internet, inspired Love Story and discovered Love Canal.”

More than two weeks after the *Post* correction, the bogus quote was still spreading. The *Providence Journal* lashed out at Gore in an editorial that reminded readers that Gore had said about Love Canal, “I was the one that started it all.” The editorial then turned to the bigger picture:

This is the third time in the last few months that Mr. Gore has made a categorical assertion that is – well, untrue. ... There is an audacity about Mr. Gore’s howlers that is stunning. ... Perhaps it is time to wonder what it is that impels Vice President Gore to make such preposterous claims, time and again.<sup>30</sup>

The characterization of Gore as a clumsy liar continued into the new year. Again in the *Washington Times*, R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. put Gore’s falsehoods in the context of a sinister strategy:

“Deposit so many deceits and falsehoods on the public record that the public and the press simply lose interest in the truth. This, the Democrats thought, was the method behind Mr. Gore’s many brilliantly conceived little lies. Except that Mr. Gore’s lies are not brilliantly conceived. In fact, they are stupid. He gets caught every time ... Just last month, Mr. Gore got caught claiming ... to have been the whistleblower for ‘discovering Love Canal.’”<sup>31</sup>

It was unclear where Tyrrell got the quote, “discovering Love Canal,” since not even the false quotes had put those words in Gore’s mouth. But Tyrrell’s description of what he perceived as Gore’s strategy of flooding the public debate with “deceits and falsehoods” might fit better with what the news media and the Republicans had been doing to Gore.

The media’s treatment of the internet comment followed a similar course. Gore’s statement may have been poorly phrased, but its intent was clear: he was trying to say that he worked in Congress to help develop the internet. Gore wasn’t claiming to have “invented” the internet or to have been the “father of the internet,” as many journalists have asserted.

Gore’s actual comment, in an interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer that aired on March 9, 1999, was as follows: “During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the internet.”



Republicans quickly went to work on Gore's statement. In press releases, they noted that the precursor of the internet, called ARPANET, existed in 1971, a half dozen years before Gore entered Congress. But ARPANET was a tiny networking of about 30 universities, a far cry from today's "information superhighway," ironically a phrase widely credited to Gore.

As the media clamor arose about Gore's supposed claim that he had invented the Internet, Gore's spokesman Chris Lehane tried to explain. He noted that Gore "was the leader in Congress on the connections between data transmission and computing power, what we call information technology. And those efforts helped to create the internet that we know today."<sup>32</sup>

There was no disputing Lehane's description of Gore's lead congressional role in developing today's internet. But the media was off and running.

Routinely, the reporters lopped off the introductory clause "during my service in the United States Congress" or simply jumped to word substitutions, asserting that Gore claimed that he "invented" the internet which carried the notion of a hands-on computer engineer.

Whatever imprecision may have existed in Gore's original comment, it paled beside the distortions of what Gore clearly meant. While excoriating Gore's phrasing as an exaggeration, the media engaged in its own exaggeration.

Yet, faced with the national media putting a hostile cast on his internet statement – that he was willfully lying – Gore chose again to express his regret at his choice of words.

Now, with the Love Canal controversy, this media pattern of distortion has returned with a vengeance. The national news media has put a false quote into Gore's mouth and then extrapolated from it to the point of questioning his sanity. Even after the quote was acknowledged to be wrong, the words continued to be repeated, again becoming part of Gore's record.

From the media's hostile tone, one might conclude that reporters have reached a collective decision that Gore should be disqualified from the campaign.

Reasons for this widespread media contempt for Gore vary. Conservative outlets, such as Rev. Moon's *Washington Times* and Murdoch's media empire, clearly want to ensure the election of a Republican conservative to the White House. They are always eager to advance that cause.

In the mainstream press, many reporters may feel that savaging Gore protects them from the "liberal" label that can so damage a reporter's career. Others simply might be venting residual anger over President Clinton's survival of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. They might believe that Gore's political destruction would be a fitting end to the Clinton administration.

Reporters apparently sense, too, that there is no career danger in showing open hostility toward Clinton's Vice President.

Yet, the national media's prejudice against Gore – now including fabrication of damaging quotes and misrepresentation of his meaning – raises a troubling question about this year's election and the future health of American democracy:

How can voters have any hope of expressing an informed judgment when the media intervenes to transform one of the principal candidates – an individual who, by all accounts, is a well-qualified public official and a decent family man – into a national laughingstock?

What hope does American democracy have when the media can misrepresent a candidate's words so thoroughly that they become an argument for his mental instability – and all the candidate feels he can do about the misquotes is to apologize?

As *The Daily Howler's* Somerby observes, the concern about deception and its corrosive effect on democracy dates back to the ancient Greeks.

"Democracy won't work, the great Socrates cried, because sophists will create mass confusion," Somerby recalled at his website. "Here in our exciting, much-hyped new millennium, the Great Greek's vision remains crystal clear."<sup>33</sup>

In the days following the Nov. 7, 2000, election, a recount in the state of Florida steadily chipped away at Bush's razor-thin margin of victory. But as Gore gained ground in the official tally, it was becoming clear that had there not been so many spoiled ballots, a recount would have not even been necessary because Gore would have clearly won the state.

As Parry explains here, Gore likely lost some 13,000 votes in Palm Beach County due to a poorly designed – and probably illegal – ballot, which would have easily put him over the top and into the White House.

This article was published a day after the Florida Supreme Court unanimously ruled that manual recounts could continue and that the totals must be included in the final results, which likely would have resulted in a Gore victory had the U.S. Supreme Court not stepped in a few weeks later and stopped the count.

## [Gore's Florida 'Victory' \(Nov. 22, 2000\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

A new analysis of Florida's presidential vote seems to confirm that Vice President Al Gore was the choice of the state's voters, although various irregularities cost him thousands of votes and could tip the state's 25 electoral votes – and the presidency – to Texas Gov. George W. Bush.

The analysis suggests that Gore may have lost about 13,000 votes in Palm Beach County because of voter confusion over an illegally designed ballot. With Bush's current lead at 930 votes – pending recounts in three counties – those lost votes alone could have provided Gore a clear margin of victory.

The analysis also supports claims by many elderly voters in Palm Beach County that they were confused by the so-called “butterfly ballot,” which listed presidential choices in two side-by-side lists rather than in one vertical column as required by Florida law.

These voters said they feared they accidentally cast their votes for Reform Party nominee Patrick Buchanan or negated their ballots by trying to correct their mistake and voting for both Gore and Buchanan.

After the election, Buchanan acknowledged that his surprising blip of 3,704 votes in the staunchly Democratic county, with a large Jewish population, almost certainly resulted from confusion. Buchanan said he believed those votes were intended for Gore.

Buchanan's total in Palm Beach County exceeded his tally in any other county by about 2,700.

It now appears that Gore lost even more votes – possibly in excess of 10,000 ballots – when voters tried to correct their error. After mistakenly

punching a hole for Buchanan, these Palm Beach voters punched a second hole for Gore.

Since Buchanan's name was positioned diagonally above and to the right of Gore's, the Reform Party candidate would have been the beneficiary of the first punch from voters thinking they were picking Gore, whose name was the second on the left-hand list directly below Bush's.

The confused voters, apparently realizing their mistake, then poked a second hole directly next to Gore's name.

In Palm Beach County, there were 19,120 ballots disqualified because of double-voting. The Palm Beach County canvassing board analyzed a sample of these disqualified ballots. From that sample of 144 ballots, 80 ballots – or 56 percent – showed punches for both Buchanan and Gore.<sup>34</sup>

If that sample percentage were applied to the entire batch, Gore potentially lost 10,622 votes. If one counts 2,700 of the Buchanan votes as likely confused voters for Gore, that would put Gore's lost votes in Palm Beach County alone at more than 13,000.

In a statewide race with Bush leading by fewer than 1,000 votes, the confusion in Palm Beach County could account for far more than the deciding margin.

On Monday, a local judge sympathized with the confused voters but rejected a lawsuit seeking a re-vote in Palm Beach County. The judge said such a remedy was beyond his authority.

In other counties, allegations of outright misconduct have been raised. The NAACP has complained that Florida authorities intimidated African-Americans who were trying to vote.

In Seminole County, a lawsuit is proceeding alleging that election officials gave Republicans special access to absentee-ballot applications so corrections could be made and the votes counted for Bush.

Democrats and individual voters with similar deficiencies in their applications were not given an opportunity to make corrections, the *New York Times* reported on Nov. 21. Bush outpolled Gore among Seminole County's absentee ballots by nearly 5,000 votes, again far more than Bush's current lead.

Meanwhile, the Republicans have lodged a complaint of their own. They claim that early network projections of a Gore victory in Florida based on exit polls cost them votes in the Florida panhandle where the polls stayed open an hour later than the rest of the state.

But GOP leaders have misstated the chronology of events. They assert that the networks awarded Florida to Gore at 7 p.m., just as the polls in most of Florida closed. The network projections actually occurred at about 7:50 p.m. – only 10 minutes before the panhandle polls closed.

Though the networks certainly could have and obviously should have waited, it is unclear that any Bush voter decided not to go to the polls because of a projection that occurred only minutes before the polls closed. It's unlikely that more than a few late-arriving voters were even aware of Gore's projected victory.

It also now appears that those exit polls correctly assessed voter preferences in Florida, though not by adequate margins to justify an Election Night call of the race.

Based on the still-evolving record in Florida, the evidence indicates that a combination of errors and irregularities ultimately could reverse the voters' preference for Gore.

In turn, that reversal of the public's will – by giving Florida's 25 electoral votes to Bush – also would reverse the will of the American people, who favored Gore by a clear though narrow margin.

With more than 50 million votes in his column – the second-highest total ever and the largest vote tally by any non-incumbent president – Gore now leads Bush in the national popular vote by about 300,000 ballots.

A Bush victory in the Electoral College – with Florida putting him over the top – would make the Texas governor the first popular-vote loser in modern times to claim the White House. The last such case was in 1888.

Even with the Florida Supreme Court allowing hand recounts to proceed, Bush seems poised to do just that, winning the presidency although the people of the United States and apparently the voters of Florida wanted someone else.

On November 26, 2000, Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris denied a Palm Beach County request to extend the 5 p.m. deadline to turn in completed vote totals, leaving 1,000 ballots uncounted. Harris then certified Bush the winner of Florida, and for a moment it seemed that the election had been settled, with Bush supporters calling him “president-elect” and demanding that Gore concede.

Although there would be a few more twists and turns in Election 2000, ultimately culminating in the notorious December 12 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that halted the recount in Florida, at the time of Parry’s writing the following article, it seemed to most observers that the election was over.

## W’s Triumph of the Will (Nov. 27, 2000)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Texas Gov. George W. Bush has claimed the mantle of president of the United States after one of the most brazen – and effective – power grabs in political history.

The loser of the national popular vote by about 337,000 votes and apparently not even the favorite of the six million Floridians who went to the polls, Bush assured his victory by deploying Republican foot soldiers to Florida and revving up the powerful conservative propaganda machine across the country.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Bush even called to offer words of encouragement to GOP operatives who had physically intimidated the Dade County canvassing board before it abruptly reversed its decision to count disputed ballots and instead cast those 10,750 ballots aside.

Now, barring an unlikely court ruling in the weeks ahead,<sup>48</sup> the result of Bush’s bare-knuckle strategy appears to be that the will of the American voters has been overturned for the first time in 112 years. The first popular-vote loser since Benjamin Harrison will ascend to the presidency.

In the days since the election, the conservative media apparatus worked to create an atmosphere of inevitability and entitlement. Republican operatives insisted that Bush be declared the winner because he led in Florida, though by only a narrow margin and despite widespread complaints of irregularities.

Thousands of mostly elderly residents of Palm Beach – apparently 10,000 or more – had tried to vote for Gore, but were confused by an improperly designed ballot.

These citizens accidentally voted for Reform Party candidate Patrick Buchanan or punched two holes in trying to correct their ballots. Bush supporters ridiculed them as morons who had disenfranchised themselves.

In other parts of Florida, African-American voters complained of receiving ballots already punched for Bush or of being turned away from polling places. Bush supporters complained when Jesse Jackson and other black leaders joined local people for protests.

Meanwhile, in Seminole County, evidence emerged that voting officials had granted special opportunities for Republicans to correct data on absentee ballots, while flawed absentee ballots from regular citizens and Democrats were thrown away.

Republican Party workers were allowed to work out of Seminole County offices for as long as 10 days, without supervision in rooms housing the county's computer database of voters.

Sandra Goard, the county election supervisor, said she did not even know the identity of one of the two men given access to the absentee ballots and the computer rooms. Goard made her admissions in a sworn deposition, according to the *New York Times*.<sup>[35](#)</sup>

In Seminole County, absentee ballots gave Bush about a 5,000-vote margin over Gore.

In the days after the Nov. 7 election, the Bush campaign insisted that the machine count should be respected as the most accurate.

But a statewide machine recount saw Bush's lead slip from 1,784 to 327, a margin that ironically included at least 418 hand-recounted votes for Bush from mostly Republican counties.

The machines also kicked out tens of thousands of ballots because the choice for president had not been completely punched through. Gore's campaign exercised a provision of Florida law – similar to laws in other states, including Texas – that permitted a hand recount.

The Bush forces immediately denounced a hand recount in three counties – Dade, Palm Beach and Broward – as unfair and unconstitutional. They also rejected Gore’s offer for a statewide hand recount.

Republican court actions and administrative orders from the Republican Secretary of State Katherine Harris caused delays in pressing ahead.

### **Building Support**

Around the country, meanwhile, the conservative media apparatus, led by talk show host Rush Limbaugh and pro-Bush pundits, rallied the faithful with charges that a hand recount was fraudulent and amounted to “inventing” votes.

Given the large size of the three counties and the legal challenges, the hand recounts were barely started when Harris certified the machine recount as the official tally at a Nov. 14 deadline for the counties to submit Election Day results.

The Bush campaign insisted that Harris’s certification was binding. Gore’s appeal to the Florida Supreme Court, however, reversed that finding and allowed the hand recounts to proceed under another deadline of Nov. 26.

As the hand recounts resumed, Bush’s official lead was 930 votes, after adding in overseas absentee ballots.

At this point, Republicans began busing in demonstrators to the sites of the recounts. The scenes grew more and more reminiscent of organized mobs in some banana republic, rather than the United States.

But Bush did nothing to temper the increasingly inflammatory rhetoric of his supporters. Nor did he urge them to respect the legally sanctioned vote counting.

Instead, Bush’s recount representative, James Baker, and Bush himself denounced the Florida Supreme Court. Bush accused the court of abusing its powers in a bid to “usurp” the authority of the legislature. Bush’s comments suggested that he did not understand the role of the judiciary in the American system of governance.

Amid the escalating Republican rhetoric, a mob of about 150 pro-Bush demonstrators stormed the offices of the election canvassers in Dade



County on Nov. 22. The election board was beginning its examination of 10,750 disputed ballots, which had not previously been counted.

With the mob pounding on the walls and roughing up Democrats in the vicinity, the canvassing board abruptly reversed its decision. The uncounted ballots were discarded, amid cheers from the Bush partisans.

The mob action in Dade County effectively assured Bush's election to the presidency, barring a court reversal. Despite the use of intimidation to influence a decision by election officials, Bush and his top aides remained publicly silent about these disruptive tactics.

The *Washington Post* reported today that "even as the Bush campaign and the Republicans portray themselves as above the fray," national Republicans actually had joined in and helped finance the raucous protests.

These GOP operatives spotted among the demonstrators included Tom Pyle, an aide to House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, R-Texas, and Doug Heye, a spokesman for Rep. Richard W. Pombo, R-Calif., the *Post* reported.

"Many of the out-of-state GOP demonstrators told local reporters that the Republican National Committee paid for their travel, room and board, putting a number of them up at a Sheraton in Fort Lauderdale," the article said.

The *Wall Street Journal* added more details, including the fact that Bush offered personal words of encouragement to the rioters in a conference call to a Bush campaign-sponsored celebration on the night of Thanksgiving Day, one day after the canvassing board assault.

"The night's highlight was a conference call from Mr. Bush and running mate Dick Cheney, which included joking reference by both running mates to the incident in Miami, two [Republican] staffers in attendance say," according to the *Journal*.<sup>[36](#)</sup>

After their victory in shutting down the Dade County recount, the national GOP operatives from the Bush campaign and Capitol Hill celebrated at a party at the Hyatt on Pier 66 in Fort Lauderdale. The *Journal* reported that "entertainer Wayne Newton crooned the song 'Danke Schoen'," the German words for thank you very much.

**'President-Elect'**

Still, by Sunday night, the Broward County vote had whittled down Bush's lead. Gore was gaining slowly in Palm Beach's recount, despite constant challenges from Republican observers.

To boost Bush's margin back up by 52 votes, Secretary of State Harris allowed Nassau County to throw out its recounted figures that had helped Gore. The county reverted back to the original Election Night count that had been more favorable to Bush.

As a 5 p.m. deadline approached, the Palm Beach canvassing board asked for a short extension to finish the contentious recount. Harris refused, rejecting even the partial recount figures that Palm Beach sent in the interim.

With Palm Beach excluded and Dade County shut down, Harris certified Bush the winner by 537 votes. The certification ceremony was conducted with all the fanfare of an official international treaty being signed.

Bush partisans cheered their victory and began demanding that Bush be called the president-elect. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, Gore's vice presidential running mate, denounced the certification as "an incomplete and inaccurate count" and vowed to challenge Harris's action in court.

Soon afterwards, Bush appeared on national television to announce himself the winner and to call on Gore to concede defeat.

"Now," Bush said, "we must live up to our principles. We must show our commitment to the common good, which is bigger than any person or any party."

As extraordinary as the Bush power grab might be, Gore's chances of reversing the certification seem slim at best. Legal challenges – especially under these circumstances – will be difficult, if not impossible.

Even should Gore pull ahead with the inclusion of the Dade County and Palm Beach County votes, the Republicans have vowed to block Gore's election in the state legislature or, if necessary, in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The voters' will on Election Day – both nationally and in Florida – may have been to elect Al Gore and Joe Lieberman. But Bush and the Republicans have demonstrated that their hardball political strategies – and

even their readiness to use mob tactics – can trump a narrow Democratic victory among the voters.

Indeed, one of the remarkable aspects of Republican rhetoric in the weeks since the election was the dropping of any pretense that Bush's election reflected the desires of the American voters.

Nationally, Republicans termed Gore's popular-vote victory irrelevant. In Florida, they called the confusion and irregularities simply the way the system works or tough luck.

Rather than respect a legal Democratic request for hand recounts that still could have given Bush the victory, the Republicans equated the court-ordered tally with voter fraud. Mobs were organized and sent to intimidate vote counters.

To the Bush camp, winning became everything, while Gore was excoriated as a "sore loser."

For all the world to see, "President-Elect" George W. Bush had demonstrated his triumph of the will.

Despite earlier appearances that Election 2000 had already been decided by Secretary of State Katherine Harris's decision to certify Bush the winner of Florida, the electoral saga would continue when the Florida Supreme Court on Dec. 8 ordered a statewide recount of more than 61,000 ballots that the vote tabulation machines had missed. Although initially it looked like this court order might provide the basis for a full counting of votes and a legitimate determination of the winner – with a strong chance still for Al Gore to prevail – the Bush campaign immediately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court to stay the decision.

On Dec. 9, the five conservative justices on the Court granted the stay, with Justice Antonin Scalia saying that counting votes would cast "a needless and unjustified cloud" over Bush's legitimacy. Oral arguments were scheduled for Dec. 11, and on Dec. 12 the Supreme Court would formally overturn the Florida Supreme Court, thereby ensuring that Bush won the state's electoral votes and the White House.

## [A Dark Cloud \(Dec. 10, 2000\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

For the first time in history, the U.S. Supreme Court has ordered a halt in the counting of ballots cast by citizens for the election of the president of the United States.

It was a breathtaking moment whose frightening grandeur was missed by the tinny news media punditry about which side “won” and which side “lost.”

It was a moment that wafted the unmistakable odor of a new order imposing itself in defiance of the popular will. There were no tanks in the streets, but this was as raw an imposition of political power as this nation has seen in modern times.

In a 5-4 decision on Saturday, the hardline conservatives who dominate the highest court in the land told vote-counters across Florida to stop counting ballots that had been cast by voters on Nov. 7. The partial recount had been ordered by the Florida Supreme Court on Friday, and Texas Gov. George W. Bush had sought the injunction to stop the counting.

The federal ruling made clear that the count was being halted because the U.S. Supreme Court’s conservative majority feared that the recount would show that Vice President Al Gore got more votes in Florida than Bush did.

That outcome would “cast a cloud” over the “legitimacy” of an eventual Bush presidency if the U.S. Supreme Court later decided to throw out the Gore gains as illegal, explained Justice Antonin Scalia in an opinion speaking for the majority.

“Count first, and rule upon the legality afterwards, is not a recipe for producing election results that have the public acceptance democratic stability requires,” Scalia wrote.

In other words, it was better for the U.S. public not to know for sure that Gore got the most votes if – as expected – the Supreme Court’s five hardline conservatives rule on Monday to prohibit any more vote-counting and effectively award Bush the presidency.

For the American people to realize that they gave Gore more votes nationally – as well as in Florida – while Bush moves into the White House simply wouldn’t generate “the public acceptance [that] democratic stability requires,” as Scalia put it.

If such logic had appeared in the old Soviet Union, we would be pulling out copies of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* to search for comparable phrases.

## **A Dissent**

In a remarkable dissent also released on Saturday, Justice John Paul Stevens took Scalia's reasoning to task.

Stevens, a moderate conservative who was appointed by Republican President Gerald Ford, said the injunction against the vote tally violated the traditions of "judicial restraint that have guided the Court throughout its history."

Stevens complained that the high court's action overrode the judgment of a state supreme court, took sides on a constitutional question before that issue was argued to the justices, and misinterpreted the principles of "irreparable harm."

"Counting every legally cast vote cannot constitute irreparable harm," Stevens argued. "On the other hand, there is a danger that a stay may cause irreparable harm to the respondents [the Gore side] and, more importantly, the public at large" because the stay could prevent a full tally of the votes before the impending deadline of Dec. 12 for selecting Florida's electors.

As for the "legitimacy" issue, Stevens answered Scalia's rhetoric directly. "Preventing the recount from being completed will inevitably cast a cloud on the legitimacy of the election," Stevens wrote.

There remains a chance that one or more of the court's conservatives will recognize the danger of their present course. The court could decide to let the vote counting resume and extend the current deadline so there is sufficient time to complete it.

Bush might hold on to his narrow lead – or Gore might prevail – with the winner deriving his legitimacy from the fullest count of the Florida ballots as possible.

But if the five hardline conservatives – Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Anthony Kennedy, Sandra Day O'Connor, Clarence Thomas and Scalia – insist on stopping the vote count and handing the presidency to George W. Bush, the United States will have embarked upon a dangerous political journey whose end could affect the future of all mankind.

For American political institutions to ignore the will of the voters – and to wrap partisanship in the judicial robes of the nation's highest court – will

almost certainly be followed by greater erosion of political freedom in the United States and eventually elsewhere.

Illegitimacy and repression are two of history's most common bedfellows.

Perhaps most chilling, at least for the moment, is the now-unavoidable recognition that the U.S. Supreme Court, the country's final arbiter of justice, has transformed itself into the right wing's ultimate political weapon.

A dark cloud is descending over the nation.

## PART III

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### TURNING POINTS

*“It appears the most serious offense you can commit in Washington these days is telling the truth. You get a pass on torture, aggressive war, killing civilians, lying, destroying evidence and such, but don’t dare give honest information to the American people.”*

*- Robert Parry*

Amid widespread cries of a stolen election, President-elect George W. Bush tapped Colin Powell as his first Cabinet choice, hoping that the popular military man would bring some badly needed legitimacy to his fledgling administration. Neoconservatives, for their part, hoped that he would continue the process of eliminating the “Vietnam Syndrome” – Americans’ lingering reluctance to engage in foreign wars since the debacle in Southeast Asia.

Secretary of State Powell would come under criticism a couple years later for serving as the face of the administration as he made false claims at the United Nations about Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction. Although many were surprised that Powell would debase his own credibility in making the Bush administration’s fraudulent case for war on the world stage, Parry knew that Powell was not a trustworthy figure – particularly when it came to issues of war and peace – as he had attempted to warn in his series “Behind Colin Powell’s Legend,” co-written with Norman Solomon.

Originally appearing a few years earlier in *I.F. Magazine*, the series was republished at *Consortium News* following Powell’s designation as Bush’s Secretary of State in December 2000. Below are two parts of the series, dealing with Powell’s background in the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War.<sup>5††</sup>

### Behind Colin Powell’s Legend (Dec. 2000)

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Originally published in *I.F. Magazine* and *Consortium News*

Co-written with Norman Solomon

#### **Vietnam War**

On a sunny autumn afternoon, Sept. 25, 1995, hundreds lined up on a sidewalk in San Francisco to grab a glimpse of a national icon.

Indoors, dozens of reporters and photographers packed into a room baking under the hot lights of television cameras.

An electricity filled the air, as if the crowd were waiting for a TV actor or a rock star, some super-hot celebrity. In a sense, they were. That day, on a mega-successful book tour, retired General Colin L. Powell was scheduled to answer a few questions and sign a few hundred books.

Preparations for the news conference were going smoothly, too, until two minutes before Powell was to appear.

Then, the bookstore managers fell into in a small panic over an intruder who was holding forth at the back of the room.

“How did he get here?” one manager asked the other. “I don’t know how he got in here,” the other answered. “He slipped in,” said the first.

Their fretting focused on a middle-aged man in a wheelchair who was speaking to a cluster of reporters. He was hunched inside his silvery metal contraption. His jeans-clad legs dangled as if inert. His clothes were tidy but informal. His thinning hair was slightly unkempt.

The man spoke quietly, at a deliberate pace. He paused occasionally to search for and capture an elusive word. The reporters, most younger than he was, leaned over him with microphones and note pads. They seemed intrigued, but uncertain of his news value.

The bookstore managers did not have a quick solution to the intrusion, so they drifted back to their anticipation of Powell’s arrival. “I have so much respect for this man,” bubbled the store’s director of sales.

### **The Hero Arrives**

Moments later, San Francisco’s mayor swept into the room. A wave of excitement followed as Colin Powell arrived and strode to the rostrum. He was the picture of confident authority, in his wire-rim executive-style glasses, a well-tailored pinstripe black business suit, a crisp pastel-blue shirt, a tasteful burgundy tie.

The mayor pumped Powell’s hand and proclaimed a formal welcome for the first African American to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Reporters competed to toss some softball questions that the general smoothly swatted over the fence. Powell offered only a well-rehearsed glimpse into his private side.



“Writing the book,” the retired general explained about *My American Journey*, “you learn a lot about yourself, you learn a lot about your family, you learn a lot about people who helped you along the way that you have forgotten about. So, it was very introspective for me, and I came away with ... a faith in this society that I hope, as a result of this book and whatever I might do in the future, faith that I hope we can continue to pass on to new generations.”

As the news conference rolled on, Powell showed off the qualities that had set so many political hearts aflutter in fall 1995. But Powell encountered some friction when he started explaining why Americans were dazzled by the military again, a quarter century after the disastrous Vietnam War.

“Why that comes about,” Powell said, “because of the superb performance of the armed forces of the United States in recent conflicts, beginning with the, I think, Panama invasion, and then through Desert Shield and Storm. And Americans saw that these young men and women were competent, proud, clean, patriotic, and they kind of fell in love with them again. And so it’s not so much I think what –”

The voice from the back of the room suddenly broke in, an accusatory voice belonging to the man in the wheelchair. “You didn’t tell the truth about the war in the Gulf, general,” the man shouted.

Powell first tried to ignore the interruption, but the man persisted, hectoring Powell about the tens of thousands of civilian dead in the wars in Panama and Iraq, conflicts that brought Powell his national fame. Finally, Powell responded with a patronizing tone, but he called the dissenter by name.

“Hi, Ron, how are you? Excuse me, let me answer one question if I may.”

“But why don’t you tell them, why don’t you tell them why –”

“The fact of the matter is –”

“My Lai –”

“I think the American people are reflecting on me the glory that really belongs to those troops,” Powell continued, brushing aside the interruption.

Then, Ron Kovic’s voice could be heard only in snippets beneath Powell’s amplified voice. “General, let me speak –”

“I think what you’re seeing is a reflection on me of what those young men and women have done in Panama, in Desert Storm, in a number of other places –”

“A hundred-and-fifty-thousand people, the bombing –”

“So it’s very, it’s very rewarding to see this change in attitude toward the military. It’s not just Colin Powell, rock star. It’s all of those wonderful men and women who do such a great job.”

### **Born on the Fourth**

Ron Kovic, a veteran of the Vietnam War, a soldier paralyzed in combat, was one of the few dissident voices at the bookstore that day. Kovic, author of the autobiography, *Born on the Fourth of July*, which was later made into a movie, tried to warn reporters not to swallow Powell-mania.

“Colin Powell is not the answer,” Kovic pleaded. “He sets a very dangerous precedent for this country.”

From his wheelchair, Kovic had struggled to make that case. “I want the American people to know what the general hid from the American public during the Gulf War,” Kovic said. “They hid the casualties. They hid the horror. They hid the violence. We don’t need any more violence in our country. We need leaders who represent cooperation. We need leadership that represents peace. We need leaders that understand the tragedy of using violence in solving our problems.”

To Kovic, Powell lacked a truly critical eye toward war.

“Did Colin Powell really learn the lessons of the Vietnam War? Did he learn that the war was immoral? I think that he learned another lesson. He learned to be more violent, to be more ruthless. And I’ve come as a counterbalance to that today. I’ve come as an alternative voice. And I think I speak for many, many people in this country when I say that General Colin Powell is a detriment to democracy; he’s a danger to our Constitution; he’s a danger to our democracy.”

Kovic tried to persuade the journalists that the United States should confront its Cold War past, the way other nations have begun to do.

“America has got to go through its own perestroika, its own glasnost,” Kovic continued. “I came down today because I just can’t allow this to

continue – this honeymoon, this love affair with someone who was part of a policy which hurt so many human beings.”

But few Americans listened to the advice of Ron Kovic that day or since. Hundreds of thousands bought Powell’s 1995 memoirs, *My American Journey*, and the national press corps accorded the retired general near-unanimous acclaim. Besides being a hero for his accomplishments as the first black American to lead the nation into war, Powell became the most celebrated U.S. military officer since Dwight Eisenhower.

Still, what about Kovic’s questions? What is Colin Powell’s unvarnished record?

What did Powell do in Vietnam? What was his role in the Iran-Contra scandal? How did he rise so smoothly as a black man in a white-dominated Republican national security establishment? Were Powell’s victories in Panama and Iraq excessively violent and insufficiently concerned with civilian dead?

Who is Colin Powell?

### **Vietnam Lessons**

On Jan. 17, 1963, in South Vietnam’s monsoon season, U.S. Army Capt. Colin Powell jumped from a military helicopter into a densely forested combat zone of the A Shau Valley, not far from the Laotian border.

Carrying an M-2 carbine, Capt. Powell was starting his first – and only – combat assignment. He was the new adviser to a 400-man unit of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Across jungle terrain, these South Vietnamese government troops were arrayed against a combined force of North Vietnamese regulars and local anti-government guerrillas known as the Viet Cong.

The 25-year-old Powell was arriving at a pivotal moment in the Vietnam War. To forestall a communist victory, President John F. Kennedy had dispatched teams of Green Beret advisers to assist the ARVN, a force suffering from poor discipline, ineffective tactics and bad morale.

Already, many U.S. advisers, most notably the legendary Col. John Paul Vann, were voicing concerns about the ARVN’s brutality toward civilians. Vann feared that the dominant counterinsurgency strategy of destroying

rural villages and forcibly relocating inhabitants while hunting down enemy forces was driving the people into the arms of the Viet Cong.

But as Colin Powell arrived, he was untainted by these worries. He was a gung-ho young Army officer with visions of glory. He brimmed with trust in the wisdom of his superiors. Capt. Powell also felt the deepest sympathy for the ARVN troops under his command, but only a cold contempt for the enemy.

Soon after his arrival, Powell and his ARVN unit left for a protracted patrol that fought leeches as well as Viet Cong ambushes. From the soggy jungle brush, the Viet Cong would strike suddenly against the advancing government soldiers. Often invisible to Powell and his men, the VC would inflict a few casualties and slip back into the jungles.

In *My American Journey*, Powell recounted his reaction when he spotted his first dead Viet Cong. “He lay on his back, gazing up at us with sightless eyes,” Powell wrote. “I felt nothing, certainly not sympathy. I had seen too much death and suffering on our side to care anything about what happened on theirs.”

While success against the armed enemy was rare, Powell’s ARVN unit punished the civilian population systematically. As the soldiers marched through mountainous jungle, they destroyed the food and the homes of the region’s Montagnards, who were suspected of sympathizing with the Viet Cong. Old women would cry hysterically as their ancestral homes and worldly possessions were consumed by fire.

“We burned down the thatched huts, starting the blaze with Ronson and Zippo lighters,” Powell recalled. “Why were we torching houses and destroying crops? Ho Chi Minh had said the people were like the sea in which his guerrillas swam. ... We tried to solve the problem by making the whole sea uninhabitable. In the hard logic of war, what difference did it make if you shot your enemy or starved him to death?”

For nearly six months, Powell and his ARVN unit slogged through the jungles, searching for Viet Cong and destroying villages.

Then while on one patrol, Powell fell victim to a Viet Cong booby trap. He stepped on a punji stake, a dung-poisoned bamboo spear that had been

buried in the ground. The stake pierced Powell's boot and quickly infected the young soldier's right foot. The foot swelled, turned purple and forced his evacuation by helicopter to Hue for treatment.

Although Powell's recovery from the foot infection was swift, his combat days were over. He stayed in Hue, reassigned to the operations staff of ARVN division headquarters. As part of his work, he handled intelligence data and oversaw a local airfield. By late autumn 1963, Powell's first Vietnam tour ended.

On his return to the United States, Powell did not join Vann and other early American advisers in warning the nation about the self-defeating counterinsurgency strategies. In 1963, Vann carried his prescient concerns back to a Pentagon that was not ready to listen to doubters. Then, when his objections fell on deaf ears, Vann resigned his commission and sacrificed a promising military career.

In contrast, Powell recognized that his early service in Vietnam put him on a fast track for military success. He signed up for a nine-month Infantry Officer Advanced Course that trained company commanders. In May 1965, Powell finished third in a class of 200 and was the top-ranked infantryman. A year later, he became an instructor.

In 1966, as the numbers of U.S. servicemen in Vietnam swelled, Powell received a promotion to major, making him a field-grade officer before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1968, Powell continued to impress his superiors by graduating second in his class at Fort Leavenworth's Command and General Staff College, a prestigious school regarded as an essential way station for future Army generals.

Recognizing Powell as an emerging "water-walker" who needed more seasoning in the field, the Army dispatched Powell to a command position back in Vietnam. But on his second tour, Powell would not be slogging through remote jungles. On July 27, 1968, he arrived at an outpost at Duc Pho to serve as an executive officer.

Then, to the north, at the Americal headquarters in Chu Lai, division commander Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys saw a favorable mention of Powell in the Army Times. Gettys plucked Powell from Duc Pho and installed him on the general's own staff at Chu Lai.

Gettys jumped the young major ahead of more senior officers and made him the G-3 officer in charge of operations and planning. The appointment made “me the only major filling that role in Vietnam,” Powell wrote in his memoirs.

But history again was awaiting Colin Powell. The Americal Division was already deep into some of the cruelest fighting of the Vietnam War. The “drain-the-sea” strategy that Powell had witnessed near the Laotian border continued to lead American forces into harsh treatment of Vietnamese civilians.

Though it was still a secret when Powell arrived at Chu Lai, Americal troops had committed an act that would stain forever the reputation of the U.S. Army. As Major Powell settled into his new assignment, a scandal was waiting to unfold.

### **My Lai**

On March 16, 1968, a bloodied unit of the Americal division stormed into a hamlet known as My Lai 4. With military helicopters circling overhead, revenge-seeking American soldiers roused Vietnamese civilians – mostly old men, women and children – from their thatched huts and herded them into the village’s irrigation ditches.

As the round-up continued, some Americans raped the girls. Then, under orders from junior officers on the ground, soldiers began emptying their M-16s into the terrified peasants. Some parents used their bodies futilely to shield their children from the bullets. Soldiers stepped among the corpses to finish off the wounded.

The slaughter raged for four hours. A total of 347 Vietnamese, including babies, died in the carnage. But there also were American heroes that day in My Lai. Some soldiers refused to obey the direct orders to kill and some risked their lives to save civilians from the murderous fire.

A pilot named Hugh Clowers Thompson Jr. from Stone Mountain, Ga., was furious at the killings he saw happening on the ground. He landed his helicopter between one group of fleeing civilians and American soldiers in pursuit.

Thompson ordered his helicopter door gunner to shoot the Americans if they tried to harm the Vietnamese. After a tense confrontation, the soldiers backed off. Later, two of Thompson's men climbed into one ditch filled with corpses and pulled out a three-year-old boy whom they flew to safety.

Several months later, the Americal's brutality would become a moral test for Major Powell, too.

A letter had been written by a young specialist fourth class named Tom Glen, who had served in an Americal mortar platoon and was nearing the end of his Army tour. In the letter to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam, Glen accused the Americal division of routine brutality against civilians.

Glen's letter was forwarded to the Americal headquarters at Chu Lai where it landed on Major Powell's desk.

"The average GI's attitude toward and treatment of the Vietnamese people all too often is a complete denial of all our country is attempting to accomplish in the realm of human relations," Glen wrote. "Far beyond merely dismissing the Vietnamese as 'slopes' or 'gooks,' in both deed and thought, too many American soldiers seem to discount their very humanity."

Glen's letter contended that many Vietnamese were fleeing from Americans who "for mere pleasure, fire indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." Gratuitous cruelty was also being inflicted on Viet Cong suspects, Glen reported.

"Fired with an emotionalism that belies unconscionable hatred, and armed with a vocabulary consisting of 'You VC,' soldiers commonly 'interrogate' by means of torture that has been presented as the particular habit of the enemy," he wrote. "Severe beatings and torture at knife point are usual means of questioning captives or of convincing a suspect that he is, indeed, a Viet Cong."

### **Powell's Response**

The letter's troubling allegations were not well received at Americal headquarters.

Major Powell undertook the assignment to review Glen's letter, but did so without questioning Glen or assigning anyone else to talk with him. Powell simply accepted a claim from Glen's superior officer that Glen was not close enough to the front lines to know what he was writing about, an assertion Glen denies.

After that cursory investigation, Powell drafted a response on Dec. 13, 1968. He admitted to no pattern of wrongdoing. Powell claimed that U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were taught to treat Vietnamese courteously and respectfully. The Americal troops also had gone through an hour-long course on how to treat prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions, Powell noted.

"There may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs," Powell wrote in 1968. But "this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the Division." Indeed, Powell's memo faulted Glen for not complaining earlier and for failing to be more specific in his letter.

"In direct refutation of this [Glen's] portrayal," Powell concluded, "is the fact that relations between Americal soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent."

Powell's findings, of course, were false, though they were exactly what his superiors wanted to hear.

It would take another Americal hero, an infantryman named Ron Ridenhour, to piece together the truth about the atrocity at My Lai. After returning to the United States, Ridenhour interviewed Americal comrades who had participated in the massacre.

On his own, Ridenhour compiled this shocking information into a report and forwarded it to the Army inspector general. The IG's office conducted an aggressive official investigation, in marked contrast to Powell's review.

Confirming Ridenhour's report, the Army finally faced the horrible truth. Courts martial were held against officers and enlisted men who were implicated in the murder of the My Lai civilians.

But Powell's peripheral role in the My Lai cover-up did not slow his climb up the Army's ladder. After the scandal broke, Powell pleaded ignorance about the actual My Lai massacre.



Luckily for Powell, Glen's letter also disappeared into the National Archives – to be unearthed only years later by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sims for their book, *Four Hours in My Lai*.

### **Powell's Admissions**

In his best-selling memoirs, Powell did not mention his brush-off of Tom Glen's complaint.

Powell did include, however, another troubling recollection that belied his 1968 official denial of Glen's allegation that American soldiers "without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves."

After a brief mention of the My Lai massacre in *My American Journey*, Powell penned a partial justification of the Americal's brutality. In a chilling passage, Powell explained the routine practice of murdering unarmed male Vietnamese.

"I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male," Powell wrote. "If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him.

"Brutal? Maybe so. But ... the kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong."

While it's certainly true that combat is brutal and judgments can be clouded by fear, the mowing down of unarmed civilians in cold blood does not constitute combat. It is murder and, indeed, a war crime.

Neither can the combat death of a fellow soldier be cited as an excuse to murder civilians. Disturbingly, that was precisely the rationalization that the My Lai killers cited in their own defense.

But returning home from Vietnam a second time in 1969, Powell already had begun to prove himself the consummate team player. Those skills were tested again when Powell was drawn into another Vietnam controversy involving the killing of civilians.

In a court martial proceeding, Powell sided with an Americal Division general who was accused by the Army of murdering unarmed civilians while flying over Quang Ngai province. Helicopter pilots who flew Brig.

Gen. John W. Donaldson had alleged that the general gunned down civilian Vietnamese almost for sport.

In an interview, a senior investigator from the Donaldson case told us that two of the Vietnamese victims were an old man and an old woman who were shot to death while bathing. Though long retired – and quite elderly himself – the Army investigator still spoke with a raw disgust about the events of a quarter century earlier. He requested anonymity before talking about the behavior of senior American officers.

“They used to bet in the morning how many people they could kill – old people, civilians, it didn’t matter,” the investigator said.

For eight months in Chu Lai during 1968-69, Powell had worked with Donaldson and apparently developed a great respect for this superior officer.

When the Army charged Donaldson with murder on June 2, 1971, Powell rose in the general’s defense. Powell submitted an affidavit dated Aug. 10, 1971, which lauded Donaldson as “an aggressive and courageous brigade commander.”

Powell did not specifically refer to the murder allegations, but added that helicopter forays in Vietnam had been an “effective means of separating hostiles from the general population.”

### **Mysterious Interview**

Powell apparently was questioned by Army authorities about his knowledge of Donaldson’s alleged atrocities. But his answers may be lost to history. In his memoirs, Powell provides a brief – and incorrect – description of the 1971 interview in the context of the My Lai massacre.

“I was serving in the Washington area, and was called to appear before a board of inquiry conducted by Lt. Gen. William Ray Peers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia,” Powell wrote. “The board wanted me to give a picture of fighting conditions in the Batangan Peninsula in 1968 [where the My Lai massacre had occurred]. I knew it had been a hellhole, a rough piece of territory inhabited by VC sympathizers.”

Powell’s account of the interview is itself a bit of a mystery. While it’s true that in 1971, a commission headed by Gen. Peers was investigating the My

Lai cover-up, all the Peers interviews were conducted at the Pentagon, not at Fort Belvoir.

Also, by 1971, the Army knew a great deal about the “fighting conditions in the Batangan Peninsula” and would not need the opinion of an officer who arrived months after the My Lai massacre. Further, when we examined the Peers Commission records at the National Archives branch at Suitland, Md., we found no indication that Colin Powell ever had been interviewed by the board.

There was, however, an investigation at Fort Belvoir conducted in the same time frame by the Army’s criminal investigation unit. It was examining the murder allegations against Powell’s friend, Gen. Donaldson.

The retired Army investigator told us that Powell was questioned in that case. But the investigator said Powell volunteered little knowledge about the atrocities. The investigator doubted that any record was made of the interview.

Nevertheless, the investigator claimed that “we had him [Donaldson] dead to rights,” with the testimony of two helicopter pilots who had flown Donaldson on his shooting expeditions. Still, the investigation collapsed after the two pilot-witnesses were transferred to another Army base and apparently came under pressure from military superiors.

The two pilots withdrew their testimony, and the Army dropped all charges against Donaldson. “John Donaldson was a cover-up specialist,” the old investigator growled.

While thousands of other Vietnam veterans joined the anti-war movement and denounced the brutality of the war, Powell held his tongue. To this day, Powell has avoided criticizing the Vietnam War other than to complain that the politicians should not have restrained the military high command.

With the My Lai cloud dissipated, Major Powell’s career advanced smartly. Powell often says he learned many lessons from Vietnam. One lesson he doesn’t mention is that a military bureaucrat succeeds best by sidestepping controversy and keeping quiet when superiors screw up.

As the years unfolded, that proved to be a very valuable lesson indeed.

## **Persian Gulf War**

An enduring image from the Persian Gulf War is the picture of the two generals – Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf – celebrating the 1991 military victory in ticker-tape parades.

They seemed the perfect teammates, a politically smooth chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Powell) and the gruff field commander (Schwarzkopf).

But the behind-the-scenes reality often was different. Time and again in the march toward a ground war in Kuwait and Iraq, Powell wavered between siding with Schwarzkopf, who was willing to accept a peaceful Iraqi withdrawal, and lining up with President Bush, who hungered for a clear military victory.

The tension peaked in the days before the ground war was scheduled to begin. Iraqi forces already had been pummeled by weeks of devastating allied air attacks both against targets in Iraq and Kuwait.

As the clock ticked toward a decision on launching a ground offensive, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev tried to hammer out a ceasefire and a withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. President Bush and his political leadership desperately wanted a ground war to crown the American victory.

Schwarzkopf and some of his generals in the field felt U.S. goals could be achieved through a negotiated Iraqi withdrawal that would end the slaughter and spare the lives of U.S. troops. With a deadline for a decision looming, Powell briefly joined the Schwarzkopf camp.

On Feb. 21, 1991, the two generals hammered out a ceasefire proposal for presentation to the National Security Council. That last-minute peace deal would have given Iraqi forces one week to march out of Kuwait while leaving their armor and heavy equipment behind. Schwarzkopf thought he had Powell's commitment to pitch the plan at the White House.

But Bush was fixated on a ground war. According to insiders, he saw the war as advancing two goals: to inflict severe damage on Saddam Hussein's army and to erase the painful memories of America's defeat in Vietnam.

At the NSC meeting, Powell reportedly did reiterate his and Schwarzkopf's support for a peaceful settlement, if possible. But sensing Bush's mood,

Powell substituted a different plan, shortening the one-week timetable to an unrealistic two days and, thus, making the ground war inevitable.

### **Set on a Ground War**

Though secret from the American people at that time, Bush had long determined that a peaceful Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait would not be tolerated. Indeed, U.S. peace initiatives in early 1991 had amounted to window-dressing, with Bush privately fearful that the Iraqis might capitulate before the United States could attack.

To Bush, exorcising the “Vietnam Syndrome” demons had become an important priority of the Persian Gulf War, almost as central to his thinking as ousting Saddam’s army from Kuwait.

Conservative columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak were among the few who described Bush’s obsession publicly at the time. On Feb. 25, 1991, they wrote that the Gorbachev initiative brokering Iraq’s surrender of Kuwait “stirred fears” among Bush’s advisers that the Vietnam Syndrome might survive the Gulf War.

“There was considerable relief, therefore, when the President ... made clear he was having nothing to do with the deal that would enable Saddam Hussein to bring his troops out of Kuwait with flags flying,” Evans and Novak wrote.

“Fear of a peace deal at the Bush White House had less to do with oil, Israel or Iraqi expansionism than with the bitter legacy of a lost war. ‘This is the chance to get rid of the Vietnam Syndrome,’ one senior aide told us.”

In the book, *Shadow*, author Bob Woodward confirmed that Bush was adamant about fighting a war, even as the White House pretended that it would be satisfied with an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal.

“We have to have a war,” Bush told his inner circle of Secretary of State James Baker, national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Powell, according to Woodward.

“Scowcroft was aware that this understanding could never be stated publicly or be permitted to leak out. An American president who declared the necessity of war would probably be thrown out of office. Americans were peacemakers, not warmongers,” Woodward wrote.

On Jan. 9, 1991, when Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz rebuffed an ultimatum from Baker in Geneva, “Bush was jubilant because it was the best news possible, although he would have to conceal it publicly,” Woodward wrote.

### **The Air War**

On Jan. 15, U.S. and allied forces launched a punishing air war, hitting targets in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities as well as Iraqi forces in Kuwait. Weeks of devastating bombing left tens of thousands of Iraqis dead, according to estimates.

The Iraqi forces soon seemed ready to crack. Soviet diplomats were meeting with Iraqi leaders who let it be known that they were prepared to withdraw their troops from Kuwait.

Still, Bush recognized the military and psychological value of a smashing ground offensive. A ground war could annihilate the Iraqi forces as they retreated while proving America’s war-fighting mettle once again.

But Schwarzkopf saw little reason for U.S. soldiers to die if the Iraqis were prepared to withdraw and leave their heavy weapons behind. There was also the prospect of chemical warfare that might be used by the Iraqis against advancing American troops. Schwarzkopf saw the possibility of heavy U.S. casualties.

Powell found himself in the middle. He wanted to please Bush while still representing the concerns of the field commanders. Stationed at the front in Saudi Arabia, Schwarzkopf thought Powell was an ally.

“Neither Powell nor I wanted a ground war,” Schwarzkopf wrote in his memoirs, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*.

At key moments in White House meetings, however, Powell sided with Bush and his hunger for outright victory.

In mid-February 1991, Powell bristled when Schwarzkopf acceded to a Marine commander’s request for a three-day delay to reposition his troops.

“I hate to wait that long,” Powell fumed. “The President wants to get on with this.” Powell explained that Bush was worried about the pending Soviet peace plan which sought to engineer an Iraqi withdrawal with no more killing.

“President Bush was in a bind,” Powell wrote in *My American Journey*. “After the expenditure of \$60 billion and transporting half a million troops 8,000 miles, Bush wanted to deliver a knock-out punch to the Iraqi invaders in Kuwait. He did not want to win by a TKO that would allow Saddam to withdraw with his army unpunished and intact.”

On Feb. 18, Powell relayed a demand to Schwarzkopf from Bush’s NSC for an immediate attack date. Powell “spoke in the terse tone that signaled he was under pressure from the hawks,” Schwarzkopf wrote. But one field commander still protested that a rushed attack could mean “a whole lot more casualties,” a risk that Schwarzkopf considered unacceptable.

“The increasing pressure to launch the ground war early was making me crazy,” Schwarzkopf wrote. “I could guess what was going on. ... There had to be a contingent of hawks in Washington who did not want to stop until we’d punished Saddam.

“We’d been bombing Iraq for more than a month, but that wasn’t good enough. There were guys who had seen John Wayne in ‘The Green Berets,’ they’d seen ‘Rambo,’ they’d seen ‘Patton,’ and it was very easy for them to pound their desks and say, ‘By God, we’ve got to go in there and kick ass! Got to punish that son of a bitch!’

“Of course, none of them was going to get shot at. None of them would have to answer to the mothers and fathers of dead soldiers and Marines.”

### **Dodging Peace**

On Feb. 20, Schwarzkopf sought a two-day delay because of bad weather. Powell exploded. “I’ve got a President and a Secretary of Defense on my back,” Powell shouted. “They’ve got a bad Russian peace proposal they’re trying to dodge. ... I don’t think you understand the pressure I’m under.”

Schwarzkopf yelled back that Powell appeared to have “political reasons” for favoring a timetable that was “militarily unsound.” Powell snapped back, “Don’t patronize me with talk about human lives.”

By the evening of Feb. 21, however, Schwarzkopf thought he and Powell were again reading from the same page, looking for ways to avert the ground war. Powell had faxed Schwarzkopf a copy of the Russian ceasefire

plan in which Gorbachev had proposed a six-week period for Iraqi withdrawal.

Recognizing that six weeks would give Saddam time to salvage his military hardware, Schwarzkopf and Powell devised a counter-proposal. It would give Iraq only a one-week ceasefire, time to flee from Kuwait but without any heavy weapons.

### **An Angry President**

But when Powell arrived at the White House late that evening, he found Bush angry about the Soviet peace initiative. Still, according to Woodward's *Shadow*, Powell reiterated that he and Schwarzkopf "would rather see the Iraqis walk out than be driven out."

Powell said the ground war carried serious risks of significant U.S. casualties and "a high probability of a chemical attack." But Bush was set: "If they crack under force, it is better than withdrawal," the president said.

In *My American Journey*, Powell expressed sympathy for Bush's predicament. "The President's problem was how to say no to Gorbachev without appearing to throw away a chance for peace," Powell wrote.

"I could hear the President's growing distress in his voice. 'I don't want to take this deal,' he said. 'But I don't want to stiff Gorbachev, not after he's come this far with us. We've got to find a way out'."

Powell sought Bush's attention. "I raised a finger," Powell wrote. "The President turned to me. 'Got something, Colin?'," Bush asked. But Powell did not outline Schwarzkopf's one-week ceasefire plan. Instead, Powell offered a different idea intended to make the ground offensive inevitable.

"We don't stiff Gorbachev," Powell explained. "Let's put a deadline on Gorby's proposal. We say, great idea, as long as they're completely on their way out by, say, noon Saturday," Feb. 23, less than two days away.

Powell understood that the two-day deadline would not give the Iraqis enough time to act, especially with their command-and-control systems severely damaged by the air war. The plan was a public-relations strategy to guarantee that the White House got its ground war.

"If, as I suspect, they don't move, then the flogging begins," Powell told a gratified president.



The next day, at 10:30 a.m., a Friday, Bush announced his ultimatum. There would be a Saturday noon deadline for the Iraqi withdrawal, as Powell had recommended.

Schwarzkopf and his field commanders in Saudi Arabia watched Bush on television and immediately grasped its meaning. “We all knew by then which it would be,” Schwarzkopf wrote. “We were marching toward a Sunday morning attack.”

When the Iraqis predictably missed the deadline, American and allied forces launched the ground offensive at 0400 on Feb. 24, 1991, Persian Gulf time.

Though Iraqi forces were soon in full retreat, the allies pursued and slaughtered tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers in the 100-hour war. U.S. casualties were light, 147 killed in combat and another 236 killed in accidents or from other causes.

“Small losses as military statistics go,” wrote Powell, “but a tragedy for each family.”

On Feb. 28, the day the war ended, Bush celebrated the victory. “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” the president exulted.

On Sept. 11, 2001, a decade after the Persian Gulf War, four planes were hijacked by Islamist terrorists and crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.<sup>6††</sup> With 2,977 people killed and more than 6,000 injured, the attacks were the deadliest terrorist act in world history.

Within days of these tragic events, the nation was on a war footing, with all signs indicating that the response would primarily take a military form. It was also clear that George W. Bush’s lack of historical understanding combined with his Christian evangelical zeal would prove detrimental to his handling of the crisis.

Bush called the nation’s response a “crusade,” apparently unconcerned about historical connotations of this word in Europe and the Middle East. It also quickly became evident that the response would ignore the pleas of a burgeoning peace movement organizing under the mantra “war is not the answer.” Brushing aside these calls for restraint, Bush administration officials said that they foresaw military engagements in dozens of countries around the world.

## [Bush’s ‘Crusade’ \(Sept. 25, 2001\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

In retaliation for the terror attacks on Sept. 11, George W. Bush is vowing to strike at a shadowy network of international terrorists reaching into 60 countries. He has called this coming war a “crusade” and has led his friends to believe that he views his new duty as a mission from God.

“I think, in [Bush’s] frame, this is what God has asked him to do,” a close acquaintance told the *New York Times*. “It offers him enormous clarity.” According to this acquaintance, Bush believes “he has encountered his reason for being, a conviction informed and shaped by the president’s own strain of Christianity,” the *Times* reported.<sup>37</sup>

Few Americans would disagree that violent retribution should be inflicted on the masterminds of the mass murders at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon – and on those who aided and abetted this crime that killed thousands of people. The unsettling question, which so far few have been willing to voice, is whether Bush is up to this delicate, complex and dangerous job.

Two weeks after the terrorist attacks, it appears that Bush still has little grasp of the long history of frustration that has met previous anti-terrorism campaigns. It’s also unclear whether he recognizes the risks in the geopolitical tradeoffs involved in building an international coalition and the potential costs of an open-ended war.

Bush’s limited sense of the history goes beyond his use of the word “crusade,” which has a European connotation of chivalrous knights in shining armor driving the infidels out of the Holy Lands, but conjures up very different memories in the Islamic world, of a bloody Christian holy war against Arabs. In 1099, for instance, the Crusaders massacred many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Already, Osama bin Laden has seized on Bush’s gaffe to rally Islamic fundamentalists. A typed statement attributed to bin Laden called the coming war “the new Christian-Jewish crusade led by the big crusader Bush under the flag of the cross.”

## **Wars on Terrorism**

Bush’s short-term knowledge of history seems sketchy, too.

Repeatedly, he has called this war on terrorism a new kind of conflict, the first war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, his father was Vice President in the administration of Ronald Reagan that made combating terrorism a top priority of U.S. foreign policy, replacing the Carter administration's hallmark of human rights.

Reagan committed his administration to the war on terrorism in the wake of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the radical Arab nationalism of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. The Reagan era's war on terrorism met some success but also failure.

Reagan created special counter-terrorism task forces and authorized the CIA to hunt down suspected terrorists in preemptive attacks that bordered on assassinations. Some administration hardliners, such as CIA Director William J. Casey, sought to trace virtually all terrorism back to the Soviet Union, combining anti-communism with anti-terrorism.

The war on terrorism even led the Reagan administration to engage in terrorism itself, both in Central America and the Middle East. To punish Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government for aiding insurgents elsewhere in the region, the Reagan administration supported the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, who earned a reputation for torture, rape and murder as they swept through towns in northern Nicaragua.

One former Contra director, Edgar Chamorro, described the Contras' practice of dragging captured government officials into town squares and executing them in front of the residents. American news outlets also reported on larger Contra massacres of peasants picking coffee, presumably to discourage economic activity.

To counter disclosures of these atrocities, the administration created special propaganda teams that engaged in "public diplomacy" to persuade editors, producers and bureau chiefs to stop these kinds of stories and to remove journalists who filed the reports.

Administration insiders called these largely successful public relations efforts "perception management." Today's influential conservative news media is, in part, an outgrowth of those Reagan-era efforts.

In George W. Bush's new war on terrorism, the nation can expect a similar strategy for shaping public opinion. In the 1980s, the head of State Department's "public diplomacy" office, Otto Reich, is now Bush's nominee to be assistant secretary of state for Latin America.

### **Seeds of Violence**

In the Middle East, the counter-terrorism campaigns of the 1980s also veered into terrorism itself, with some of the central players of that era still holding center stage today.

Under the leadership of then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. The goal was to crush Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, which was then widely regarded as a terrorist organization.

Allied with right-wing Lebanese forces, Israeli troops forced the PLO to flee Lebanon. But Israel's Lebanese allies then massacred Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, drawing U.S. Marines into Lebanon on what was initially a peacekeeping mission.

Gradually, U.S. forces began siding with the right-wing Lebanese army as it mounted paramilitary attacks on suspected Muslim terrorists. The loss of neutrality worsened when the Reagan administration ordered the U.S.S. New Jersey to begin shelling Muslim villages in the mountains.irate Muslims countered by launching a suicide bombing attack against the U.S. Marine barracks outside Beirut, killing 241 Marines.

Though the surviving U.S. forces withdrew from Lebanon, the war of terror and counter-terror continued. In a 1985 strike against Hizbollah leader Sheikh Fadlallah, Casey helped finance an operation that included the hiring of operatives who detonated a car bomb outside the Beirut apartment building where Fadlallah lived.

As described by Bob Woodward in *Veil*, "the car exploded, killing 80 people and wounding 200, leaving devastation, fires and collapsed buildings. Anyone who had happened to be in the immediate neighborhood was killed, hurt or terrorized, but Fadlallah escaped without injury. His followers strung a huge 'Made in the USA' banner in front of a building that had been blown out."

The mixed experiences of the 1980s – and the efforts to contain terrorism that continued through the 1990s – should be both a guide and a warning as America seeks retribution against the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 mass murders.

### **Tough Rhetoric**

To date, Bush has opted for tough rhetoric but relatively modest action, such as beefing up U.S. military forces near Afghanistan and tightening financial restrictions on money flows to groups considered friendly to bin Laden's organization.

The initial military phase of the retaliation appears likely to be special operations attacks aimed at bin Laden and his top lieutenants at their Afghan base camps, combined with aerial attacks against his Taliban allies who rule most of Afghanistan.

As Bush moves forward, one of the few institutions that has applied some brakes to any rush toward war has been Wall Street. While joining in patriotic demonstrations, such as singing God Bless America before the start of trading on Sept. 17, institutional investors voted with their dollars when it came to showing confidence in the future U.S. economy.

With war looming, the stock markets went into free fall. From Sept. 17 through Sept. 21, the Dow Jones industrial average plunged 14.3 percent, its biggest percentage weekly drop since the Great Depression. The sell-off reversed somewhat on Monday as the expectation of a hasty U.S. military action faded and investors moved in to pick up some stocks at bargain prices.

If Bush's war on terrorism expands over the next several months, economists agree a full-scale recession could follow. Some estimates see unemployment soaring from the 4.5 percent range of the late Clinton years to about 7 or 8 percent.

In congressional testimony on Sept. 20, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan stressed the importance of the free flow of goods and ideas to future growth.

“The openness of societies, the openness of economies are very crucial for economic growth, and they can be open only if they are not hampered by

violence,” the Fed chairman said. “Violence is complete destruction of the institutions of free markets and of global economic systems.”

So, the inexperienced president now is faced with a two-pronged challenge: how to live up to his strong words about an unrelenting war on terrorism and how to do so without tanking the economy and creating deeper divisions in the world.

To date, Bush has drawn strength from the unity of the American people horrified by the mass murders of Sept. 11. He also has shown restraint in avoiding a rash retaliation that might have satisfied a thirst for revenge while killing innocent civilians in Afghanistan – and enflaming anti-American passions in the Middle East.

But Bush’s challenge now is to implement a measured – and effective – response to the Sept. 11 attacks. To do that, Bush must recognize the shades of gray that have marked the path behind and surely will mark the struggle ahead.

In this article, Parry reflects on the mainstream media’s servile approach to journalism and its misguided efforts to bestow legitimacy on an inept Bush administration. Parry explores hypothetical scenarios that could have prevented the 9/11 tragedy, wondering for example whether a hypothetical Gore presidency might have taken effective action to stop the attacks or whether they would have been averted if America’s political-journalistic class took its role more seriously.

## [The What-If’s of Sept. 11 \(Oct. 18, 2001\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Since Sept. 11, the trivial pursuits of American politics have been set aside. Even the national news media, which obsessed about Gary Condit-Chandra Levy affair for most of the summer, has put on a serious face.

But there’s also been little or no reflection about how the feckless behavior of Washington’s political-journalistic elites over the past decade contributed to the deadly crisis the world is now facing. There’s been little or no self-criticism for letting the problems of the Middle East fester while pundits and journalists romped through juicier sex scandals and missing persons stories.

Questions such as whether Bush's ascension to power was somehow connected to the Sept. 11 attacks, given his father's close ties to the Persian Gulf's oil sheikdoms that are Osama bin Laden's principal targets, have been brushed aside. Did those Bush family relationships and America's diminished image as a beacon of democracy, following the election debacle, embolden the terrorists to strike?

### **'Wag the Dog'**

It can be argued that Bush's family background and the policies of his first seven months in office worsened an already tense situation in the Middle East. But militant Islamic fundamentalists despised Bill Clinton as well as George W. Bush and his father, George H.W. Bush. All three were put on a hit list read by bin Laden's spokesman, Suleiman Abu Gheith, on Oct. 13, according to CNN.

In 1998, Clinton tried to kill bin Laden in retaliation for bombing American targets in Africa. Cruise missiles hit an al-Qaeda training base in Afghanistan, killing some inhabitants but missing bin Laden. Those attacks, along with the war in Kosovo, prompted smirking media commentaries about Clinton trying to distract attention from his sex scandal with a White House intern by employing a "wag the dog" public-relations ploy.

It's also recently been revealed that Clinton authorized covert plots aimed at eliminating bin Laden and his inner circle. The United States and Uzbekistan collaborated on covert operations against Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime and its terrorist allies for at least two years, the *Washington Post* reported on Oct. 14.

Islamic militants condemned Clinton, too, for maintaining President George H.W. Bush's embargo against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, a policy that has been blamed for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children due to poor medical treatment and malnutrition.

Clinton also continued the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden's homeland. Bin Laden has denounced the presence of those U.S. troops and their defense of the corrupt Saudi royal family. Presumably, the hatred of Clinton would have carried over to his Vice President, Al Gore.

It's clear, too, that bin Laden's network planned attacks against targets inside the United States during the Clinton-Gore administration, but was thwarted by effective police work. One foiled plot planned to detonate explosions during the millennial celebrations at the start of 2000.

### **Flying Lessons**

Another argument for believing that the Sept. 11 attack would have happened anyway is that its early planning dated back about two years, as several of the conspirators arrived in the United States to take flying lessons.

The initial bank transfer of \$100,000 was sent to Mohammed Atta, the presumed ringleader of the hijackings, in June 2000.<sup>[38](#)</sup> At that point, Bush may have led in opinion polls, but his selection as president was not settled until the Supreme Court ruling on Dec. 12.

On the other hand, a case can be made that Bush's actions as president – and his father's complicated entanglements with Middle Eastern intrigue over the past quarter century – could have contributed to the terrorists' determination to see the Sept. 11 project through to its tragic conclusion.

One of the assault's chief tactical difficulties would have been assuring the continued fervor of all 19 participants in the months leading up to the attack.

No previous terrorist attack had rivaled the Sept. 11 operation in the need for choreographed coordination among four separate groups mounting four distinct terrorist operations, the hijacking of four different planes. A single lapse could have foiled the entire operation.

### **Determination**

Assuming all 19 men understood the full scope of the plan, the attacks required their solid determination to slash the throats of strangers, aim the jetliners at the targets, and murder large numbers of innocent people, including Muslims. The attackers also faced certain death themselves.

To keep this large a group committed to this extraordinary course of action could not have been easy, even if the 19 participants were carefully selected. If a single attacker wavered and betrayed the operation, the attacks could have been stopped.



The terrorists also seemed divided into two operational groups, those who had trained as pilots, who arrived earlier, and the musclemen, who entered the United States later, around June 2001.

Some participants seemed to have known each other for years, while others appeared to be relative newcomers with no known history in militant activities. According to witnesses who knew the men, some were anti-American but others seemed to like the United States and Americans.<sup>[39](#)</sup>

Middle Eastern events – whether positive or negative – might have shaken or reinforced their level of commitment. For instance, it is unclear whether a comprehensive peace settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians might have dissuaded some of the attackers from their course of action.

For his part, Gore likely would have continued some form of Clinton's strategy of pushing the Israelis and the Palestinians toward a negotiated settlement – while trying to present the United States as a negotiating partner that could be trusted by both sides. However, Islamic militants surely viewed Gore and his Jewish running mate, Joe Lieberman, with great suspicion.

### **Bush Baggage**

Bush carried a different kind of baggage as far as the militants were concerned.

Many Middle Easterners view his father as the classic Western manipulator of events. The elder Bush earned this reputation from his career in the oil business, his year running the CIA, the Reagan-Bush administration's meddling in Lebanon, Iran and Iraq, and his own his presidency, which reached its zenith in 1991 with the bloody rout of Iraqi forces in Kuwait and the triumphal celebrations back home.

The elder Bush is seen as especially close to the Saudi royal family and other oil-rich sheiks. They have done lucrative business with Bush's inner circle both before and after the first Bush presidency. The ascendance of Bush's son, especially through an undemocratic process in the United States, may have exacerbated concerns among dissidents in Saudi Arabia and other oil states.

Once in office, George W. Bush confirmed many of the suspicions about him, by adopting what was viewed as an arrogant unilateralist foreign policy that set protecting U.S. interests, such as oil supplies, above all else. Through his first several months, Bush made clear that Washington would do whatever it felt was in its interests with little regard to the sensibilities of the rest of the world.

Bush also repudiated Clinton's Middle East negotiations. Beyond disinterest in an active U.S. role in the peace process, Bush showed open disdain for the Palestinian cause. As the violence worsened and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon unleashed U.S.-built helicopter gunships against Palestinian targets, the Bush administration issued only muted protests.

Personally, Bush toed a line drawn by conservative American commentators, such as Charles Krauthammer and Michael Kelly, publicly blaming Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat for the escalation in violence. In early September, when a United Nations conference on racism debated an Arab resolution likening Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to racism, Bush ordered his diplomats to walk out, rather than fight for more moderate language.

Bush may have thought his tough stance against the Palestinians was playing well to his conservative base at home. But he also offended many Muslims who saw the comments as proof of Washington's anti-Palestinian bias.

If any of the 19 terrorists preparing to die on Sept. 11 were inclined toward doubts about their mission – if there was a weakest link in the conspiracy – that person received little reason for second thoughts from Bush's Middle East policy over the summer.

### **Window of Opportunity**

The other what-if imponderable about Sept. 11 is whether the bureaucratic transition in the United States created its own window of opportunity for the terrorists.

After gaining the presidency as the first popular-vote loser in more than a century, Bush rebuffed calls for a bipartisan administration, choosing to

staff his new government with staunchly conservative figures who had little respect for their Democratic predecessors.

In his first seven months in office, Bush also focused on domestic policy, primarily his \$1.3 trillion tax cut, while investing his personal attention heavily on the issue of stem-cell research. In August, he retreated to his ranch in Crawford, Texas, for a working vacation that mixed relaxation with his stem-cell policy speech and visits to several cities to promote what he called “heartland values.”

Before Sept. 11, Bush’s biggest foreign policy initiative was his determination to implement Ronald Reagan’s dream of a national missile shield, even in the face of critics who argued that the far-greater danger was from a non-missile terrorist attack. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other administration officials assured Congress that they were not neglecting these so-called “asymmetrical threats.”

Without doubt, the Bush administration was unprepared for Sept. 11, though a Gore administration might have been caught just as flatfooted.

### **Lessons Learned?**

A separate historical question is whether the slaughter of thousands of people in New York City and at the Pentagon has taught the political and media players of Washington any enduring lessons about their responsibilities to the nation – and the importance of serious information about world problems.

Many U.S. allies wonder if Bush really has jettisoned the unilateralist hubris that colored his first seven-plus months in office. In describing his post-Sept. 11 policy to Congress, Bush asserted that the world was divided into countries that are “with us” and thus worthy of U.S. friendship or “with the terrorists” and thus deserving of destruction, with Washington the sole judge and jury.

“Close U.S. allies and many inside the administration itself are uncertain whether the doctrine really means what it appears to say – that the United States will be the unilateral judge of whether a country is supporting terrorism, and will determine the appropriate methods, including the use of

military force, to impose behavioral change,” wrote Karen DeYoung of the *Washington Post* on Oct. 16.

Those worries are well grounded. On the issue of terrorism, Washington has long subordinated facts to ideology and politics, giving the world little confidence that the U.S. selection of countries deserving retribution would be fair.

These ideological judgments are demonstrated by this year’s choice of seven nations that the State Department officially designated terrorist. One is Cuba, though the State Department report cites no examples of Fidel Castro’s government engaging in terrorism, accusing it only of providing safe haven to alleged terrorists from the Basque region of Spain and having links to guerrilla groups in Colombia.

By contrast, the State Department’s terrorist list did not include Afghanistan. This glaring omission comes although the Taliban regime was aiding and abetting bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network, which was believed responsible for the bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa and was allegedly behind terrorist plots aimed at the United States.

Fingering Afghanistan, however, might have embarrassed the Saudis, the Pakistanis and the CIA, all of which had a hand in creating the current mess in that country.

As for the national news media, there’s little or no indication that the talking heads feel any remorse about fiddling for a decade – concentrating on the most trivial of political issues – while a strategic part of the world smoldered.

Nor is there much reason for optimism that journalists now will seize this opportunity to unravel, finally, the hidden history of the U.S. relationships in the Middle East, a history that might cast a dark shadow over the political legacy of the Bush family.

Most likely, the American people can expect one more drawn-out morality play, with white hat George W. Bush “smoking out” black hat Osama bin Laden.

One year after the disputed election of 2000, a document emerged that revealed a startling – although perhaps unsurprising – truth: that Al Gore would have won the presidency had the counting of votes in Florida been allowed to proceed. This, however, is not how major media

outlets reported the story. As Robert Parry explains here, the media bent itself into a pretzel trying to bury the lede of the story and promote the false narrative that Bush won the election fair and square.

## [So Bush Did Steal the White House \(Nov. 22, 2001\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

George W. Bush now appears to have claimed the most powerful office in the world by blocking a court-ordered recount of votes in Florida that likely would have elected Al Gore to be president of the United States.

A document, revealed by *Newsweek*, indicates that the Florida recount that was stopped last year by five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court would have taken into account so-called “overvotes” that heavily favored Gore.

If those overvotes were counted, as now it appears they would have been, Gore would have carried Florida regardless of what standard of chad – dimpled, hanging, punched-through – was used in counting the so-called “undervotes,” according to an examination of those ballots by a group of leading news organizations.

In other words, Bush lost not only the national popular vote by more than a half million ballots, but he would have lost the key state of Florida and thus the presidency, if Florida’s authorities had been allowed to count the votes that met the state’s legal requirement of demonstrating the clear intent of the voter.

The *Newsweek* disclosure – a memo that the presiding judge in the state recount sent to a county canvassing board – shows that the judge was instructing the county boards to collect overvotes that had been rejected for indicating two choices for president when, in reality, the voters had made clear their one choice.

“If you would segregate ‘overvotes’ as you describe and indicate in your final report how many where you determined the clear intent of the voter,” wrote Judge Terry Lewis, who had been named by the Florida Supreme Court to oversee the statewide recount, “I will rule on the issue for all counties.”

Lewis's memo to the chairman of the Charlotte County canvassing board was written on Dec. 9, 2000, just hours before Bush succeeded in getting five conservative justices on the U.S. Supreme Court to stop the Florida recount.

Lewis has said in more recent interviews that he might well have expanded the recount to include those overvotes. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine that he wouldn't count those legitimate votes once they were recovered by the counties and were submitted to Lewis.

The overvotes in which voters marked the name of their choice and also wrote in his name would be even more clearly legal votes than the so-called undervotes, which were kicked out for failing to register a choice that could be read by voting machines.

### **Misguided Articles**

This new information indicating that the wrong presidential candidate moved into the White House also makes a mockery of the Nov. 12 front-page stories of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other leading news outlets, which stated that Bush would have won regardless of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling.

Those stories were based on the hypothetical results if the state-ordered recount had looked only at undervotes. The news organizations assumed, incorrectly it now appears, that the overvotes would have been excluded from such a tally, leaving Bush with a tiny lead.

In going with the "Bush Wins" headlines, the news organizations downplayed their more dramatic finding that Gore would have won if a full statewide recount had been conducted in accordance with state law. Using the clear-intent-of-the-voter standard, Gore beat Bush by margins ranging from 60 to 171 votes, depending on what standard was used in judging the undervotes.

Beyond the big newspapers' false assumptions about the state recount, the news stories showed a pro-Bush bias in their choice of language and the overall slant of the articles.

The *New York Times*, for instance, used the word "would" and even declarative statements when referring to Bush prevailing in hypothetical

partial recounts. By contrast, the word “might” was used when mentioning that Gore topped Bush if all ballots were considered.

“A comprehensive review of the uncounted Florida ballots,” the *Times* wrote, “reveal that George W. Bush would have won even if the United States Supreme Court had allowed the statewide manual recount of the votes that the Florida Supreme Court had ordered to go forward. Contrary to what many partisans of former Vice President Al Gore have charged, the United State Supreme Court did not award an election to Mr. Bush that otherwise would have been won by Mr. Gore.”

Two paragraphs later, the *Times* noted that the examination of all rejected ballots “found that Mr. Gore might have won if the courts had ordered a full statewide recount. ... The findings indicate that Mr. Gore might have eked out a victory if he had pursued in court a course like the one he publicly advocated when he called on the state to ‘count all the votes.’”

Left out of that formulation, which suggests that Gore was a hypocrite, is the fact that Bush rejected Gore’s early proposal for a full statewide recount. Bush also waged a relentless campaign of obstruction that left no time for the state courts to address the equal-protection-under-the-law concerns raised by the U.S. Supreme Court in its final ruling on Dec. 12, 2000.

Note also how the *Times* denigrates as misguided Gore “partisans” those American citizens who concluded, apparently correctly, that the U.S. Supreme Court awarded the election to Bush.

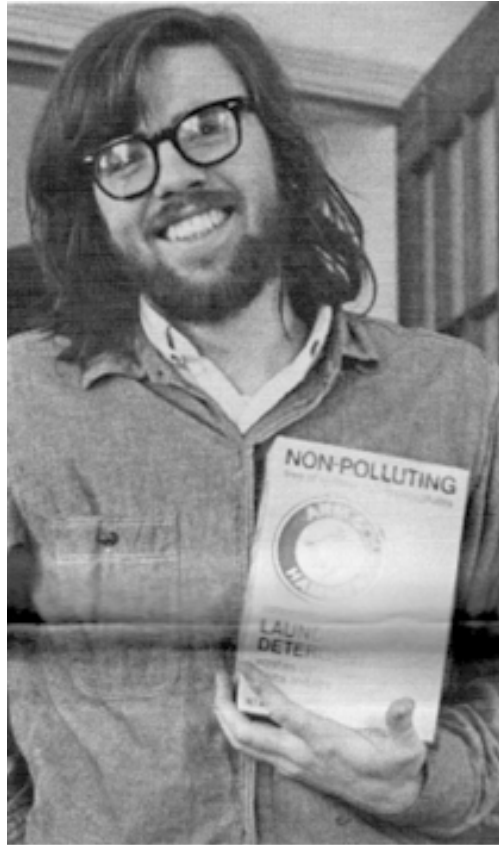
The headlines, too, favored Bush. The *Times*’ front-page headline on Nov. 12 read, “Study of Disputed Florida Ballots Finds Justices Did Not Cast the Deciding Vote.” The *Washington Post*’s headline read, “Florida Recounts Would Have Favored Bush.”

### **Spreading Confusion**

The pro-Bush themes in the headlines and stories were repeated over and over by television and other newspapers, creating a widespread belief among casual news consumers that Bush had prevailed in the full statewide recount, rather than only in truncated recounts based on dubious hypotheses.

Now, Judge Lewis's memo undercuts both the tone and the content of those news reports. It is certainly not clear anymore that the state-ordered recount would have favored Bush. It also appears likely that the interference by the U.S. Supreme Court was decisive. Based on the new evidence, the major newspapers look to be wrong on both these high-profile points.

The evidence is now overwhelming that Bush strong-armed his way, illegitimately, to the presidency.



Robert Parry, as editor of the Colby *Echo* college newspaper, displaying a new environmentally friendly Arm & Hammer laundry detergent. Feb. 26, 1970.

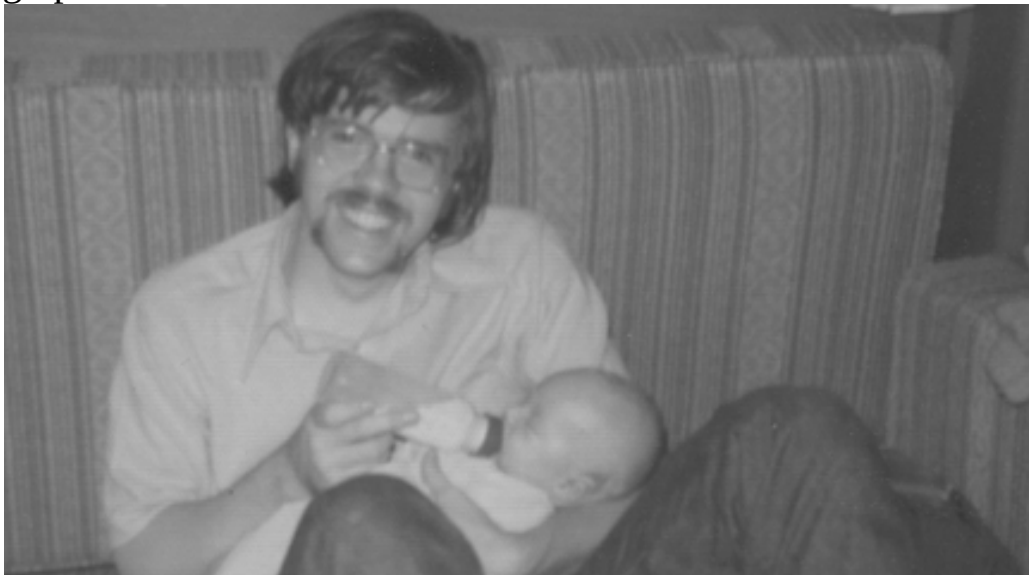
Photographer unknown.





Odd couple. Bob with brother Bill, circa 1970.

Photographer unknown.



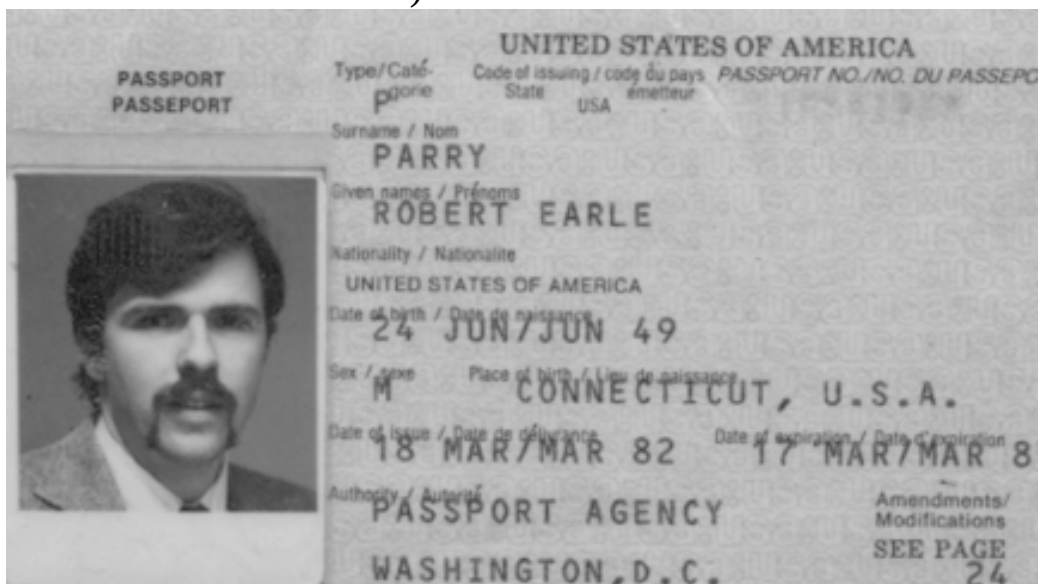
The new dad holding his first-born child, Sam, in August 1973. Boston, Mass.

Photographer unknown.



Bob Parry in an AP newsroom, mid-1970s.

(Photo credit: Associated Press)



Bob Parry's passport, issued 1982

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FOR THE DIRECTOR  
FROM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA ON 6 DECEMBER 1984

Media Representative	Agency Contact	Query and Comment
Robert Parry AP STAT	Mr. Lauder	CIA told HPSCI that it had distributed some of the manuals by balloon. Asked number of questions. COMMENT: Cannot help.
Christopher Dickey WASHINGTON POST	Mr. Lauder	Requests briefing with DCI on Nicaragua. COMMENT: Cannot arrange.
Will Elsworth Jones LONDON SUNDAY TIMES		Asks general questions about CIA complaint to FCC. COMMENT: Answered as appropriate.
Corky Siemaszko City News Bureau, Chicago		Is President Ferdinand Marcos on his way to Chicago for emergency medical treatment? COMMENT: Cannot help; referred to State.
Robert Schakne CBS News STAT		Can we confirm story that two of three Americans on board hijacked plane in Tehran have been shot? COMMENT: No.

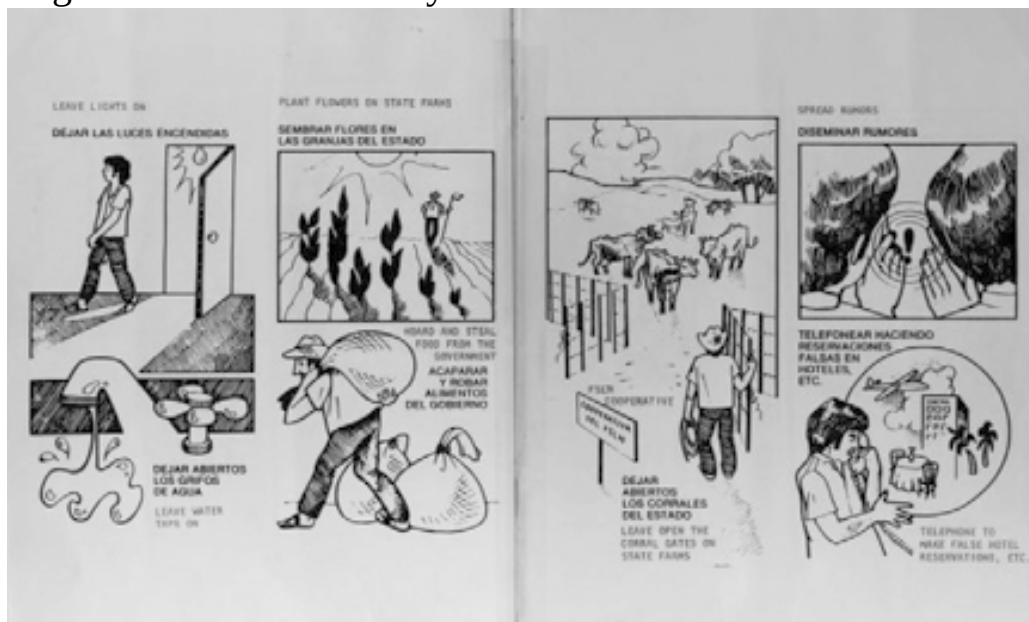
George V. Lauder  
Director, Public Affairs

BOB

001 0001 EXPDIR 001 000 00SAT 00A 00C 05 00G 0C 0P NIC 0LL 00A/015 EXSEC

Administrative - Internal Use Only

The CIA's archives contain more than 100 articles by Robert Parry, most of them focusing on his Associated Press work from the 80s. This file from 1984 includes a handwritten note from the Agency's Director of Public Affairs, who circled a passage regarding the CIA's assassination manual that it had distributed to Nicaraguan Contras, and included one word indicating the source of this story: "Bob"



Freedom fighting for dummies. In this excerpt of the CIA-produced “Freedom Fighter’s Manual,” exposed by Robert Parry in 1984, opponents of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua are encouraged to leave water taps running and make false hotel reservations, among other creative methods of sabotage.



Robert Parry won the George Polk Award for National Reporting in 1984 for his work disclosing that the CIA had provided an assassination manual to the Contras. Here he is pictured with AP Executive Editor Louis Boccardi after receiving the award.

(Photo credit: Associated Press)

MEMORANDUM

~~SECRET~~  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ACTION

June 3, 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR JOHN M. POINDEXTER

FROM: OLIVER L. NORTH

SUBJECT: Press Revelations regarding North's Role with  
Nicaraguan Resistance

N- 6415

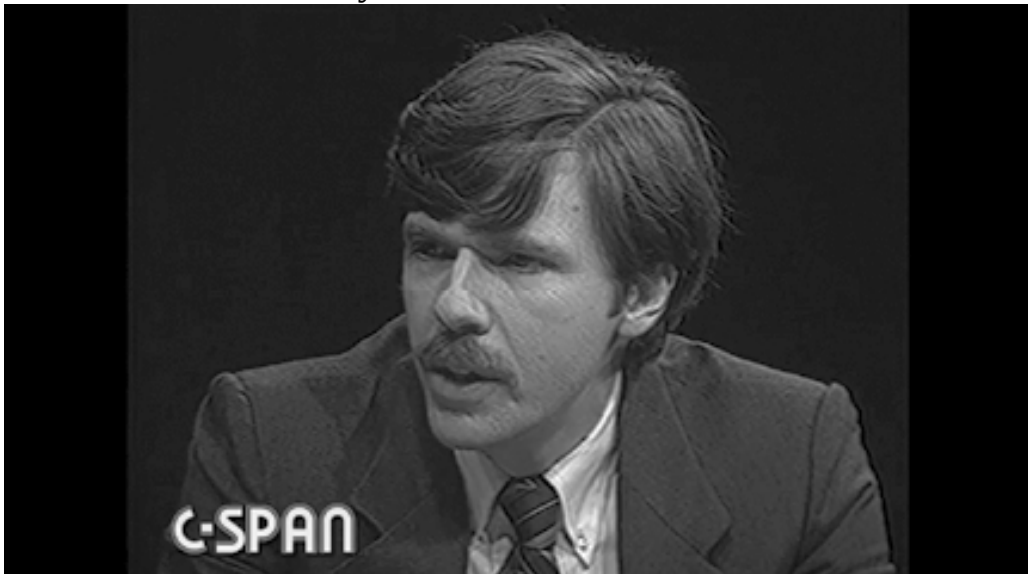
EXHIBIT

OLN-186

For several weeks now there have been rumors of stories being prepared which allege an NSC connection to private funding and other support to the Nicaraguan resistance. The rumors originally surfaced with a reporter Alfonso Chardi from the Miami Herald and now seem to focus more on an Associated Press reporter named Robert Parry (note at Tab I). Parry is the reporter who "broke the story" on the so-called CIA "murder manual."

At my request [REDACTED] went to Chardi before departing for Tokyo.

A June 3, 1985, National Security Council memorandum warned about stories being prepared by Robert Parry that would expose the NSC's involvement in funding the Contras. The memo notes that "Parry is the reporter who 'broke the story' on the so-called CIA 'murder manual.'"



Robert Parry appearing on C-SPAN to discuss the Report on the President's Special Review Board, also known as the Tower Commission Report, on March 2, 1987. (C-SPAN screenshot)

By Brian Barger and Robert Parry

Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Nicaraguan rebels operating in northern Costa Rica have engaged in cocaine trafficking, in part to help finance their war against Nicaragua's leftist government, according to U.S. investigators and American volunteers who work with the rebels.

The smuggling operations included refueling planes at clandestine airstrips and helpline transport cocaine to other Costa Rican points for shipment to the United States, said U.S. law enforcement officials and the volunteers.

These sources, who refused to be identified by name, said the smuggling involves individuals from the largest of the U.S.-backed Contra groups -- the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) and the Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (ARDE) -- as well as a splinter group known as M-3.

A leader of M-3, Sebastian Gonzalez Mendola, was indicted in Costa Rica for cocaine trafficking a year ago. No other Contra leaders have been charged.

A new National Intelligence Estimate, a secret CIA-prepared analysis on narcotics trafficking, alleges that one of ARDE's top commanders loyal to ARDE leader Eden Pastora used cocaine profits this year to buy a \$250,000 arms shipment and a helicopter, according to a U.S. government official in Washington.

FDN spokesman Bosco Matamoros and Levy Sanchez, a Miami-based spokesman for Pastora, denied that their groups participated in drug smuggling.

Cornelius J. Dougherty, spokesman for the Drug Enforcement Administration, said DEA headquarters in Washington is aware that drug traffickers use airstrips in northern Costa Rica to transport cocaine, but has not examined the political affiliations of those involved.

Dougherty said the DEA focuses its Latin American enforcement efforts on the cocaine-producing nations of South America, rather than on countries, such as Costa Rica, that are used in shipping the drugs to the United States.

Earlier this year, President Reagan accused the leftist government of Nicaragua of "exporting drugs to poison our youth" after a Nicaraguan government employee, Federico Vaughan, was indicted by a federal grand jury in Miami. But Dougherty said DEA investigators are still not sure if Sandinista leaders were involved.

Rep. Sam Goldenson, D-Conn., a House Foreign Affairs Committee member, called on the administration Friday to investigate the Contra allegations "with the same vigor that they would devote to charges of left-wing drug trafficking."

"After all, the victims of narcotics smuggling are not able to differentiate between left-wing and right-wing cocaine," the congressman said.

Responding to the AP report, State Department deputy spokesman Charles Radman said the United States "actively opposes drug trafficking" and that the DEA is not conducting any investigation of the charges.

"We are not aware of any evidence to support those charges," Radman added.

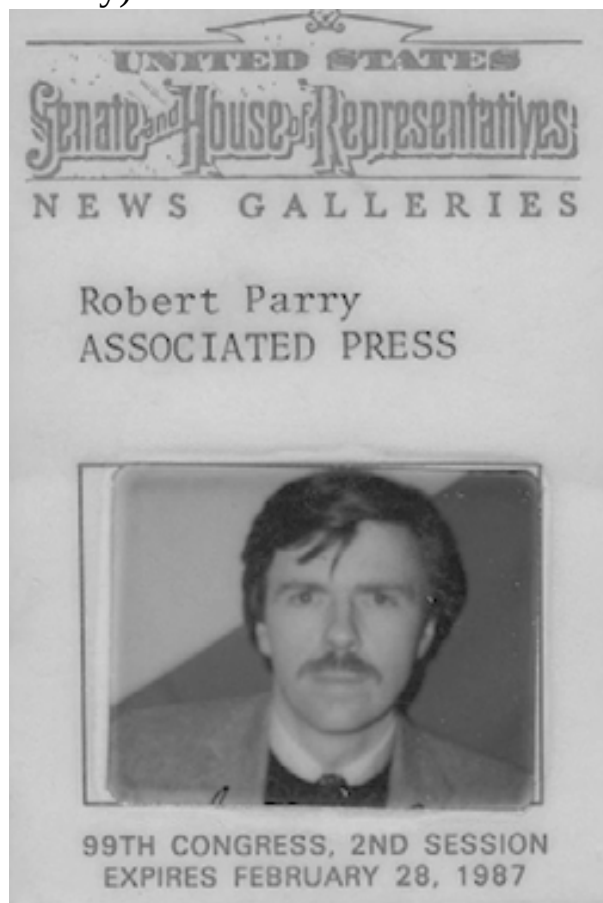
The U.S.-backed rebels, fighting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, operate from bases in Honduras to Nicaragua's north and from Costa Rica, to its south. Contra leaders claim a combined force of 20,000 men, although some U.S. officials say the real number is much lower. The Costa Rica-based rebel groups are smaller and more poorly financed than those in Honduras.

Contra cocaine. The original 1985 AP article filed by Brian Barger and Robert Parry which revealed that the US-backed Nicaraguan Contras were involved with drug trafficking. The Associated Press had initially refused to publish this story and only did so when it appeared in Latin American newspapers after the AP's Spanish-language newswire service mistakenly published a translation.



Just married. Diane Duston and Bob Parry on their wedding day, April 27, 1987, in Arlington, Virginia.

(Photo credit: Lynn Neary)



Covering Capitol Hill. Robert Parry's congressional press pass, 1987



Bob Parry, seated at the far end of the table on the right, listens to Oliver North's congressional testimony on July 7, 1987, Washington, D.C. (C-SPAN screenshot.)



Investigating the October Surprise. Introductory graphic of the PBS



“Frontline” production “Investigating the October Surprise,”  
written by Robert Parry and Robert Ross, 1992.

(Internet Archive screenshot)



Family man. Bob Parry with his four children in 1994. From left to right: Nat, Bob, Liz, Sam, and Jeff, center. (Photo credit: Diane Duston)

TOP SECRET/NOFORN

005363

OTHER STATES IN THE AREA.

8. BOTH SAUD AND IRAN PROVIDED OTHER BITS OF USEFUL INTELLIGENCE  
E.G. IRAN IS RECEIVING MILITARY SPARES FOR U.S. EQUIPMENT FROM  
IRAN. IT WAS ALSO INTERESTING TO HEAR THAT PRESIDENT  
CARTER GAVE THE IRAQIS A GREEN LIGHT TO LAUNCH THE WAR AGAINST  
IRAN THROUGH FAHD.

9. THESE CHANNELS PROMISE TO BE EXTREMELY USEFUL IN FINDING  
COMPATIBLE POLICIES WITH THE SAUDS AND IRANIS. NOTE HER  
TAGNE THE "OFFICIAL STATUS" YOU HAVE CONFIDED IN THEM AND WITH  
TAGNE CONFIDENTIALITY.

10. I WILL FOLLOW UP WITH THE IRANIS AND WILL KEEP YOU  
INFORMED.

11. NEXT WITH I WILL OPEN AN ARABIAN/IRANIAN WITH PRESIDENT  
EIA OF THE STATE AND SAUD OF IRAN. I WILL KEEP YOU  
INFORMED.

12. THE LARGE MESSAGE EMERGING FROM THESE CHANNELS HOWEVER,  
IS THAT YOUR POLICIES ARE CORRECT AND ARE ALREADY ELICITING  
THE ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT OF IRANIAN LEADERS ARAB.

In these “top secret” talking points that former Secretary of State Alexander Haig prepared for President Reagan in 1981, he noted “that President Carter gave the Iraqis a green light to launch the war against Iran through Fahd.” Parry discovered this document in 1995 amid records from a congressional investigation and published it for the first time at *Consortium News*.



The first issue of *I.F. Magazine*, published in July 1997, focused largely on the contra-cocaine controversy and how it had been misreported by the big newspapers.



Robert Parry talks about his book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* at a bookstore in Washington, DC, on Jan. 30, 2000. (C-SPAN screenshot)



Robert Parry accepting the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence from Nieman Foundation curator and chair of the I.F. Stone selection committee Bill Kovach. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Oct. 22, 2015.

(Photo credit: Lisa Abitbol/Nieman Foundation for Journalism)



Let's go Pats. Bob Parry, a lifelong New England Patriots fan, is pictured here at

Gillette Stadium with wife Diane, son Jeff, and nephew Brendon. In the mid-2010s,

Parry wrote a series of articles challenging the NFL's flimsy "Deflategate" case against Patriots quarterback Tom Brady.

(Photographer unknown)



Taking in a ballgame. Pictured here at Fenway Park, Bob Parry entertains his granddaughters Eva and Lea with his iPhone.

July 2016, Boston, Mass.

(Photo credit: Malene Parry)

Following 9/11, millions of Americans were asking what they could do to help overcome the trauma and ensure that those horrible events were never repeated. With a little leadership, many might have been persuaded to make changes in their lifestyles to help make the United States more energy-independent, which in turn could have given the U.S. government a stronger hand to deal with the Salafist regime in Saudi Arabia, upon which the U.S. relied on for access to cheap oil. The U.S. could have also gotten serious about resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict, the source of much anger in the Muslim world.

None of this happened, of course. Instead, Bush told Americans to "go shopping" and began threatening countries with pre-emptive invasions. In this article, published a month after the Taliban was deposed by a U.S.-led coalition in a military campaign that dropped some 12,000 bombs on Afghanistan and killed thousands of civilians, Parry explains how the opportunities to make constructive changes were squandered by the Bush administration.

## Missed Opportunities of Sept. 11 (Jan. 13, 2002)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

The ouster of the Taliban and the disruption of Osama bin Laden's terrorist network may have bought the U.S. public some added safety four months after the Sept. 11 attacks. But those gains could prove illusory because George W. Bush has ignored the root causes of the violence.

Some of those root causes, such as the world's unequal economic development, may require long-term attention. But others could have been addressed in the aftermath of Sept. 11 as fitting responses to the atrocities.

Missed, for instance, was the opportunity to call on the American people to commit themselves to serious energy conservation and thus to free the hand of U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East. Bush also missed a unique opportunity to demand a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And he has been silent about the danger of mixing politics with religious fundamentalism.

In each case, Bush displayed a lack of presidential vision or was frozen by the political and economic entanglements of his supporters.

### **Go Shopping**

Perhaps most significantly, at a time when Americans were eager to do something meaningful as a way to pay tribute to the estimated 3,000 people who died in the terrorist attacks, Bush most memorably urged the U.S. public to go shopping and take vacations, a call made in a national address to Congress and now featured in tourism industry TV commercials.

The White House could have explained how the nation's over-dependence on fossil fuels prevents the U.S. government from pressuring Arab states, especially the Saudi Arabians, to reform corrupt and authoritarian governments, one of most immediate causes for Islamic terrorism.

The Saudi royal family and other undemocratic Arab regimes have long understood the leverage that oil gives them over the United States. The implicit deal was expressed bluntly in one State Department cable dated July 5, 1979. "The basis of this relationship – our need for oil and the Saudi need for security – will continue," predicted the cable.

To fulfill the U.S. side of the relationship, the CIA has collaborated with Saudi security forces by training palace guards and disrupting political opposition. The United States adopted similar relationships with other undemocratic leaders throughout the Middle East – from the Shah of Iran, before the 1979 Iranian revolution, to the Emir of Kuwait, who was reinstalled by a U.S.-led military force that reversed the Iraqi invasion in 1991.

In return for U.S.-supplied security, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf sheikdoms have kept the oil flowing. But they also paid what amounts to protection money to Islamic fundamentalist leaders who share bin Laden's hostility to the West. In effect, these "allies" subsidized bin Laden's attacks on Americans.

### **Home Video**

In December, when a home-made videotape was released of bin Laden speaking to guests, some Saudi clerics mentioned on the tape were "fairly influential and well-known," according to Saudi experts quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*.

One Saudi religious leader, Suleiman al-Ulwan, who had been considered a moderate, is described on the tape as having issued a fatwa, or religious decree, that endorsed the Sept. 11 attacks and judged the dead Americans as not innocent.[40](#)

U.S. intelligence has been aware of the growing Saudi danger for years, at least since the 1990s when the Saudis frustrated U.S. efforts to investigate acts of terrorism emanating from Saudi soil. In 1995, when a U.S.-run military school in Riyadh was bombed and five Americans were killed, the FBI rushed in agents to question four suspects. Before the questioning could begin, the Saudi government beheaded the suspects.

A similar lack of Saudi cooperation frustrated the investigation into the Khobar Towers bombing that killed 19 American soldiers stationed in Saudi Arabia in 1998.[41](#)

Bin Laden himself is a Saudi whose family grew rich from construction contracts awarded by the Saudi king. He saw up close the decadence and corruption of the Saudi princes. These men preside over a system of strict

Islamic law, even executing women who commit adultery, while the princes have wild parties during frequent trips to Europe and with Western women flown into the kingdom.

Fifteen of the 19 hijackers who carried out the Sept. 11 attacks also were Saudis. Yet U.S. diplomats still tiptoe around the issue of official Saudi complicity because the U.S. remains dependent on foreign oil and Saudi Arabia sits atop about a quarter of the world's proven supply.

Curbing U.S. energy use would give U.S. diplomacy crucial maneuvering room to confront the Saudi royal family. By raising fuel-efficiency standards for motor vehicles and investing in alternative energy sources, the U.S. government also could improve relations with Western allies concerned about U.S. inaction on global warming.

The American people were ready to make the sacrifice after Sept. 11 if Bush had asked. Instead, Bush made no conservation appeal to the public and continued to oppose legislation that would require better gas mileage in cars.

In his new budget, he moves to cut government spending on alternative fuels and scraps a program to introduce high-mileage cars over the next few years. Instead, Bush will propose long-range research on fuel-cell technology whose promise is a decade or more down the road.

"They're letting Detroit off the hook on delivering real fuel-economy breakthroughs in the next few years," said Dan Reicher, assistant energy secretary in the Clinton administration. "This is in exchange for potential improvements that are more than a decade off."<sup>[42](#)</sup>

### **Bush Oil-igarchy**

Besides giving car manufacturers a pass, Bush's decision means oil consumption will remain high, a boon to Bush's political backers from the Texas oil fields and their Arab business pals.

"Many of the same American corporate executives who have reaped millions of dollars from arms and oil deals with the Saudi monarchy have served or currently serve at the highest levels of U.S. government," the *Boston Herald* reported in an investigative series.



“Those lucrative financial relationships call into question the ability of America’s political elite to make tough foreign policy decisions about the kingdom that produced Osama bin Laden and is perhaps the biggest incubator for anti-Western Islamic terrorists,” the *Herald* article said. “Nowhere is the revolving U.S.-Saudi money wheel more evident than within President Bush’s own coterie of foreign policy advisers, starting with the president’s father, George H.W. Bush.”

The former president has served as a senior adviser at the Carlyle Group, an investment house which employed other key Bush aides. One Carlyle consultant was James A. Baker III, George W. Bush’s chief lawyer in the Florida recount battle and his father’s secretary of state. Another was Colin Powell, the younger Bush’s secretary of state.

One of the deals between the Carlyle Group and the Saudi monarchy was an “Economic Offset Program,” a kind of kickback scheme in which U.S. arms manufacturers selling weapons to Saudi Arabia return some money as contracts to Saudi businesses, most with links to the royal family. The Carlyle Group served as an adviser on this program, the *Herald* article reported.<sup>[43](#)</sup>

Between the U.S. public’s dependence on foreign oil and the profits going to the U.S. economic elite in cahoots with oil-rich Arab sheiks, it may not be surprising that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has propped up a variety of anti-democratic and unsavory regimes.

This expedient view of democracy – that it is an important principle elsewhere but can’t be allowed to destabilize oil production – has given traction to anti-American charges in the Middle East that Washington is hypocritical about its most cherished principles or is simply prejudiced against Arabs.

Bush has avoided any public discussion of these thorny political realities in the Middle East. Instead, he has framed the post-Sept. 11 debate in the quasi-Christian language of a “crusade” to eradicate “evil,” with bin Laden as the “evil one.”

## **Israel-Palestine**



Bush also has failed on another front, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, again letting politics and ideology obscure a possible route to a solution.

During his first months in office, Bush repudiated Clinton's Middle East policy of pressing for a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and Palestine.

Bush chose to follow instead a hardline strategy against the Palestinians, which some foreign-policy sources say was motivated by Bush's belief that his father lost in 1992, in part, because of Israel's suspicion that the elder Bush privately favored the oil-rich Arab countries and couldn't be trusted.

Possibly with 2004 in mind, Bush cast aside any appearance of balance in the first several months of his presidency. Bush singled out Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat for primary blame for the continued Israeli-Palestinian violence and essentially let Likud leader Ariel Sharon off the hook.

Bush voiced no public sympathy for the worsening conditions of Palestinians living in the squalor of Gaza and other fenced-in areas. In early September, Bush ordered U.S. diplomats to walk out of a United Nations racism conference because of draft language criticizing Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

The tragedy of Sept. 11 did not alter Bush's basic strategy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many Americans might have favored a stern demand to both sides to accept a reasonable compromise that protected Israel's security while granting the Palestinians an economically viable homeland – or perhaps a solution that forged a single secular state with constitutional protections for all religions.

But Bush made no such move. His emissaries continued to insist that ceasefires of specific lengths were necessary before more substantive negotiations. However, the time limits turned into deadlines for Islamic suicide bombers to inflict bloody outrages against Israeli civilians. The Israeli government then responded with helicopter attacks and targeted killings of Palestinian leaders.

Four months after the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush seems clueless about how to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Meanwhile, the post-Sept. 11

public pressure for action has dissipated and the tit-for-tat killings have taken on a grim look of business as usual.

### **Missed Warnings**

Not only has Bush failed to address the larger threats that continue to give rise to terrorism, he did not protect the United States from the Sept. 11 attacks themselves.

On Jan. 31, 2001, just 11 days after Bush's inauguration, former Sens. Gary Hart and Warren Rudman unveiled the final report of a blue-ribbon commission on terrorism that bluntly warned that urgent steps were needed to prevent an attack on U.S. cities.

"States, terrorists and other disaffected groups will acquire weapons of mass destruction, and some will use them," the report said. "Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers."

Hart specifically noted that the nation was vulnerable to "a weapon of mass destruction in a high-rise building."

When congressional hearings on the findings were set for early May, the Bush administration intervened to stop them, an article in the *Columbia Journalism Review* reported. Presumably, Bush did not want to seem behind the curve.

So, instead of embracing the Hart-Rudman findings and getting to work on the recommendations, Bush set up a White House committee, headed by Vice President Dick Cheney, to examine the issue again and submit a report in the fall.

### **Alarm Bells**

By late spring, other alarm bells were ringing.

Credible evidence of what became the World Trade Center/Pentagon attacks began pouring in to U.S. intelligence agencies. "It all came together in the third week of June," said Richard Clarke, who was the White House coordinator for counter-terrorism. "The CIA's view was that a major terrorist attack was coming in the next several weeks."<sup>44</sup>

The intelligence community also learned that two suspected terrorists had penetrated the United States, but the FBI could not find them.

As these dangers grew, Bush focused not on terrorism but on stem-cell research and other domestic issues that played well with his Christian Right allies. Bush took off the month of August for a working vacation that interspersed relaxation on his Texas ranch with his speech on stem-cell policy and trips to non-coastal cities to praise “heartland” values.

Former Sen. Hart tried to rekindle interest in what he viewed as the pressing threat of terrorism. On Sept. 6, he went to the White House for a meeting with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and urged the White House to move faster. Rice agreed to pass on Hart’s concerns to higher-ups.

Five days later, despite all the warnings, Bush and his administration were caught flatfooted. Two of America’s greatest landmarks were leveled, with thousands of people killed. For the first time in history, the Pentagon was attacked and partially destroyed.

After the attacks, however, the nation rallied around Bush. He won praise for unleashing the U.S. military against Afghanistan and pulling together a coalition that backed the war. Ironically, the attacks that his administration had done nothing to stop boosted Bush’s approval ratings to historically high levels.

### **God’s Will**

The news media’s praise for Bush was unbridled. On Dec. 23, for instance, NBC’s Tim Russert joined New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and First Lady Laura Bush in ruminating about whether divine intervention had put Bush in the White House to handle this crisis.

Russert asked Mrs. Bush if “in an extraordinary way, this is why he was elected.” Mrs. Bush disagreed with Russert’s suggestion that “God picks the president, which he doesn’t.”

Giuliani thought otherwise. “I do think, Mrs. Bush, that there was some divine guidance in the president being elected. I do,” the mayor said. McCarrick also saw some larger purpose. “I think I don’t thoroughly agree with the first lady. I think that the president really, he was where he was when we needed him,” the cardinal said.

Theologically speaking, it was less clear why God didn't simply let Bush actually be elected, rather than having him get a U.S. Supreme Court ruling to stop the vote count in Florida – or why God didn't give Bush the foresight to act on the Hart-Rudman warnings so he could thwart the terrorist attacks altogether.

More mundane realities can explain Bush's subsequent failure in squandering an unparalleled opportunity to take decisive action against some of the root causes that have fed – and will continue to feed – terrorism. The hard fact is that Bush, weighed down with political and ideological baggage, missed the moment.

The post-9/11 course that George W. Bush set the country on was a belligerent one characterized by tough talk and pre-emptive war. In his State of the Union address in January 2002, Bush declared that the U.S.'s goal was to "prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction." Singling out not only Islamic countries such as Iran and Iraq, but also the communist regime of North Korea, he spoke ominously of an "axis of evil [that was] arming to threaten the peace of the world" and warned that "America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security."

Shortly after these bellicose words were spoken, North Korea resumed a uranium-enrichment program to power nuclear weapons, and by the end of 2002, declared that it would reactivate its nuclear plant in Yongbyon. In January 2003, it announced withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and within a few years it successfully tested its first nuclear weapon.

In this article, published on the eve of the pivotal 2002 mid-term elections, Parry explains how Bush's "tough-guy rhetoric" was making the world less stable and paving the way for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction that he claimed to oppose.

## [Deeper Into the Big Muddy \(Oct. 27, 2002\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

On the campaign trail this fall, George W. Bush has been selling his hardline foreign policy as a strategy for protecting Americans. But the opposite now appears to be true: Bush's tough-guy rhetoric in the face of complex world problems is adding to the dangers confronting Americans.

The latest episode of Bush's unintended consequences is North Korea's admission that it is pressing ahead to build nuclear weapons.

Bush's supporters have tried to shift the blame for this unsettling development to President Clinton, by claiming that a 1994 agreement to

stop North Korea's nuclear program was too weak. But the evidence now is that North Korea cast aside that agreement this year and sped up its quest for nuclear weapons in direct reaction to Bush's threats and rhetoric.

The collision course with North Korea was set early in the Bush administration. In 2001, shortly after taking office, Bush cut off talks with North Korea and snubbed South Korea's President Kim Dae-Jung over his détente strategy. Kim Dae-Jung, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, found himself humiliated during a state visit to Washington.

After the Sept. 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington, Bush began counting North Korea as part of his "axis of evil," along with Iraq and Iran. Apparently, Bush's reasoning for putting North Korea into the "axis" was to avoid fingering only Islamic countries. So his speechwriters added North Korea as a kind of politically correct multiculturalism in reverse.

More substantively, in late 2001, Bush sent to Congress a "nuclear posture review," which laid out future U.S. strategy for deploying nuclear weapons. Leaked early this year, the so-called NPR put North Korea on a list of potential targets for U.S. nuclear weapons. In doing that, Bush reversed President Clinton's commitment against targeting non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons. Clinton's idea was that a U.S. promise not to fire nuclear weapons at non-nuclear states would reduce their incentives for joining the nuclear club.

But to Bush's advisers, Clinton's strategy was simply more "appeasement." So Bush showed his toughness by aiming nuclear missiles at North Korea and other enemy states. As part of the nuclear review, the Bush administration also discussed lowering the threshold for the use of U.S. nuclear weapons by making low-yield tactical nukes available for some battlefield situations.

All of this may have played well with Bush's conservative base and many of his neoconservative geopolitical enthusiasts. But North Korea's famously paranoid communist government went, as they say, ballistic.

### **'Strong Countermeasures'**

Last March, Pyongyang signaled what would come next. The North Korean government warned of "strong countermeasures" against Bush's nuclear

policy shifts. North Korea accused the Bush administration of “an inhuman plan to spark a global nuclear arms race” and vowed that it would “not remain a passive onlooker” after being included in the Pentagon’s list of prospective nuclear targets.

A commentary, issued by the official Korean Central News Agency, cited the threat from the Bush administration in the context of the U.S. nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. “If the U.S. intends to mount a nuclear attack on any part of the DPRK [North Korea] just as it did on Hiroshima, it is grossly mistaken,” the communiqué read.

This rhetoric about nuclear weapons, though rarely mentioned during the current crisis, was not a secret last March. It was covered in the *New York Times* and other newspapers.

The *Times*, for instance, reported that “North Korea threatened earlier this month to withdraw from the [1994 nuclear suspension] agreement if the Bush administration persisted with what North Korea called a ‘hardline’ policy that differed from the Clinton administration’s approach. North Korea also renewed its complaints against delays in construction of two nuclear reactors promised in the 1994 agreement to fulfill its energy needs.”<sup>45</sup>

In retrospect, it appears obvious that the North Koreans were telegraphing how they planned to respond to Bush’s nuclear saber-rattling. They would create a nuclear threat of their own.

### **‘Pygmy’**

Raising the tensions even more, Bush personally lashed out at North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Il during a closed-door meeting of Republican lawmakers in May. In a lectern-thumping, disjointed tirade that unnerved some Republicans present, Bush denounced Kim Jong Il as a “pygmy” and compared him to “a spoiled child at a dinner table,” *Newsweek* magazine reported.

By last summer, U.S. intelligence was seeing evidence of a resurgent nuclear program in North Korea.

“U.S. officials have known since early July that North Korea had acquired key equipment for enriching uranium,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

“On Sept. 12, the same day Mr. Bush addressed the UN about the dangers posed by Iraq, the president met quietly in New York with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to brief him on the U.S. intelligence findings about North Korea.”<sup>46</sup>

In early October, U.S. diplomats confronted Pyongyang with the evidence and were surprised when North Korean leaders admitted that they were working on building nuclear weapons. Bush canceled the 1994 agreement.

Despite the warnings given seven months earlier, official Washington was stunned. Many analysts puzzled over what might have caused Pyongyang to violate its earlier promises about suspending its nuclear program and then admit to it. In briefing U.S. journalists, Bush administration officials claimed that signs of North Korean violations dated back several years, to the Clinton administration.

According to aides, Bush said he would never go down the same path of compromise that Clinton followed in 1994. North Korea “would not be rewarded for bad behavior,” Bush aides told reporters.<sup>47</sup> Still, while talking tough, the Bush administration said it would seek a resolution of the crisis through a multilateral strategy involving China and Japan, not through military force.

### **‘Declaration of War’**

For its part, North Korea issued a press release at the United Nations on Oct. 25, explaining its reasoning. The statement cited both Bush’s “axis of evil” rhetoric and the administration’s decision to target North Korea for a possible preemptive nuclear strike.

“This was a clear declaration of war against the DPRK as it totally nullified” the 1994 agreement, the North Korean statement read. “Nobody would be so naïve as to think that the DPRK would sit idle under such a situation. ... The DPRK, which values sovereignty more than life, was left with no other proper answer to the U.S. behaving so arrogantly and impertinently.”

While the “mystery” behind North Korea’s motives may no longer seem so mysterious – having been explained both before and after the evidence of a

revived nuclear program – it is less clear that Bush has learned any lessons about the risks of using threatening rhetoric in a careless or imprecise way.

As world leaders have known for centuries, belligerent words and bellicose actions can have real consequences. Sometimes, potential enemies take hostile gestures more seriously than they are meant and events spiral out of control. That's what appears to have happened with North Korea's nuclear-bomb program, though Bush and his advisers seem to believe this is just one more problem they can blame on Bill Clinton.

There's another dangerous feature in Bush's differing reactions to weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and North Korea. By swaggering toward an invasion of Iraq, which is likely years away from a nuclear capability, while supporting a non-military response to North Korea, which either has or is close to possessing nuclear weapons, Bush may be sending an unintended message to other countries: "Hurry up and get the Bomb!"

Potential enemies may come to think that the best way to protect their nations against Bush's unilateralist policies and threats of invasions is to quickly add a nuclear bomb or two to the arsenal.



Nearing the end of his second year as president of the most powerful nation on earth, Bush still does not seem to have learned some basic rules of the job. One is that reckless language can create unnecessary trouble. Another is that to defend the U.S. against threats such as terrorism one must remember a basic tenet of counterinsurgency – that a wise application of military force must be coupled with careful strategies for winning hearts and minds, in this case the hearts and minds of people around the world.

Yet, with his undisciplined rhetoric and lack of world knowledge, Bush has needlessly alienated U.S. allies and dangerously alarmed enemies. The end result has been a rising flood tide of threats facing the American people, as Bush leads the nation deeper into the “big muddy” of international crises.

With the U.S. set to invade Iraq in early 2003, many knowledgeable people were questioning the Bush administration’s rationale and challenging its main *casus belli* for the looming war – namely the claims of a secret weapons of mass destruction program in Iraq and speculation that Saddam Hussein might give these weapons to al-Qaeda.

Former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq Scott Ritter had for months been making the case that no one could substantiate the allegations that Iraq possessed WMDs or was attempting to acquire them, while terrorism experts pointed out that Hussein and Osama bin Laden were mortal enemies and therefore Iraq would never give weapons to al-Qaeda.

State Department diplomat Ann Wright objected to the doctrine of pre-emptive war and quit in protest. In Wright’s resignation letter to Colin Powell, she wrote that “going to war now will make the world more dangerous, not safer,” and expressed concern over the inevitable loss of life and “destruction of the Iraqi peoples’ homes and livelihood[s].” She also worried that pre-emptive war would “provide justification for individuals and groups to ‘preemptively attack’ America.”

While whistleblowers such as Ritter and Wright attempted to correct falsehoods and flawed reasoning offered by the Bush administration, Parry wrote an article providing some badly needed historical context to the crisis. This missing history, if more widely understood, might have equipped the American people to question the U.S. rationale for attacking Iraq and could have eroded the uninformed support the Bush administration relied upon to make its case for war.

## [Missing U.S.-Iraq History \(Feb. 27, 2003\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Before George W. Bush gives the final order to invade Iraq – a nation that has not threatened the United States – the American people might want a few facts about the real history of U.S.-Iraq relations. Missing chapters from 1980 to the present would be crucial in judging Bush’s case for war.

But Americans don't have those facts because Bush and his predecessors in the White House have kept this history hidden from the American people. When parts of the story have emerged, administrations of both parties have taken steps to suppress or discredit the disclosures. So instead of knowing the truth, Americans have been fed a steady diet of distortions, simplifications and outright lies.

This missing history also is not just about minor details. It goes to the heart of the case against Saddam Hussein, including whether he is an especially "aggressive" and "unpredictable" dictator who must be removed from power even at the risk of America's standing in the world and the chance that a war will lead to more terrorism against U.S. targets.

For instance, George W. Bush has frequently cited Saddam Hussein's invasions of neighbors, Iran and Kuwait, as justification for the looming U.S. invasion of Iraq. "By defeating this threat, we will show other dictators that the path of aggression will lead to their own ruin," Bush declared during a speech in Atlanta on Feb. 20.

Leaving aside whether Bush's formulation is Orwellian newspeak – aggression to discourage aggression – there is the historical question of whether Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush actually encouraged Saddam's aggressions for geopolitical reasons or out of diplomatic incompetence.

### **Carter's 'Green Light'?**

This intersection of Saddam's wars and U.S. foreign policy dates back at least to 1980 when Iran's radical Islamic government held 52 Americans hostage in Tehran and the sheiks of the oil-rich Persian Gulf feared that Ruhollah Khomeini's radical breed of Islam might sweep them from power just as it had the Shah of Iran a year earlier.

The Iranian government began its expansionist drive by putting pressure on the secular government of Iraq, instigating border clashes and encouraging Iraq's Shiite and Kurdish populations to rise up. Iranian operatives sought to destabilize Saddam's government by assassinating Iraqi leaders.<sup>[48](#)</sup>

On Aug. 5, 1980, as tensions mounted on the Iran-Iraq border, Saudi rulers welcomed Saddam to Riyadh for the first state visit ever by an Iraqi

president to Saudi Arabia. During meetings at the kingdom's ornate palaces, the Saudis feted Saddam whose formidable Soviet-supplied army was viewed as a bulwark against Iran.

Saudi leaders also say they urged Saddam to take the fight to Iran's fundamentalist regime, advice that they say included a "green light" for the invasion from President Carter.

Less than two months after Saddam's trip, with Carter still frustrated by his inability to win release of the 52 Americans imprisoned in Iran, Saddam invaded Iran on Sept. 22, 1980. The war would rage for eight years and kill an estimated one million people.

The claim of Carter's "green light" for the invasion was made by senior Arab leaders, including King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, to President Reagan's first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, when Haig traveled to the Middle East in April 1981, according to "top secret" talking points that Haig prepared for a post-trip briefing of Reagan.

Haig wrote that he was impressed with "bits of useful intelligence" that he had learned. "Both [Egypt's Anwar] Sadat and [Saudi then-Prince] Fahd [explained that] Iran is receiving military spares for U.S. equipment from Israel," Haig noted. "It was also interesting to confirm that President Carter gave the Iraqis a green light to launch the war against Iran through Fahd."

Haig's "talking points" were first disclosed at *Consortium News* in 1995 after I discovered the document amid records from a congressional investigation into the early history of the Reagan administration's contacts with Iran. At that time, Haig refused to answer questions about the talking points because they were still classified. Though not responding to direct questions about the talking points, Carter has pooh-poohed other claims that he gave Saddam encouragement for the invasion.

But before the U.S. heads to war in 2003, both Carter and Haig might be asked to explain what they know about any direct or indirect contacts that would explain the Saudi statements about the alleged "green light." Prince Bandar, Saudi Arabia's longtime ambassador to the United States, also might be asked to give a complete account of what the Saudi government knows and what its leaders told Saddam in 1980.

## **Reagan's Iraqi Tilt**

Through the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, as first one side and then the other gained the upper hand, the Reagan administration was officially neutral but behind the scenes tilted from one side to the other.

When Iran appeared to be winning in 1982, Reagan and his advisers made a fateful decision to secretly supply Saddam's military, including permitting shipments of dual-use technology that Iraq then used to build chemical and biological weapons. Tactical military assistance also was provided, including satellite photos of the battlefield.

While congressional inquiries and press accounts have sketched out some of these facts over the years, the current Bush administration continues to plead ignorance or question the reliability of the stories.

Last September, for example, *Newsweek* reported that the Reagan administration in the 1980s had allowed sales to Iraq of computer databases that Saddam could use to track political opponents and shipments of "bacteria/fungi/protozoa" that could help produce anthrax and other biological weapons.<sup>[49](#)</sup>

Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va, asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld about the *Newsweek* story at a Senate hearing on Sept. 19. "Did the United States help Iraq to acquire the building blocks of biological weapons during the Iran-Iraq war?" Byrd inquired. "Are we, in fact, now facing the possibility of reaping what we have sown?"

"Certainly not to my knowledge," Rumsfeld responded. "I have no knowledge of United States companies or government being involved in assisting Iraq develop chemical, biological or nuclear weapons."

So even the current U.S. secretary of defense – who served the Reagan administration as a special envoy to the Middle East in 1983-84 and personally met with Saddam – says he doesn't know about this secret history. Promises of further investigation last September also haven't brought answers to Byrd's questions.

## **Senior Bush's Advice**

Beyond those "dual-use" supplies, other unanswered questions relate to whether then-Vice President George H.W. Bush urged Saddam to use

greater ferocity in waging his war with Iran, advice that led the Iraqi air force to bomb civilian centers in Tehran and other Iranian cities in 1986.

A lengthy article by Murray Waas and Craig Unger in the *New Yorker* in 1992 described the senior Bush passing on advice to Saddam, through Arab intermediaries, for this more aggressive bombing campaign. Yet the historical question has never been settled. The senior Bush has never been subjected to a careful questioning, though it is true that Saddam did intensify his air campaign after Bush's trip.

The answer would be relevant now as the younger Bush asserts that Saddam's penchant for military aggression justifies a new war. If Bush's father actually was counseling Saddam to be more aggressive, that's a fact that the American people ought to know.

Waas and Unger described the motive for the Reagan administration's tactical advice as a kind of diplomatic billiard shot. By getting Iraq to expand use of its air force, the Iranians would be more desperate for U.S.-made HAWK anti-aircraft missile parts, giving Washington more leverage with the Iranians. Iran's need to protect their cities from Iraqi air attacks gave impetus to the Reagan administration's arms-for-hostage scheme, which later became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.<sup>[50](#)</sup>

### **Another 'Green Light'?**

The devastation from the Iran-Iraq war, which finally ended in 1988, also set the stage for the Gulf War of 1990-91. The eight-year war had crippled the Iraqi economy and left Saddam's government deeply in debt.

Having been egged on by the oil-rich sheikdoms to blunt the revolutionary zeal of Iran, Saddam felt betrayed when Kuwait wouldn't write off Iraq's debts and rejected a \$10 billion loan. Beyond that, Saddam was furious with Kuwait for driving down world oil prices by overproducing and for slant-drilling into Iraqi oil fields. Many Iraqis also considered Kuwait, historically, a part of Iraq.

Before attacking Kuwait, however, Saddam consulted George H.W. Bush's administration. First, the U.S. State Department informed Saddam that Washington had "no special defense or security commitments to Kuwait."

Then, U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie told Saddam, “we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait.”

As *Foreign Policy* magazine observed, “the United States may not have intended to give Iraq a green light, but that is effectively what it did.”<sup>51</sup>

While Glaspie’s strange diplomacy drew some congressional and press attention during the previous Gulf crisis, the full context of George H.W. Bush’s relationship with Saddam – which might help explain why the Iraqi dictator so disastrously misread the U.S. signals – has never been made public.

### **A Clinton Cover-up?**

Beyond that missing history of U.S.-Iraq relations, there’s the secondary issue of cover-ups conducted by the administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

Democratic sources say Clinton heeded personal appeals from the elder Bush and other top Republicans to close the books on the so-called “Iraqgate” investigation – as well as probes into secret Reagan-Bush dealings with Iran – soon after the Democrat defeated Bush in the 1992 election.

Some Democrats say Clinton agreed to shelve the investigations out of concern for national security and the country’s unity. Others suggest that Clinton was tricked by the wily elder Bush with promises that a pullback on the Iran-Iraq investigations might win Clinton some bipartisanship with the Republicans in Congress, a tantalizing prospect that turned out to be a mirage.

Whatever the reasons, Clinton’s Justice Department did bail out the Reagan-Bush team in the mid-1990s when more disclosures about the secret dealings with Iraq flooded to the surface. Perhaps the most important disclosure was an affidavit by former Reagan administration official Howard Teicher that was filed in connection with a criminal trial in Miami in 1995. The Teicher affidavit was the first sworn public account by a Reagan insider of the covert U.S.-Iraq relationship.

Teicher, who served on Reagan’s National Security Council staff, traced the U.S. tilt to Iraq to a turning point in the war in 1982 when Iran gained the

offensive and fears swept through the U.S. government that Iran's army might slice through Iraq to the oil fields of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

"In June 1982, President Reagan decided that the United States could not afford to allow Iraq to lose the war to Iran," Teicher wrote in his affidavit. Teicher said he helped draft a secret national security decision directive that Reagan signed to authorize covert U.S. assistance to Saddam Hussein's military.

The effort to arm the Iraqis was "spearheaded" by CIA Director William Casey and involved his deputy, Robert Gates, according to Teicher's affidavit. "The CIA, including both CIA Director Casey and Deputy Director Gates, knew of, approved of, and assisted in the sale of non-U.S. origin military weapons, ammunition and vehicles to Iraq," Teicher wrote.

In 1984, Teicher said he went to Iraq with Rumsfeld to convey a secret Israeli offer to assist Iraq after Israel had concluded that Iran was becoming a greater danger. "I traveled with Rumsfeld to Baghdad and was present at the meeting in which Rumsfeld told Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz about Israel's offer of assistance," Teicher wrote. "Aziz refused even to accept the Israelis' letter to Hussein offering assistance because Aziz told us that he would be executed on the spot by Hussein if he did so."

Another key player in Reagan's Iraq tilt was then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, according to Teicher's affidavit.

"In 1986, President Reagan sent a secret message to Saddam Hussein telling him that Iraq should step up its air war and bombing of Iran," Teicher wrote. "This message was delivered by Vice President Bush who communicated it to Egyptian President Mubarak, who in turn passed the message to Saddam Hussein.

"Similar strategic operational military advice was passed to Saddam Hussein through various meetings with European and Middle Eastern heads of state. I authored Bush's talking points for the 1986 meeting with Mubarak and personally attended numerous meetings with European and Middle East heads of state where the strategic operational advice was communicated."

Teicher's affidavit represented a major break in the historical mystery of U.S. aid to Iraq. But it complicated a criminal arms-trafficking case that Clinton's Justice Department was prosecuting against Teledyne Industries and a salesman named Ed Johnson. They had allegedly sold explosive pellets to Chilean arms manufacturer Carlos Cardoen, who used them to manufacture cluster bombs for Iraq.

### **Red-Faced Prosecutors**

Prior to trying the Teledyne case, Clinton's Justice Department declared that its investigation "did not find evidence that U.S. agencies or officials illegally armed Iraq." But the review noted, curiously, that the CIA had withheld an unknown number of documents that were contained in "sensitive compartments" that were denied to the investigators. Despite that denial of access, the Clinton investigators expressed confidence in their conclusions.

Two weeks after that exonerating report, however, Teicher's affidavit was filed in federal court in Miami, embarrassing senior Justice Department officials. After taking the word of former Reagan-Bush officials and agreeing not to examine the CIA's "sensitive compartments," the Justice Department officials looked gullible, incompetent or complicit.

They took their fury out on Teicher, insisting that his affidavit was unreliable and threatening him with dire consequences for coming forward. Yet, while deeming Teicher's affidavit false, the Clinton administration also declared the document a state secret, classifying it and putting it under court seal. A few copies, however, had been distributed outside the court and the text was soon posted on the internet.

After officially suppressing the Teicher affidavit, the Justice Department prosecutors persuaded the judge presiding in the Teledyne-Johnson case to rule testimony about the Reagan-Bush policies to be irrelevant. Unable to mount its planned defense, Teledyne agreed to plead guilty and accept a \$13 million fine. Johnson, the salesman who had earned a modest salary in the mid-\$30,000 range, was convicted of illegal arms trafficking and given a prison term.

Before a U.S. invasion of Iraq begins, former President Clinton might be asked whether he was approached by George H.W. Bush or a Bush



emissary with an request to drop investigations into Reagan-Bush policies in the Middle East.

Teicher, who has since 1995 refused to discuss his affidavit, could be given a congressional forum to testify about his knowledge. So could other surviving U.S. officials named in Teicher's affidavit, including Gates and Rumsfeld. Foreign leaders mentioned in the affidavit also could be approached, including former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Mubarak and Aziz.

### **Junior Bush's Hidden Records**

George W. Bush also has some questions he should answer before missiles start crashing into Baghdad. When he took office in 2001, one of his first acts as president was to block the legally required release of documents from the Reagan-Bush administration.

Then, after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks as a stunned nation rallied around him, Bush issued an even more sweeping secrecy order. He granted former presidents and vice presidents or their surviving family members the right to stop release of historical records, including those related to "military, diplomatic or national security secrets." Bush's order stripped the Archivist of the United States of the power to overrule claims of privilege from former presidents and their representatives.

By a twist of history, Bush's order eventually could give him control of both his and his father's records covering 12 years of the Reagan-Bush era and however long Bush's own presidential term lasts, potentially a 20-year swath of documentary evidence.

As the junior Bush now takes the nation to war in the name of freedom and democracy, he might at least be challenged to reverse that secrecy and release all relevant documents on the history of the Reagan-Bush policies in the Middle East.

Without the full history – as embarrassing as that record might be to the last five U.S. presidents – the American people cannot judge whether the nation's security will be enhanced or endangered by Bush's decision to put the United States on its own aggressive course of action.

On March 19, 2003, the U.S. launched air strikes on Iraq followed by a ground invasion the next day. Since Iraq had not attacked nor threatened to attack the United States and since the

U.S. invasion was not authorized by the UN Security Council, it was a rather clearcut violation of the UN Charter, which requires UN Member States to refrain from the use of force and instead use “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means” to settle disputes.

Most media outlets brushed aside concerns about international law, however, and the prevailing view of journalists was summarized by CBS anchorman Dan Rather who said, “I’m an American ... and when my country is at war, I want my country to win.” Civilian casualties were downplayed or ignored altogether, and much of the media adopted an unabashedly hyper-patriotic tone, with American flags incorporated into cable news TV graphics, and coverage of the war effusive and upbeat.

Parry, however, could see from the outset that the war was not going according to plan. Eleven days into the invasion he published the following article, which went against the grain and declared the war lost regardless of what would happen in the weeks ahead. The article would prove prescient, as although Saddam Hussein was ousted from power on April 9 and Bush declared victory on May 1, the war was only just beginning. A bloody insurgency would ensue, with many of the ousted Baathists joining the armed resistance, and U.S. occupation forces suffering thousands of casualties in the coming years.

## [Bay of Pigs Meets Black Hawk Down \(March 30, 2003\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

Whatever happens in the weeks ahead, George W. Bush has “lost” the war in Iraq. The only question now is how big a price America will pay, both in terms of battlefield casualties and political hatred swelling around the world.

That is the view slowly dawning on U.S. military analysts, who privately are asking whether the cost of ousting Saddam Hussein has grown so large that “victory” will constitute a strategic defeat of historic proportions. At best, even assuming Saddam’s ouster, the Bush administration may be looking at an indefinite period of governing something akin to a California-size Gaza Strip.

The chilling realization is spreading in Washington that Bush’s Iraqi debacle may be the mother of all presidential miscalculations – an extraordinary blend of Bay of Pigs-style wishful thinking with a “Black Hawk Down” reliance on special operations to wipe out enemy leaders as a short-cut to victory. But the magnitude of the Iraq disaster could be far

worse than either the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba in 1961 or the bloody miscalculations in Somalia in 1993.

In both those cases, the U.S. government showed the tactical flexibility to extricate itself from military misjudgments without grave strategic damage.

The CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion left a small army of Cuban exiles in the lurch when the rosy predictions of popular uprisings against Fidel Castro failed to materialize. To the nation's advantage, however, President John Kennedy applied what he learned from the Bay of Pigs – that he shouldn't blindly trust his military advisers – to navigate the far more dangerous Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

The botched “Black Hawk Down” raid in Mogadishu cost the lives of 18 U.S. soldiers, but President Bill Clinton then cut U.S. losses by recognizing the hopelessness of the leadership-decapitation strategy and withdrawing American troops from Somalia. Similarly, President Ronald Reagan pulled out U.S. forces from Lebanon in 1983 after a suicide bomber killed 241 Marines who were part of a force that had entered Beirut as peacekeepers but found itself drawn into the middle of a brutal civil war.

### **The Bush Strategy**

Few analysts today, however, believe that George W. Bush and his senior advisers, including Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, have the common sense to swallow the short-term bitter medicine of a ceasefire or a U.S. withdrawal. Rather than face the music for admitting to the gross error of ordering an invasion in defiance of the United Nations and then misjudging the enemy, these U.S. leaders are expected to push forward no matter how bloody or ghastly their future course might be.

Without doubt, the Bush administration misjudged the biggest question of the war: “Would the Iraqis fight?” Happy visions of rose petals and cheers have given way to a grim reality of ambushes and suicide bombs.

But the Bush pattern of miscalculation continues unabated. Bush seems to have cut himself off from internal dissent at the CIA and the Pentagon, where intelligence analysts and field generals warned against the wishful thinking that is proving lethal on the Iraqi battlefields.

Secretary Rumsfeld has emerged as the principal bully in enforcing Bush's dangerous groupthink, a pattern that dates back to the war in Afghanistan when senior generals feared disagreeing with Rumsfeld. In one telling, though little-noticed passage in Bob Woodward's *Bush at War*, Bush asks Gen. Tommy Franks for his opinion, only to have Franks defer to Rumsfeld.

"Sir, I think exactly what my secretary thinks, what he's ever thought, what he will ever think, or whatever he thought he might think," said Franks, who is now commander of U.S. forces fighting in Iraq.

So, instead of recognizing their initial errors and reconsidering their war strategy, Bush and his team are pressing forward confidently into what looks like a dreamscape of their own propaganda.

Once Saddam is killed, their latest reasoning goes, the Iraqi people will begin celebrating like some Mideast version of the flying monkeys in *The Wizard of Oz*, who were transformed into happy creatures once the Wicked Witch of the West was dead. However, there is little empirical evidence to support Bush's deferred rosy scenario of thankful Iraqis.

### **Grim Prospect**

A long occupation would be another grim prospect for American soldiers. Given what's happened in the past 11 days, U.S. occupation troops and Iraqi collaborators can expect an extended period of scattered fighting that might well involve assassinations and bombings. U.S. troops, inexperienced with Iraqi culture and ignorant of the Arabic language, will be put in the predicament of making split-second decisions about whether to shoot some 14-year-old boy with a backpack or some 70-year-old woman in a chador.

In retrospect, it should be clear that the only way for Bush's military strategy to have worked was for the bulk of the Iraqi army to throw down its weapons in the first few days, at least in the southern cities. Mass surrenders and easy victories outside Baghdad might have convinced the Arab street and world opinion that the invasion had popular support or at least acquiescence inside Iraq.

Once the "shock and awe" bombing failed to crack the regime and Iraqis showed they were willing to fight in cities such as Umm Qasr, Basra and

Nasiriya – where Saddam's support was considered weak – Bush's initial war strategy was shown to be a grave mistake.

The supposedly decisive "shock and awe" bombing in the war's opening days amounted to TV pyrotechnics that did little more than blow up empty government buildings, including Saddam's tackily decorated palaces. The U.S. had so telegraphed the punch that the buildings had been evacuated.

Bush also rushed the invasion without the full U.S. force in place. Once Turkey balked at letting the Army's Fourth Division use Turkish territory to open a northern front, Bush had the option of delaying the war by a month to transfer the division's armor and equipment to Kuwait.

### **'Feel Good'**

But Bush, the self-described "gut player" who had pronounced himself tired of the diplomatic games, lurched ahead.

The new watchword was a "rolling start," which meant that the invasion would begin before a full complement of U.S. forces was in place. So, American generals, who had wanted 500,000 troops and then settled for a force half that size, were told to launch the war with only about half of that lower number available.

There were doubters, but they were ignored. Before the war, one seasoned military analyst told me that he didn't believe the aerial bombing would be as decisive as the administration thought, and he worried that the slimmed-down U.S. force would leave only about 20,000 front-line infantry troops to match up against a far bigger Iraqi army. The Americans also would be fighting in a foreign terrain. The risks, he said, were enormous, but his cautionary advice was unwelcome inside the gung-ho White House.

After the war began, these skeptics saw their warnings borne out. Faced with stiff resistance across Iraq, the U.S. forces found their supplies lines stretched and under pressure. There were too few forces to protect the convoys that were bringing not only armaments north for the siege of Baghdad, but also necessities such as bottled water for the troops.

Now, as the official optimism continues in Washington, the military options are getting grimmer by the day in Iraq.

### **War Boosters**

Over the past several months, despite escalating rhetoric from his team about the potential dangers posed by Iraq, Bush could muster only four out of 15 votes on the UN Security Council, causing him to withdraw a resolution to authorize war. It was a diplomatic defeat of historic proportions, though the embarrassing vote count was barely reported by a U.S. news media that was excitedly turning its attention to the impending war.

Since the war began March 19, the cable news channels have been Bush's most reliable handmaidens as they compete to demonstrate greater "patriotism" than the other networks.

While still insisting that its news is "fair and balanced," Fox News has taken to broadcasting stirring sequences of American and British soldiers being interviewed about the war while a harmonica soundtrack in the background plays the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Fox's super-patriotic tone apparently has helped it outpace its chief rivals, MSNBC and CNN, in the ratings war.

Though lagging, MSNBC and CNN have not trailed Fox by much in pitching their own news in the glow of red-white-and-blue righteousness. Like Fox, MSNBC uses a logo that superimposes the American flag on scenes of Iraq. CNN has adopted Bush's name for the war – "Operation Iraqi Freedom" – as the subtitle for much of its coverage, even when the scenes show Iraqis being rounded up and handcuffed.

The major TV networks also have swapped professionalism for jingoism as their high-priced anchors wallow in the first-person plural of the war, describing what "we" are going to do to Saddam. "One of the things that we don't want to do is to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq because in a few days we're going to own that country," NBC's Tom Brokaw explained on March 19, the opening night for "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Eleven days later, with heavy fighting still ahead before the U.S. government can claim to "own" Iraq, the slanted U.S. media coverage continues to stunt the debate among the American people and inside the U.S. government. Bush and his aides are insisting that this truncated debate be maintained by saying that anything other than military victory is

unthinkable. Only by charging ahead can the United States find a way out of the darkening tunnel.

### **‘Big Muddy’**

The administration’s so-called “forward-leaning” strategy is an extension of the logic that led to the war. It started when U.S. forces were first shipped to the Persian Gulf region. That was necessary, the administration said, to show resolve and force Saddam to give up his weapons of mass destruction.

The administration then argued that once the U.S. troops were in place, there was no realistic choice but to use them. Otherwise, Saddam would thumb his nose at another Bush and America would lose credibility.

Now, the argument holds, that since the troops have been committed to battle, any result that leaves Saddam in power would be a humiliation to Washington and embolden other dictators around the world.

Here the historical analogy is closer to the Vietnam War during which Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon argued that a U.S. military withdrawal would have dangerous strategic consequences, touching off falling of dominoes across Southeast Asia. That logic led to a deepening U.S. military commitment in Southeast Asia and the expansion of the war beyond Vietnam’s borders. Only after a decade of bloody fighting did Washington painfully negotiate a withdrawal from the conflict.

In Iraq, Bush is demanding that the American people follow him into this new “big muddy” and that having taken the first steps into the swamp there’s now no choice but to press on. As a person who has never had much interest in history or other cultures, Bush may be only dimly aware of the worrisome historical precedents surrounding the trail he has chosen.

Unwittingly, Bush may be applying all the wrong lessons from America’s worst military disasters of the past 40-plus years. He’s mixing risky military tactics with a heavy reliance on propaganda and a large dose of wishful thinking.

Bush also has guessed wrong on the one crucial ingredient that would separate meaningful victory from the political defeat that is now looming. He completely miscalculated the reaction of the Iraqi people to an invasion.

More and more, Bush appears to be heading toward that ultimate lesson of U.S. military futility. He's committed himself – and the nation – to destroying Iraq in order to save it.

Despite a vocal and broad-based anti-war movement that brought millions of people into the streets of American cities, by the time of the Iraq invasion in spring of 2003, polls showed that most Americans supported the policy of pre-emptive war, even if the main rationale offered by the Bush administration – Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction – turned out to be false. Parry attributed this consent to a sustained propaganda effort by the administration and the U.S. media, which had successfully convinced most Americans that attacking a nation that posed no threat to the United States was somehow justified.

But rather than a legitimate use of military force in defense of U.S. national security, Bush's assault on Iraq was comparable to the Galactic Empire's annihilation of Princess Leia's home planet of Alderaan in the original Star Wars movie – a cruel act of naked aggression against a virtually defenseless target – as Parry argues here.

## [Bush's Alderaan \(April 8, 2003\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

In the latest sign of a troubled American democracy, a large majority of U.S. citizens now say they wouldn't mind if no weapons of mass destruction are found in Iraq, though it was George W. Bush's chief rationale for war. Americans also don't seem to mind that Bush appears to have deceived them for months when he claimed he hadn't made up his mind about invading Iraq.

As he marched the nation to war, Bush presented himself as a Christian man of peace who saw war only as a last resort. But in a remarkable though little noted disclosure, *Time* magazine reported that in March 2002 – a full year before the invasion – Bush outlined his real thinking to three U.S. senators, “Fuck Saddam,” Bush said. “We’re taking him out.”

Bush offered his pithy judgment after sticking his head in the door of a White House meeting between National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and three senators who had been discussing strategies for dealing with Iraq through the United Nations. The senators laughed uncomfortably at Bush's remark, *Time* reported.<sup>[52](#)</sup>

It now is clear that Bush never intended to avoid a war in Iraq, a conflict which has so far claimed the lives of at least 85 American soldiers and



thousands of Iraqis.

### **No Credibility**

Much of the world – from Canada to Cameroon – caught on to the administration's game as it sought to manipulate international support for an invasion. Bush's lack of credibility on the world stage left him with only four out of 15 votes on the UN Security Council for a war resolution.

The Bush administration's deceit was so obvious that even *Washington Post* columnist David Broder spotted it. Broder, who has built a career ignoring unpleasant realities about Washington's powerful, observed how Bush had choreographed the march to war.

"Looking back, the major landmarks of the past year appear to have been carefully designed to leave no alternative but war with Iraq – or an unlikely capitulation and abdication by Hussein," Broder wrote on the eve of the war. Noting Bush's post-Sept. 11 doctrine of waging preemptive war against any nation that he deemed a potential threat, Broder said, "It quickly became clear that Iraq had been chosen as the test case of the new doctrine."<sup>53</sup>

Once Bush had chosen the site, there was virtually nothing the Iraqi government could do to avoid war, short of total capitulation. As a demonstration of both America's military might and his own itchy trigger finger, Bush had decided to make Iraq his Alderaan, the hapless planet in the original Star Wars movie that was picked to show off the power of the Death Star.

"Fear will keep the local systems in line, fear of this battle station," explained Death Star commander Tarkin in the movie. "No star system will dare oppose the emperor now."

Similarly, the slaughter of the outmatched Iraqi military is meant to send a message to other countries that might try to resist Bush's dictates. At a Central Command briefing, Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks took note of this awesome power on display as he described the decimation of Iraqi forces south of Baghdad.

"They're in serious trouble," Brooks said. "They remain in contact now with the most powerful force on earth." Using the unsavory Saddam

Hussein as a foil, Bush was unleashing hell on the Iraqis.

### **God's Work**

For his part, Bush sees his mission in messianic terms, believing that he is the instrument of God as he strikes at Saddam Hussein and other U.S. adversaries. In a profile of Bush at war, *USA Today* cited Commerce Secretary Don Evans, one of Bush's closest friends, describing Bush's belief that he was called on by God to do what he's doing.

Bush's obsession with Hussein also was traced to a personal loathing for the dictator. Bush "is convinced that the Iraqi leader is literally insane and would gladly give terrorists weapons to use to launch another attack on the United States," the newspaper reported. In that conviction, however, Bush is at odds with CIA analysts who concluded last year that the secular Hussein would only share weapons with Islamic terrorists if the United States invaded Iraq.

In private, Bush is even more peevish than usual, *USA Today* reported. "He rarely jokes with staffers these days and occasionally startles them with sarcastic put-downs," the newspaper wrote. "He's a critic who sees himself as the aggrieved victim of the news media and second-guessers."<sup>54</sup>

### **Flag-Waving Coverage**

Still, Bush has succeeded at a central task. Aided by a U.S. news media that sees ratings gold in its red-white-and-blue coverage of the war, Bush has taught the American people to relish this one-sided annihilation of thousands of Iraqi soldiers resisting an unprovoked invasion of their country.

Recent polls show that Americans have little regard for international law and care little about the deaths of Iraqis. Many respondents saw no problem in the possibility that Bush had misled the nation in justifying the war.

A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll found 69 percent of Americans endorsing the war even if no weapons of mass destruction are found. "I would not feel that I had been sold a bill of goods by the Bush administration," 27-year-old law student Brad Stephens said.<sup>55</sup>

By contrast, people all over the world are outraged at the U.S. invasion of Iraq, with opinion polls registering opposition often exceeding 90 percent.

U.S. public sentiment could change if a low-level guerrilla conflict drags on inflicting a growing number of American casualties. But so far the American people seem to be buying into the war as a kind of ultimate reality TV show.

The TV networks have responded by trying to associate their news products with America's fighting men and women. On MSNBC, there is "America's Bravest," mini-profiles of citizen soldiers. On Fox News, the pro-war propaganda is unrelenting and unapologetic. CNN, too, puts a pro-U.S. spin on nearly every piece of war news.

Even when American forces kill innocent civilians – as happened near Najaf where seven women and children were shot to death amid confusion at a U.S. checkpoint – the Iraqi government is held to blame, for allegedly putting women and children in harm's way.

Yet what is disturbing to many war critics about the American reaction to the war is that Bush secured majority backing by misleading the U.S. public about key facts – and the majority of American people don't seem to care.

When Secretary of State Colin Powell took the administration's propaganda campaign to the UN, he pointed to unnamed "sources" and photos of trucks and buildings that proved nothing. Powell played an intercepted phone call between two Iraqis shouting Arabic at one another and then Powell added fictitious words to the State Department's translation to make the case that the Iraqis were cleaning out illegal weapons before a UN inspection.

In his UN presentation, Powell also hailed a British dossier that he said described in "exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities." The British report, however, turned out to be cribbed from an outdated student paper on the internet. Powell further shredded his personal credibility by insisting that a communique broadcast by al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, which denounced both the U.S. intentions to invade Iraq and the Iraqi government, was proof that bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were "in partnership."

**Two Oceans**

Bush executed his own leaps of logic intended to frighten the American people rather than engage them in a reasoned debate. He repeatedly cited Sept. 11 in arguing that the terrorist attacks proved that the U.S. no longer was protected by its two oceans.

In the days leading up to war, Bush and his administration continued salting their speeches with bogus allegations, some of which had been disproved by the UN and even U.S. intelligence agencies. On March 16, Vice President Dick Cheney trotted out the canard that Iraq had “reconstituted nuclear weapons,” though the International Atomic Energy Agency had debunked that key element of the U.S. case.

The IAEA discovered that aluminum tubes that Bush had argued were meant for centrifuges to produce enriched uranium would not serve that function. The IAEA also reported that a document about Iraqi attempts to purchase uranium in Niger was a forgery. It later turned out that CIA analysts also had doubted the authenticity of the Niger document, but it was still included in Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address.<sup>[56](#)</sup>

IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei said inspections of Iraq had found “no indication of resumed nuclear activity.” Yet Iraq’s alleged nuclear program remained a scary part of the case for war.

### **White Man’s Burden**

Ironically, as the American political debate is shaped by endless propaganda, another one of the war’s stated goals is to make Iraq a model of democracy. This argument, promoted by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, has given the bloodshed and destruction in Iraq an idealistic tinge.

To the administration’s critics, however, the Wolfowitz scheme is possibly one of the most dangerous aspects of the war, an ideological hubris that foretells other conflicts and the likely creation of a new generation of anti-American terrorists who will be determined to drive an imperial U.S. out of the Middle East.

Bestowing democracy on Iraq through war carries a whiff of previous colonial rationales for empire, a kind of modern-day White Man’s Burden,

the claim that imperialism was justified because it brought civilization to dark corners of the world.

Yet given the deception and jingoism pervading the American war debate, many in the world may no longer see the U.S. political system as the preeminent model of democracy, that shining city on the hill serving as a beacon of freedom and reason. Instead, the crude lies and the other PR techniques that have rallied the nation to war make the beginning of Bush's "crusade" to rid the world of "evil" look more like the Stupid White Man's Burden.

On the one-year anniversary of Saddam Hussein's ouster from power and in the midst of a coordinated militia uprising across Iraq, Parry published this article that drew comparisons between the Iraq quagmire and the U.S.'s earlier misadventure in the jungles of Vietnam – including the refusal of people in power to acknowledge reality.

## [Bush's Tet \(April 9, 2004\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Like the Viet Cong-North Vietnamese offensive during the Tet holiday in 1968, this April's Iraqi uprising in both Sunni and Shiite regions has altered the perception of the reality on the ground. Just as the Tet offensive shattered the "light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel" myth in Vietnam, the Iraqi uprising has destroyed any realistic prospect that the Bush administration's wishful thinking about Iraq might somehow come true.

The uprising – from the street-to-street fighting in the Sunni city of Fallujah to the running battles with Moktada al-Sadr's militia forces in Shiite strongholds in the south – means that the political side of the Iraq War is lost and that means the war itself is effectively lost. The only big questions left are how many more soldiers and civilians will die – and how many more angry young Islamic radicals will be driven into the arms of al-Qaeda.

But the immediate question in Washington is whether the Bush administration and its legions of defenders will come to grips with this unpleasant reality on the ground.

### **War Hawks**

The *New York Times* columnist William Safire is an example of the pro-Bush war hawks who have chosen to hunker down in the ideological rubble

of Bush's strategy. "We should keep in mind our historic bet: that given their freedom from a savage tyrant, the three groups that make up Iraq could, with our help, create a rudimentary democracy that would turn the tide against terrorism," Safire wrote in an April 7 column.

But that notion of a U.S.-nurtured "democracy" somehow turning the tide against terrorism is among the casualties of the Iraqi uprising. It should now be obvious that the U.S.-led occupation is hated by too many Iraqis, who are ready to fight and die, for Iraq ever to submit to a U.S. formula for a future government.

Bush's "historic bet" in Iraq assumed incorrectly that the U.S.-led invasion would be broadly tolerated by the Iraqi people. A little more than a year ago, senior Bush administration officials, such as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, assured the American people that the U.S. troops would be welcomed by thankful Iraqis with open arms and flowers. The administration expected that civic order would be quickly restored and U.S. troop levels could be reduced to about 30,000 within months.

Less optimistic military experts, such as Gen. Eric Shinseki who foresaw the need of several hundred thousand soldiers, were ridiculed by the likes of Wolfowitz, who said Shinseki's estimate was "way off the mark." Today, a year after the invasion, U.S. troop levels are about 135,000 and U.S. commanders are considering a request for more soldiers.

Bush's "historic bet" also held that with Saddam Hussein gone, Iraqis would let the U.S. occupiers elevate pro-U.S. Iraqis to leadership posts, privatize Iraqi industries, sell oil rights to international corporations, draft a constitution and eventually hold elections intended to sanction the post-invasion status quo.

Phase Two of this "historic bet" foresaw the U.S. success in Iraq toppling the first of many anti-American dominoes across the Middle East. More pragmatic experts, such as former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, warned that these ambitious goals reflected a naivete about the region and could prove counterproductive.

## **Iraqi Resistance**

Indeed, Bush's scheme did go awry almost from the start, with Iraqi resistance fiercer than expected. Some American supply columns were ambushed in towns like Nasiriyah that were expected to be friendly.

U.S. public optimism about the war was revived when U.S. troops captured Baghdad and toppled Saddam Hussein's statue on April 9, 2003. But the stretched-thin U.S. forces found themselves confronting looting and chaos. In some restless cities, such as Fallujah, U.S. troops fired into crowds of demonstrators, killing civilians and stoking the beginnings of a resistance.

On the political front, the hand-picked members of the Iraqi "Governing Council" were widely viewed as quislings who survived only under the protection of the U.S. military. Meanwhile, terrorists slipped into central Iraq and carried out suicide bombings, including the destruction of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003.

Rather than see these setbacks as warning signs, the Bush administration continued to believe its own PR about progress. So, instead of using existing food ration lists as voting rolls for quick elections of Iraqi leaders who could claim some popular support, U.S. officials dawdled, insisting on a better national voting list, a fine-tuned interim constitution and then elections.

### **The Sovereignty Scam**

Those promises of Iraqi national elections now continue to recede, even as Washington says it will turn over "sovereignty" to Iraqis on June 30. Rather than making progress on preparations for elections, U.S. troops and coalition allies are battling Iraqi insurgents in cities all over the country.

Even more troubling to U.S. policymakers, the insurgency appears to have taken deeper root among the population, with many Iraqis working as merchants or laborers during the day with their guns ready to fight the Americans. In addition, Sunnis and Shiites – normally bitter rivals – have begun to cooperate in attacks on coalition troops, according to recent press reports.

While the Bush administration continues to insist that the uprising reflects the discontent of only a small number of Iraqis, U.S. intelligence has concluded that, to the contrary, the Shiite uprising is broad-based, the *New*

*York Times* reported. “Intelligence officials now say that there is evidence that the insurgency goes beyond Mr. Sadr and his militia, and that a much larger number of Shiites have turned against the American-led occupation,” correspondent James Risen wrote.<sup>57</sup>

The much-touted handover of “sovereignty” is also certain to disappoint the Iraqis since very little will change. The June 30 ceremonies appear more targeted at U.S. public opinion than the Iraqi people. But the political risk to the Bush administration could grow when Americans see continued U.S. casualties and begin to understand that the handover of power in Iraq was more a shell game than real.

### **Vietnam to Iraq**

Rather than applying a dose of realism to Bush’s “historic bet,” Bush defenders are still trying to marginalize dissenters, a continuation of a public relations strategy that has been employed since the pre-war buildup in fall 2002. But the harrowing pictures from Iraq and the growing list of casualties are making Bush’s PR strategy harder to enforce.

More and more Americans are skeptical of Bush’s “historic bet” and are viewing him as a sort of gambling addict sliding more and more chips onto the table while holding a losing hand. As any experienced gambler knows, there is a name for someone who doesn’t know when to fold a bad hand and pull back from the table: sucker.

But Bush isn’t just betting the kid’s college fund. He’s risking the lives of U.S. soldiers and Iraqi citizens. He’s also running the risk that his gamble will increase U.S. vulnerability to terrorism, not lessen it.

Like an amateur poker player in too deep, George W. Bush can’t seem to see any alternative but to go in deeper. In November, the American people will have to decide whether to escort Bush from the table or to give him a whole new pile of chips.

As Bush began his second term, his administration’s top concern was pacifying the insurgency raging in Iraq. The counterinsurgency strategy incorporated brutal tactics that had been used two decades earlier in Central America, practices that Robert Parry had covered extensively while at the AP. Here, Parry discusses the Bush administration’s “Salvador option” and profiles the unsavory characters who would implement it.



## [Bush's 'Death Squads' \(Jan. 11, 2005\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Refusing to admit personal misjudgments on Iraq, George W. Bush instead is pushing the United States toward becoming what might be called a permanent “counter-terrorist” state, which uses torture, cross-border death squads and even collective punishments to defeat perceived enemies in Iraq and around the world.

As a centerpiece of this tougher strategy to pacify Iraq, Bush is contemplating the adoption of the brutal practices that were used to suppress leftist peasant uprisings in Central America in the 1980s. The Pentagon is “intensively debating” a new policy for Iraq called the “Salvador option,” *Newsweek* magazine reported on Jan. 9.

The strategy is named after the Reagan-Bush administration’s “still-secret strategy” of supporting El Salvador’s right-wing security forces, which operated clandestine “death squads” to eliminate both leftist guerrillas and their civilian sympathizers, *Newsweek* reported. “Many U.S. conservatives consider the policy to have been a success – despite the deaths of innocent civilians,” *Newsweek* wrote.

### **Central America Veterans**

The magazine also noted that a number of Bush administration officials were leading figures in the Central American operations of the 1980s, such as John Negroponte, who was then U.S. ambassador to Honduras and is now U.S. ambassador to Iraq.

Other current officials who played key roles in Central America include Elliott Abrams, who oversaw Central American policies at the State Department and who is now a Middle East adviser on Bush’s National Security Council staff, and Vice President Dick Cheney, who was a powerful defender of the Central American policies while a member of the House of Representatives.

The insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala were crushed through the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians. In Guatemala, about 200,000 people perished, including what a truth commission later termed a genocide

against Mayan Indians in the Guatemalan highlands. In El Salvador, about 70,000 died including massacres of whole villages, such as the slaughter carried out by a U.S.-trained battalion against hundreds of men, women and children in and around the town of El Mozote in 1981.

The Reagan-Bush strategy also had a domestic component, the so-called “perception management” operation that employed sophisticated propaganda to manipulate the fears of the American people while hiding the ugly reality of the wars. The Reagan-Bush administration justified its actions in Central America by portraying the popular uprisings as an attempt by the Soviet Union to establish a beachhead in the Americas to threaten the U.S. southern border.

### **More Pain**

By employing the “Salvador option” in Iraq, the U.S. military would crank up the pain, especially in Sunni Muslim areas where resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq has been strongest. In effect, Bush would assign other Iraqi ethnic groups the job of leading the “death squad” campaign against the Sunnis.

“One Pentagon proposal would send Special Forces teams to advise, support and possibly train Iraqi squads, most likely hand-picked Kurdish Perhmerga fighters and Shiite militiamen, to target Sunni insurgents and their sympathizers, even across the border into Syria, according to military insiders familiar with discussions,” *Newsweek* reported.

Citing the Central American experiences of many Bush administration officials, we wrote in November 2003 – more than a year ago – that many of these Reagan-Bush veterans were drawing lessons from the 1980s in trying to cope with the Iraqi insurgency. We pointed out, however, that the conditions were not parallel.

In Central America, powerful oligarchs had long surrounded themselves with ruthless security forces and armies. So, when uprisings swept across the region in the early 1980s, the Reagan-Bush administration had ready-made – though unsavory – allies who could do the dirty work with financial and technological help from Washington.

### **Iraqi Dynamic**

A different dynamic exists in Iraq, because the Bush administration chose to disband rather than co-opt the Iraqi army. That left U.S. forces with few reliable local allies and put the onus for carrying out counterinsurgency operations on American soldiers who were unfamiliar with the land, the culture and the language.

Those problems, in turn, contributed to a series of counterproductive tactics, including the heavy-handed round-ups of Iraqi suspects, the torturing of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and the killing of innocent civilians by jittery U.S. troops fearful of suicide bombings.

The war in Iraq also has undermined U.S. standing elsewhere in the Middle East and around the world. Images of U.S. soldiers sexually abusing Iraqi prisoners, putting bags over the heads of captives and shooting a wounded insurgent have blackened America's image everywhere and made cooperation with the United States increasingly difficult even in countries long considered American allies.

Beyond the troubling images, more and more documents have surfaced indicating that the Bush administration had adopted limited forms of torture as routine policy, both in Iraq and the broader War on Terror. Last August, an FBI counterterrorism official criticized abusive practices at the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water. Most times they had urinated or defecated on themselves, and had been left there for 18-24 hours or more," the official wrote. "When I asked the M.P.'s what was going on, I was told that interrogators from the day prior had ordered this treatment, and the detainee was not to be moved. On another occasion ... the detainee was almost unconscious on the floor, with a pile of hair next to him. He had apparently been literally pulling his own hair out throughout the night."

Despite official insistence that torture is not U.S. policy, the blame for these medieval tactics continues to climb the chain of command toward the Oval Office. It appears to have been Bush's decision after the Sept. 11 attacks to "take the gloves off."

**TV World**

Many Americans have fantasized about how they would enjoy watching Osama bin Laden tortured to death for his admitted role in the Sept. 11 attacks. There is also a tough-guy fondness for torture as shown in action entertainment – like Fox Network’s “24” – where torture is a common-sense shortcut to get results.

But the larger danger arises when the exceptional case becomes the routine, when it’s no longer the clearly guilty al-Qaeda mass murderer, but it is now the distraught Iraqi father trying to avenge the death of his child killed by American bombs.

Rather than the dramatic scenes on TV, the reality is usually more like that desperate creature in Guantanamo lying in his own waste and pulling out his hair. The situation can get even worse when torture takes on the industrial quality of government policy, with subjects processed through the gulags or the concentration camps.

That also is why the United States and other civilized countries have long banned torture and prohibited the intentional killing of civilians. The goal of international law has been to set standards that couldn’t be violated even in extreme situations or in the passions of the moment.

Yet, Bush – with his limited world experience – was easily sold on the notion of U.S. “exceptionalism” where America’s innate goodness frees it from the legal constraints that apply to lesser countries.

Bush also came to believe in the wisdom of his “gut” judgments. After his widely praised ouster of Afghanistan’s Taliban government in late 2001, Bush set his sights on invading Iraq. Like a hot gambler in Las Vegas doubling his bets, Bush’s instincts were on a roll.

Now, however, as the Iraqi insurgency continues to grow and inflict more casualties on both U.S. troops and Iraqis who have thrown in their lot with the Americans, Bush finds himself facing a narrowing list of very tough choices.

Bush could acknowledge his mistakes and seek international help in extricating U.S. forces from Iraq. But Bush abhors admitting errors, even small ones. Plus, Bush’s belligerent tone hasn’t created much incentive for other countries to bail him out.

Instead Bush appears to be upping the ante by contemplating cross-border raids into countries neighboring Iraq. He also would be potentially expanding the war by having Iraqi Kurds and Shiites kill Sunnis, a prescription for civil war or genocide.

In late August 2005 a large Category 5 hurricane hit the city of New Orleans and surrounding areas, causing 1,800 deaths and \$125 billion in damages. Hurricane Katrina's impact was exacerbated by severe flooding caused by the collapse of the levees around New Orleans, leaving 80 percent of the city, as well as large tracts of neighboring parishes, inundated for weeks.

The lackluster emergency response from federal, state, and local governments was widely criticized, resulting in the resignation of Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Michael Brown, whom – despite his incompetence – Bush had praised as doing a “heck of a job.” The mainstream media suddenly started calling Bush out of touch and inept. He was widely lambasted for taking too long to return from vacation and when he did finally decide to cut his vacation short, he faced further criticism for flying over New Orleans instead of visiting the site on the ground.

The *Washington Post* would later call Bush's response one of the worst moments of his presidency and *USA Today* noted that while Bush had at times demonstrated qualities of empathy and decisiveness, “those qualities eluded him for days after Hurricane Katrina, and the lapse could become a defining moment of his White House tenure.”

In this article, Parry notes how unusual it was to finally hear some criticisms of Bush after several years of an obsequious press corps protecting him at every turn.

## [Bush & Media: Normalizing the Abnormal \(Sept. 21, 2005\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

What's been so surprising about the U.S. news media's coverage of George W. Bush's Katrina debacle is that leading journalists finally have broken with a five-year pattern of protecting both Bush and his presidency.

Until Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans – highlighting Bush's weakness as a crisis manager, his skewed budget priorities and cronyism at key federal agencies – the national press corps had been held in sway by a mix of White House spinning and the bullying of the occasional critic.

From Election 2000 to the 9/11 terror attacks to the invasion of Iraq, the press corps often acted as if its principal duty to the nation was to normalize Bush's often abnormal behavior, like the enabling family of a drug addict

insisting nothing is wrong. While traditionally journalists play up the unusual, in Bush's case, the media did the opposite.

This pattern can be traced back to Campaign 2000 when Al Gore became a favorite whipping boy of the national press corps, apparently still annoyed by Bill Clinton's survival of the impeachment battles of 1998-99.

### **Recount Battle**

This media dynamic carried through Election 2000's recount battle as the national press corps treated Bush as the rightful claimant to the White House even though he lost the national popular vote by more than a half million ballots and was not even the choice of a plurality of voters in the pivotal state of Florida.

During the recount, it was as if Bush could do almost anything without being held accountable by the U.S. news media. Even when Bush dispatched out-of-state thugs to intimidate vote counters in Miami, there was only limited reporting and little outrage.

As the recount battle continued, many in the news media began to treat the notion that the votes should be counted and the candidate with the most should be declared the winner as some partisan Democratic idea. Several prominent journalists openly expressed their preference for Bush regardless of what the voters may have wanted.

*Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen spoke for many colleagues when he declared that "given the present bitterness, given the angry irresponsible charges being hurled by both camps, the nation will be in dire need of a conciliator, a likable guy who will make things better and not worse. That man is not Al Gore. That man is George W. Bush."

Cohen and other Washington journalists exhaled a collective sigh of relief when five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court issued an unprecedented ruling preventing a statewide recount in Florida, ending the long standoff and effectively handing the presidency to Bush.

Rather than recognizing that the Bush campaign had engineered what had the earmarks of a political coup d'état (overturning the will of the American voters), the prevailing media view was that the nation must now put the divisive election in the past and unite behind the new leader.

The media started handling Bush's fragile legitimacy like one might hold a delicate figurine.

In marked contrast to the taunting pre-Inauguration reporting directed at President-elect Bill Clinton in December 1992 and January 1993 – when he was seen as a bumpkin interloper from Arkansas – the elite Washington media fairly radiated with enthusiasm about the supposed “return of the adults” with George W. Bush in 2001.

With the Republicans back in the White House in 2001, the media tendency was to praise Bush for “exceeding expectations” or to poke fun at his critics for “consistently underestimating” the President.

This Bush-friendly media dynamic gained powerful momentum after 9/11. The mass slaughter on U.S. soil generated a rally-round-the-President consensus, with conservatives shouting down the few remaining vocal Bush critics as traitors who were aiding and abetting the enemy.

The mainstream press corps joined in wrapping Bush in this protective PR cocoon, censoring out information that might raise public doubts about his leadership.

### **Recount Results**

An early casualty of the media's post-Sept. 11 protection of George W. Bush was the unofficial Florida recount that major news organizations had undertaken after the Supreme Court's ruling, with the goal of judging the actual choice of the voters.

When the recount report was released two months after Sept. 11, the obvious news “lede” – that Gore would have won if all the legally cast votes were counted – was hidden by news executives who focused instead on how Bush might still have won if, hypothetically, some of the legal ballots had been excluded.

Rather than report the shocking result – that the wrong person was in the White House – most news organizations chose to normalize the abnormal with reassuring, albeit misleading, articles declaring that Bush was the rightful winner. The thinking seemed to be that no good would come from undermining the sitting President at a time of crisis.

While the news executives may have congratulated themselves for their patriotic spinning of the recount results, they were, on another level, violating journalistic ethics, which put telling the truth above achieving some pleasant political outcome.

The misreporting of the recount results also was not just an innocent white lie without consequence. By publishing stories that falsely enshrined Bush as the legitimate winner of Election 2000, the news executives strengthened Bush's case for a second term in 2004 and weakened Gore's argument for a rematch.

Indeed, still hounded in 2003 by pro-Bush activists shouting "Sore Loserman," Gore decided not to challenge Bush, eliminating the person whom many Democrats saw as their strongest candidate in 2004.

### **The Iraq War**

The U.S. media's post-Sept. 11 protection of Bush also influenced his sense of invulnerability as he lurched toward a military confrontation in Iraq.

To the national press, this hailing of Bush's war-time leadership may have been meant as hopeful encouragement to the President. It's also possible that many well-paid journalists knew the career danger of probing too deeply into Bush's weaknesses.

Nevertheless, the fawning coverage did more than just boost Bush's spirits. It seems to have fed an egotism that caused Bush to discard any self-doubts.

The swelling of Bush's head was apparent in his interview for Bob Woodward's *Bush at War*, which took a largely flattering look at Bush's "gut" decision-making but also reported some disturbing attitudes within the White House.

"I am the commander, see," Bush told Woodward. "I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the President. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they need to say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation."

In *The Right Man*, former White House speechwriter David Frum followed a similar pattern of praising Bush's supposed leadership skills, while acknowledging his autocratic and anti-intellectual behavior.



Bush is “impatient and quick to anger; sometimes glib, even dogmatic; often uncurious and as a result ill-informed; more conventional in his thinking than a leader probably should be,” Frum wrote.

Bush would describe environmentalists as “green-green lima beans” and built a White House staff with a “dearth of really high-powered brains,” Frum wrote. “One seldom heard an unexpected thought in the Bush White House or met someone who possessed unusual knowledge.”

Still, these warning signs were largely ignored as the media’s protect-Bush dynamic carried over into his case for war with Iraq.

Many major news organizations, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, published front-page articles accepting – or even promoting – Bush’s claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction while shoving the infrequent story expressing skepticism onto the inside pages.

“We were so focused on trying to figure out what the administration was doing that we were not giving the same play to people who said it wouldn’t be a good idea to go to war and were questioning the administration’s rationale,” the *Post*’s Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr. said in a retrospective on the WMD controversy.

“Not enough of those stories were put on the front page,” Downie said. “That was a mistake on my part.”<sup>58</sup>

Still, Downie and other news executives have argued that it is unlikely that more critical press coverage would have deterred Bush’s determined march toward war.

But the imbalanced news coverage was not without its effects, either. The major media’s broad acceptance of Iraq’s WMD threat contributed to the marginalizing of skeptics and anti-war protesters.

### **Journalistic Fear**

It also appears that some journalists shied away from reporting aggressively about the holes in Bush’s WMD case out of fear that caches of forbidden Iraqi weapons might later be discovered. In that case, anyone who had doubted Bush’s claims would surely be held up to scorn by the powerful conservative news media.

So, there was almost certainly a degree of self-interest – or self-protection – in the media’s acquiescence to the case for war with Iraq.

Over the past two years, the failure to find WMD and the emergence of a fierce Iraqi resistance have caused chagrin within many editorial offices. There also is a sense of guilt about the rising death toll in Iraq.

Slowly, it has dawned on more and more journalists that they fell down on their job of keeping the American people informed. By trying to look patriotic and supportive of the President, journalists had failed their real test of patriotism, telling the American the truth as fairly and fully as possible.

So, when Hurricane Katrina’s flood waters struck the Gulf Coast, not only the New Orleans levees were prepared to break. The dams protecting George W. Bush from press criticism were cracking, too.

Plus, this time when Bush again hesitated in the face of a national crisis, leading newscasters, such as NBC’s Brian Williams and CNN’s Anderson Cooper, were on scene to witness the debacle.

For once, the White House and its allies in the conservative news media couldn’t spin the reality.

In 2006, author Ron Suskind published *The One Percent Doctrine*, an inside account of the Bush administration’s counterterrorism strategy. The title of the book comes from a quote by Vice President Dick Cheney, who described the White House doctrine of dealing with terrorist threats. According to Cheney, if there was a one percent chance of terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon, for example, “we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response.”

The doctrine was absurd on its face, and as Parry explains here, could easily serve to exacerbate threats rather than contain them.

## [One Percent Madness \(June 27, 2006\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Author Ron Suskind’s account of Dick Cheney’s “one percent doctrine” – the idea that if a terrorist threat is deemed even one percent likely the United States must act as if it’s a certainty – supplies a missing link in understanding the evolving madness of the Bush administration’s national security strategy.

A one-percent risk threshold is so low that it negates any serious analysis that seeks to calibrate dangers within the complex array of possibilities that exist in the real world. In effect, it means that any potential threat that crosses the administration's line of sight will exceed one percent and thus must be treated as a clear and present danger.

The fallacy of the doctrine is that pursuing one-percent threats like certainties is not just a case of choosing to be safe rather than sorry. Instead, it can suck the pursuer into a swollen river of other dangers, leading to a cascading torrent of adverse consequences far more dangerous than the original worry.

For instance, George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq may have eliminated the remote possibility that Saddam Hussein would someday develop a nuclear bomb and share it with al-Qaeda. But the U.S. military invasion of Iraq had the unintended consequence of bolstering the conviction in North Korea and Iran that having the bomb may be the only way to fend off the United States.

So, while eradicating one unlikely nightmare scenario – Hussein's mushroom cloud in the hands of Osama bin Laden – the Bush administration has increased the chances that the other two points on Bush's "axis of evil," North Korea and Iran, will push for nuclear weapons.

In other words, eliminating one "one-percent risk" may have created several other dangers which carry odds of catastrophe far higher than one percent. Bush now must decide whether to swat at these new one-plus-percent risks, which, in turn, could lead to even greater dangers.

### **Swallowing Flies**

In effect, Bush has found himself in a geopolitical version of "the little old lady who swallowed a fly." As the children's ditty goes, the little old lady next swallows a spider to catch the fly but soon finds that the spider "tickles inside her." So, she engorges other animals, in escalating size, to eliminate each previous animal. Eventually, she swallows a horse and "is dead of course."

Similarly, if Bush seeks to eradicate a succession of one-percent threats, he could well find himself trapped within a growing web of interrelated

consequences, each pulling in their own entangling complexities. The end result could leave the United States in a much worse predicament than when the process began.

Charging headstrong after one-percent risks also makes you vulnerable to getting lured into traps. Al-Qaeda strategists, for instance, understood that the 9/11 attacks would lead to a furious reaction from the United States and welcomed the prospect that the American military would strike back at targets in the Islamic world.

Al-Qaeda hoped that the United States would overreact and thus sharpen what al-Qaeda saw as the contradictions within the Islamic world, forcing Muslims to take sides either with the “crusaders” and their regional allies or with the revolt against those forces.

Al-Qaeda’s gamble was that the United States might strike a well-aimed, powerful blow that would eliminate al-Qaeda’s leadership and its key supporters without alienating the larger Muslim populations.

But in late November and early December 2001, the failure to cut off escape routes at Tora Bora, near the Afghan-Pakistani border allowed Osama bin Laden to evade capture along with Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda’s second in command.

Then, Bush – prematurely celebrating victory in Afghanistan – shifted the U.S. military’s focus to Iraq, which had long been an obsession with Bush and his neoconservative advisers. Bush and Cheney judged that Saddam Hussein represented another one-percent-plus danger that required eliminating.

### **Perception Management**

But there remained a political problem in the United States. The American people, while strongly favoring retaliation against al-Qaeda, were less convinced about the need to launch a series of “preemptive wars” against nations that were not implicated in 9/11.

Though the “one-percent doctrine” may transcend the need for any hard evidence among policymakers, it did not eliminate the political need to generate public support behind a war effort, especially when even casual

observers could note that the new target country – Iraq – posed no immediate threat to the United States.

So, the Bush administration saw little choice but to engage in exaggerations and outright falsehoods, what the CIA calls “perception management.” Bush, Cheney and their subordinates spoke in absolute terms about evidence of the Iraqi threat, including vast stockpiles of terrifying unconventional weapons and secret work on a nuclear bomb.

“Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction,” Cheney told a VFW convention on Aug. 26, 2002. “There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.”

It’s now clear that Cheney was wildly overstating the level of confidence within the U.S. intelligence community about Hussein’s WMD programs. There was little hard evidence at all, more a case of conventional wisdom about unconventional weapons than actual intelligence reporting.

CIA analysts also didn’t believe that Hussein had any intent of using whatever WMD he did have unless his nation was attacked or he was cornered.

But intelligence took on a different dimension inside the “one-percent doctrine,” a strategy that cherished action over information. In the new book, *The One Percent Doctrine*, Suskind describes Cheney first enunciating his new approach when he heard about Pakistani physicists discussing nuclear weapons with al-Qaeda.

“If there’s a one percent chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response,” Cheney said. “It’s not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence. ... It’s about our response.”

Suskind reports that Cheney’s new “standard of action ... would frame events and responses from the administration for years to come. The Cheney Doctrine. Even if there’s just a one percent chance of the unimaginable coming due, act as if it is a certainty. ... As to ‘evidence,’ the bar was set so low that the word itself almost didn’t apply.”

## **Manipulation**

By making careful evaluation of the evidence irrelevant, however, the U.S. government made itself vulnerable to willful deceptions by interested parties, such as Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, which easily could funnel enough disinformation into the decision-making process to push decisions over the one-percent brim.

American enemies also could manipulate the process by exaggerating their goals. For instance, Bush and Cheney have repeatedly defended the continuation of the U.S. military operation in Iraq by citing the supposed goal of Islamic extremists to build an empire from Spain to Indonesia.

But the real prospect for such an empire is miniscule, arguably close to zero. After all, prior to 9/11, nearly all key al-Qaeda leaders had been driven from their home countries and chased to Afghanistan, one of the most remote corners of the earth.

These al-Qaeda leaders had lost battles with fellow Muslims in Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Though heroes to some Islamists, al-Qaeda leaders were dangerous but fringe operatives on the run.

Without the clumsy intervention of the United States and Great Britain in Iraq, al-Qaeda had few prospects for any significant expansion of its power base.

In an intercepted letter, purportedly written in 2005 by Zawahiri to Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, al-Qaeda's second in command fretted about the problems that would occur if the United States military withdrew from Iraq.

The "Zawahiri letter" cautioned that an American withdrawal might prompt the "mujahedeen" in Iraq to "lay down their weapons, and silence the fighting zeal." To avert this military collapse if the United States did leave, the letter called for selling the foreign fighters on a broader vision of an Islamic "caliphate" in the Middle East, although only along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, nothing as expansive as a global empire.

But the "Zawahiri letter" indicated that even this more modest "caliphate" was just an "idea" that he mentioned "only to stress ... that the mujahedeen must not have their mission end with the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq."

In other words, al-Qaeda's leaders wanted to keep the United States bogged down in Iraq because that allowed the terrorists to swell their ranks with new fighters and to use the Iraq War as a training ground to harden them into dangerous militants.

The one-percent doctrine, therefore, empowers America's enemies to influence U.S. policy in ways favorable to them. It lets al-Qaeda play the role of Brer Rabbit from the Uncle Remus tales, where the wily rabbit begs not to be thrown into the briar patch when that is exactly where he wants to go.

Bush has said the United States must take the word of the enemy seriously and act accordingly. But what if the enemy is exaggerating his capabilities or his goals? Do the enemy's words alone push matters beyond the one percent threshold and force the United States into responses even if they are not in America's best interests?

### **Obvious Flaws**

Another curious aspect of this one-percent doctrine is how obvious its flaws are. Wouldn't even the most dimwitted foreign policy novice recognize the absurdity of striking out at one-percent risks around the world?

John Dunne wrote that "no man is an island, entire of itself," meaning that every person is connected to other people. But surely, not even George W. Bush thought that Iraq was an island, somehow disconnected from a host of intersecting regional and global relationships.

The answer to that conundrum might simply be that the one-percent doctrine is less a doctrine than another excuse used by the Bush administration to justify actions, such as invading Iraq, that it always wanted to do.

If the slimmest possibility of grievous harm – such as Saddam Hussein developing nuclear weapons and then slipping one to Osama bin Laden – can be cited to trump more circumspect policymakers, then it could be a powerful way to defeat bureaucratic rivals who show up at meetings with binders of intelligence analyses under their arms.

Then, when Bush and Cheney want to ignore other threats, they can simply revert to the posture of careful leaders not ready to jump hastily into an

unfamiliar thicket. In other words, whether or not to invoke the one-percent doctrine gives them the ultimate debate-stopping argument.

Nevertheless, if Suskind is right and Bush is following the one-percent doctrine as his guiding light in the post-9/11 world, the American people can expect to find themselves led into an endless series of wars that only worsen the dangers.

On February 14, 2005, a bomb went off in Beirut killing former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a leader of the anti-Syrian opposition in Lebanon, along with 21 others. A perfunctory UN investigation hastily implicated Syrian officials in the assassination, and the media, led by the *New York Times*, coalesced around the narrative that the Syrian government was directly responsible.

Parry covered the story extensively in the mid-2000s and pointed out on numerous occasions that the claims made about Syria's guilt failed to live up to scrutiny. The media, Parry noted, did not even include the standard denials of guilt by the Syrian regime, a departure from typical journalistic practice in these sorts of contentious allegations.

Parry argued that the media's double standards followed a pattern of hyping allegations about targeted regimes, such as the earlier false claims made about Iraq's WMD. Just as those influential articles helped shape the distorted war debate that preceded George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003, the distorted reporting on the Hariri hit ultimately helped pave the way for the U.S.-backed regime change war that would devastate Syria in subsequent years.

## [The Hariri Mirage Returns \(June 16, 2006\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

In October 2005, the drumbeat had begun for a confrontation with a rogue Middle East regime based on supposedly strong evidence about its nefarious secret activities. The U.S. news media trumpeted the regime's guilt and agreed on the need for action, though there was debate whether forcible regime change was the way to go.

A half year later, however, much of that once clear evidence has melted away and what seemed so certain to the TV pundits and the major newspapers looks now to be another case of a rush to judgment against an unpopular target.

The drumbeat in October 2005 was directed at the Syrian government for its alleged role in masterminding the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in a bomb blast in Beirut, Lebanon, on Feb. 14,



2005. A preliminary United Nations investigative report fingered senior Syrian officials as the likely architects of the killing.

“There is probable cause to believe that the decision to assassinate former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri could not have been taken without the approval of top-ranked Syrian security officials and could not have been further organized without the collusion of their counterparts in the Lebanese security services,” declared the UN’s first interim report on Oct. 20. President George W. Bush immediately termed the findings “very disturbing” and called for the Security Council to take action against Syria.

The U.S. press quickly joined the stampede in assuming Syrian guilt. On Oct. 25, a *New York Times* editorial said the UN investigation had been “tough and meticulous” in establishing “some deeply troubling facts” about Hariri’s murderers. The *Times* demanded punishment of top Syrian officials and their Lebanese allies implicated by the investigation, although the *Times* cautioned against the Bush administration’s eagerness for “regime change.”

But the UN investigative report by German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis was anything but “meticulous.” Indeed, it read more like a compilation of circumstantial evidence and conspiracy theories than a dispassionate pursuit of the truth.

Mehlis’s initial report, for instance, had failed to follow up a key lead, the Japanese identification of the Mitsubishi Canter Van that apparently carried the explosives used in the bombing that killed Hariri and 21 others. The van was reported stolen in Sagamihara City, Japan, on Oct. 12, 2004, four months before the bombing, but Mehlis’s hasty report indicated no effort to investigate how the vehicle got from the island of Japan to Beirut or who might have last possessed it.

### **False Leads**

The report also relied heavily on the testimony of two dubious witnesses. One of those witnesses – Zuhair Zuhair Ibn Muhammad Said Saddik – was later identified by the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* as a swindler who boasted about becoming “a millionaire” from his Hariri testimony.

The other, Hussam Taher Hussam, later recanted his testimony about Syrian involvement, saying he lied to the Mehlis investigation after being kidnapped, tortured and offered \$1.3 million by Lebanese officials.

Some observers believed Mehlis had found himself under intense international pressure to reach negative conclusions about Syria, much like the demands put on UN weapons inspector Hans Blix when he was searching Iraq for alleged weapons of mass destruction in early 2003. Unable to find WMD despite U.S. insistence that the WMD was there, Blix tried to steer a middle course to avert a head-on confrontation with the Bush administration, which nevertheless brushed aside his muted objections and invaded Iraq in March 2003.

Similarly, after the Hariri assassination, the Bush administration made clear its animosity toward Syria by escalating its anti-Syrian rhetoric, also blaming the government of Bashar al-Assad for the infiltration of foreign jihadists into Iraq where they have attacked U.S. troops. So, Mehlis's accusations against Syria helped advance Bush's geopolitical agenda.

But having relied on "witnesses" who now appear to have been set-ups, Mehlis found his investigation under a cloud. In a follow-up report on Dec. 10, 2005, he sought to salvage his position by hurling accusations of witness tampering at Syrian authorities. But by then, as noted in a *New York Times* news article, the conflicting accusations had given the Mehlis investigation the feel of "a fictional spy thriller."

Mehlis withdrew from the investigation and was replaced by Serge Brammertz of Belgium in early 2006.

### **Revamped Probe**

Over the past several months, Brammertz quietly jettisoned many of Mehlis's conclusions and began entertaining other investigative leads, examining a variety of possible motives and a number of potential perpetrators in recognition of the animosities Hariri had engendered among business competitors, religious extremists and political enemies.

Brammertz said "the probe was ... developing a working hypothesis regarding those who had commissioned the crime," according to a UN statement, which was released after Brammertz briefed the Security Council on June 14. "Given the many different positions occupied by Mr. Hariri,

and his wide range of public and private-sector activities, the [UN] commission was investigating a number of different motives, including political motivations, personal vendettas, financial circumstances and extremist ideologies, or any combination of those motivations.”

In other words, Brammertz had dumped Mehlis’s single-minded theory that had pinned the blame on senior Syrian security officials and was approaching the investigation with an open mind. As part of his “wide reach,” Brammertz said he had made 32 requests for information to 13 different countries.

Though Syria’s freewheeling intelligence services and their Lebanese cohorts remain on everyone’s suspect list, Brammertz has adopted a far less confrontational and accusatory tone toward Syria than Mehlis did. Brammertz said cooperation from Syria “has generally been satisfactory” as its government responded to investigative requests “in a timely manner.”

Syria had kind words for Brammertz’s report, too. Fayssal Mekdad, Syria’s Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, praised “its objectivity and professionalism” and said the investigators “had begun to uncover the truth a few months ago,” after Mehlis departed. Mekdad promised that Syria would continue supporting efforts “to unveil and uncover the truth about the assassination,” according to the June 14 UN statement.

Mekdad said he believed the biggest danger from the investigation was “exploitation by certain parties, inside or outside the region, the tendency to ‘jump to conclusions or prejudgments not based on clear evidence or proof,’ and attempts to provide false evidence to the [UN] commission for the main purpose of pressuring Syria,” the UN statement read.

The Syrian diplomat added that the investigation should continue in its pursuit of solid evidence about Hariri’s murder, free from “politicization and false and erroneous hypotheses,” according to the UN statement.

### **Missed Story**

Though the UN statement contained no direct criticism of Mehlis’s earlier efforts, Brammertz’s investigation represented an obvious break from the approach of his predecessor. Still, the U.S. news media, which had played the initial Mehlis accusations against Syria as front-page news, barely mentioned the shift in the revamped UN probe.

Virtually nothing has appeared in the U.S. news media that would alert the American people to the fact that the distinct impression they got last year – that the Syrian government had engineered a terrorist bombing in Beirut – was now a whole lot fuzzier. Much like the failure to highlight contrary evidence against the Bush administration’s claims about Iraq’s supposed weapons of mass destruction in 2002 and early 2003, the national press corps apparently doesn’t want to be seen as questioning the evidence against Syria.

On one level, this failure to be evenhanded with an unpopular regime like Syria goes to the career fears of journalists who can expect that balanced reporting in such a case might earn the label “Syrian apologist.” That risk rises dramatically if it turns out later that the Syrian security officials were guilty after all.

However, after three years of bloody war in Iraq and the failure of the U.S. government to find any WMD stockpiles, Americans might have expected the major U.S. news media to show a little more skepticism and exercise a little more caution when a new round of unproven allegations were leveled at another unpopular Middle Eastern regime, such as Iran on its nuclear program or Syria on the Hariri assassination.

In the Syria case, however, other factors – most notably the military quagmire that has bogged down 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq – gave cooler heads the time to take a second look at the evidence about the Hariri assassination and examine a wider range of possibilities. By refusing to be led in any one direction, the Brammertz investigation might even succeed in finding the truth.

But the other more intractable question remains: Is today’s U.S. press corps capable of learning any lasting lessons from its past mistakes?

In this article, written four years after Gary Webb took his own life, Parry discusses the enormous impact that his journalism had on providing the full story of one of the darkest chapters of the Reagan-Bush era – how the government turned a blind eye to cocaine trafficking by U.S.-backed Nicaraguan Contras. Parry regretted that rather than honoring him with the accolades he deserved, the mainstream media continued to vilify him – even in death – and to protect those responsible for fueling the national epidemic of crack cocaine in the 1980s.

In appreciation of Webb’s courageous journalism, Parry would later establish the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015, with his son Sam Parry being the first recipient for his

role in launching the *Consortium News* website.

## [Gary Webb's Enduring Legacy \(Dec. 11, 2007\)](#)

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Three years ago, I walked into my home in Arlington, Virginia, and checked my phone messages. One was from a *Los Angeles Times* reporter who was looking for a comment from me about Gary Webb's suicide on the night of Dec. 9, 2004. It was the first I had heard of the news.

After I recovered from the shock, I called the reporter back to get more details. I also told him he would have a hard time writing a decent obituary on Webb because the *L.A. Times* had never acknowledged that Webb was substantially correct in his reporting about the Nicaraguan Contras' role in smuggling cocaine into the United States in the 1980s.

Though Los Angeles had been hit hard by the "crack epidemic" and the *L.A. Times* had devoted front-page space to trash Webb's Contra-cocaine reporting in 1996, the newspaper never ran a story detailing the CIA inspector general's 1998 findings, which confirmed much of what Webb had alleged – and more.

The CIA inspector general found that not only had the Contras helped the cocaine cartels get their goods into the United States, but that the CIA and the Reagan administration had helped cover up the evidence.

However, to have written that story in 1998, the *L.A. Times* editors would have had to admit they had wronged Webb two years earlier when they bought into the ongoing government cover stories about the innocence of the Reagan administration and the CIA.

It was much easier for the *L.A. Times* to ignore the findings of the CIA's own inspector general and to maintain the fiction that Webb was just a reckless reporter who had gotten the Contra-cocaine story all wrong.

That decision by the *L.A. Times* – when combined with the abusive treatment Webb received from other major news outlets and his betrayal by his own editors at the *San Jose Mercury News* – had sent Webb's life into a downward spiral that ended with him shooting himself with his father's handgun.

On Dec. 10, 2004, I told the *L.A. Times* reporter that since his newspaper had never reported on the CIA's admissions, he could not put Webb's death in any honest context. So, I was not surprised the next day when the *L.A. Times* published a nasty obituary that treated Webb as if he had been a common criminal rather than a fellow journalist.

The *Washington Post* republished the graceless *L.A. Times* obit – and it quickly hardened into the official judgment on Gary Webb.

Yet, today, when trying to understand how the United States ended up with a national press corps that so eagerly passed on government propaganda about Iraq's WMD and other lies, it is worth recalling the story of Gary Webb and the Contra-cocaine scandal.

### **Dark Alliance**

Webb's death in 2004 had its roots in his fateful decision eight years earlier to write a three-part series for the *San Jose Mercury News* that challenged a potent conventional wisdom shared by the elite U.S. news organizations – that one of the most shocking scandals of the 1980s just couldn't be true.

Webb's "Dark Alliance" series, published in August 1996, revived the decade-old allegations that the Reagan administration in the 1980s had tolerated and protected cocaine smuggling by its client army of Nicaraguan rebels known as the Contras.

Though substantial evidence of the Contra crimes had surfaced in the mid-1980s (initially in an article that Brian Barger and I wrote for The Associated Press in December 1985 and later at hearings conducted by Sen. John Kerry), the major news outlets had bent to pressure from the Reagan administration and refused to take the disclosures seriously.

Thus, the ugly reality of the Contra-cocaine scandal was left in that netherworld of uncertainty, largely proven with documents and testimony but never accepted by Official Washington, including its premier news organizations, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

But Webb's series thrust the scandal back into prominence by connecting the Contra-cocaine trafficking to the spread of crack that ravaged Los Angeles and other American urban centers in the 1980s. For that reason,

African-American communities were up in arms as were their elected representatives in the Congressional Black Caucus.

So, Webb's "Dark Alliance" series offered a unique opportunity for the major news outlets to finally give the Contra-cocaine scandal the attention it deserved.

But that would have required some painful self-criticism among Washington journalists whose careers had advanced in part because they had not offended Reagan supporters who had made an art out of punishing out-of-step reporters for pursuing controversies like the Contra-cocaine scandal.

Also, by the mid-1990s, a powerful right-wing news media had taken shape and was in no mood to accept the notion that many of President Reagan's beloved Contras were drug traffickers. That recognition would have cast a shadow over the Reagan Legacy, which the Right was busy elevating into mythic status.

There was the turf issue, too. Since Webb's stories coincided with the emergence of the internet as an alternate source for news and the *San Jose Mercury News* was at the center of Silicon Valley, the big newspapers saw a threat to their historical dominance as the nation's gatekeepers for what information should be taken seriously.

### **Rev. Moon's Newspaper**

It fell to Rev. Sun Myung Moon's right-wing *Washington Times* to begin the counterattack. The *Washington Times* turned to some ex-CIA officials, who had participated in the Contra war, to refute the drug charges.

Then – in a pattern that would repeat itself over the next decade – the *Washington Post* and other mainstream newspapers quickly lined up behind the right-wing press. On Oct. 4, 1996, the *Washington Post* published a front-page article knocking down Webb's story, although acknowledging that some Contra operatives did help the cocaine cartels.

Soon, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* joined in the piling on against Gary Webb. The big newspapers made much of the CIA's internal reviews in 1987 and 1988 – almost a decade earlier – that supposedly had cleared the spy agency of a role in Contra-cocaine smuggling.

But the CIA's decade-old cover-up began to weaken on Oct. 24, 1996, when CIA Inspector General Frederick Hitz conceded before the Senate Intelligence Committee that the first CIA probe had lasted only 12 days, the second only three days. He promised a more thorough review.

Nevertheless, Webb was becoming the target of media ridicule. Influential *Post* media critic Howard Kurtz mocked Webb for saying in a book proposal that he would explore the possibility that the Contra war was primarily a business to its participants.

"Oliver Stone, check your voice mail," Kurtz smirked.<sup>59</sup>

Webb's suspicion was not unfounded, however. Indeed, White House aide Oliver North's chief Contra emissary Rob Owen had made the same point in a March 17, 1986, message about the Contra leadership.

"Few of the so-called leaders of the movement ... really care about the boys in the field," Owen wrote. "THIS WAR HAS BECOME A BUSINESS TO MANY OF THEM." [Capitalization in the original.]

### **Mercury News Retreat**

Kurtz and other big-name journalists may have been ignorant of key facts about the Contra war, but that didn't stop them from pillorying Gary Webb. The ridicule also had a predictable effect on the executives of the *Mercury News*. By early 1997, executive editor Jerry Ceppos was in retreat.

On May 11, 1997, Ceppos published a front-page column saying the series "fell short of my standards." He criticized the stories because they "strongly implied CIA knowledge" of Contra connections to U.S. drug dealers who were manufacturing crack-cocaine. "We did not have proof that top CIA officials knew of the relationship," Ceppos wrote.

The big newspapers celebrated Ceppos's retreat as vindication of their own dismissal of the Contra-cocaine stories. Ceppos next pulled the plug on the *Mercury News*' continuing Contra-cocaine investigation and reassigned Webb to a small office in Cupertino, California, far from his family. Webb resigned the paper in disgrace.

For undercutting Webb and other *Mercury News* reporters working on the Contra investigation, Ceppos was lauded by the *American Journalism*



*Review* and was given the 1997 national “Ethics in Journalism Award” by the Society of Professional Journalists.

While Ceppos won raves, Webb watched his career collapse and his marriage break up.

Still, Gary Webb had set in motion internal government investigations that would bring to the surface long-hidden facts about how the Reagan administration had conducted the Contra war.

The CIA published the first part of Inspector General Hitz’s findings on Jan. 29, 1998. Despite a largely exculpatory press release, Hitz’s Volume One admitted that not only were many of Webb’s allegations true but that he actually understated the seriousness of the Contra-drug crimes and the CIA’s knowledge.

Hitz acknowledged that cocaine smugglers played a significant early role in the Nicaraguan Contra movement and that the CIA intervened to block an image-threatening 1984 federal investigation into a San Francisco-based drug ring with suspected ties to the Contras, the so-called “Frogman Case.”

On May 7, 1998, another disclosure shook the earlier presumptions of the Reagan administration’s innocence. Rep. Maxine Waters, a California Democrat, introduced into the Congressional Record a Feb. 11, 1982, letter of understanding between the CIA and the Justice Department.

The letter, which had been requested by CIA Director William Casey, freed the CIA from legal requirements that it must report drug smuggling by CIA assets, a provision that covered both the Nicaraguan Contras and Afghan rebels who were fighting a Soviet-supported regime in Afghanistan and who were implicated in heroin trafficking.

### **Justice Report**

The next break in the cover-up was a report by the Justice Department’s inspector general Michael Bromwich. Given the hostile climate surrounding Webb’s series, Bromwich’s report opened with criticism of Webb. But, like the CIA’s Volume One, the contents revealed new details about government wrongdoing.

According to evidence cited by Bromwich, the Reagan administration knew almost from the outset of the Contra war that cocaine traffickers permeated

the paramilitary operation. The administration also did next to nothing to expose or stop the crimes.

Bromwich's report revealed example after example of leads not followed, corroborated witnesses disparaged, official law-enforcement investigations sabotaged, and even the CIA facilitating the work of drug traffickers.

The report showed that the Contras and their supporters ran several parallel drug-smuggling operations, not just the one at the center of Webb's series. The report also found that the CIA shared little of its information about Contra drugs with law-enforcement agencies and on three occasions disrupted cocaine-trafficking investigations that threatened the Contras.

Though depicting a more widespread Contra-drug operation than Webb had understood, the Justice report also provided some important corroboration about a Nicaraguan drug smuggler, Norwin Meneses, who was a key figure in Webb's series.

Bromwich cited U.S. government informants who supplied detailed information about Meneses's operation and his financial assistance to the Contras. For instance, Renato Pena, a money-and-drug courier for Meneses, said that in the early 1980s, the CIA allowed the Contras to fly drugs into the United States, sell them and keep the proceeds.

Pena, who was the northern California representative for the CIA-backed FDN Contra army, said the drug trafficking was forced on the Contras by the inadequate levels of U.S. government assistance.

The Justice report also disclosed repeated examples of the CIA and U.S. embassies in Central America discouraging Drug Enforcement Administration investigations, including one into Contra-cocaine shipments moving through the international airport in El Salvador.

Inspector General Bromwich said secrecy trumped all. "We have no doubt that the CIA and the U.S. Embassy were not anxious for the DEA to pursue its investigation at the airport," he wrote.

Despite the remarkable admissions in the body of these reports, the big newspapers showed no inclination to read beyond the press releases.

## **Cocaine Crimes & a Sex Scandal**

By fall 1998, Official Washington was obsessed with a White House sex scandal involving President Clinton and a young intern, which made it easier to ignore even more stunning Contra-cocaine disclosures in the CIA's Volume Two.

In Volume Two, published Oct. 8, 1998, CIA Inspector General Hitz identified more than 50 Contras and Contra-related entities implicated in the drug trade. He also detailed how the Reagan administration had protected these drug operations and frustrated federal investigations throughout the 1980s.

According to Volume Two, the CIA knew the criminal nature of its Contra clients from the start of the war against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The earliest Contra force, called ADREN or the 15<sup>th</sup> of September Legion, had chosen "to stoop to criminal activities in order to feed and clothe their cadre," according to a June 1981 draft CIA field report.

ADREN also employed terrorist methods, including the bombing of Nicaraguan civilian planes and hijackings, to disrupt the Sandinista government, the CIA knew. Cocaine smuggling was also in the picture.

According to a September 1981 cable to CIA headquarters, two ADREN members made the first delivery of drugs to Miami in July 1981.

ADREN's leaders included Enrique Bermudez and other early Contras who would later direct the major Contra army, the CIA-organized FDN. Throughout the war, Bermudez remained the top Contra military commander.

The CIA later corroborated the allegations about ADREN's cocaine trafficking, but insisted that Bermudez had opposed the drug shipments to the United States which went ahead nonetheless.

### **Ends and Means**

The truth about Bermudez's supposed objections to drug trafficking, however, was less clear. According to Volume One, Bermudez enlisted Norwin Meneses, a large-scale Nicaraguan cocaine smuggler, to raise money and buy supplies for the Contras.

Volume One had quoted a Meneses associate, another Nicaraguan trafficker named Danilo Blandon, who told Hitz's investigators that he and Meneses flew to Honduras to meet with Bermudez in 1982.

At the time, Meneses's criminal activities were well known in the Nicaraguan exile community. But Bermudez told the cocaine smugglers that "the ends justify the means" in raising money for the Contras.

After the Bermudez meeting, Contra soldiers helped Meneses and Blandon get past Honduran police who briefly arrested them on drug-trafficking suspicions. After their release, Blandon and Meneses traveled on to Bolivia to complete a cocaine transaction.

There were other indications of Bermudez's drug-smuggling tolerance. In February 1988, another Nicaraguan exile linked to the drug trade accused Bermudez of narcotics trafficking, according to Hitz's report.

After the Contra war ended, Bermudez returned to Managua, where he was shot to death on Feb. 16, 1991. The murder has never been solved.

Along the Southern Front, in Costa Rica, the drug evidence centered on the forces of Eden Pastora, another leading Contra commander. But Hitz discovered that the U.S. government may have made matters worse.

Hitz revealed that the CIA put an admitted drug operative – known by his CIA pseudonym "Ivan Gomez" – in a supervisory position over Pastora. Hitz reported that the CIA discovered Gomez's drug history in 1987 when Gomez failed a security review on drug-trafficking questions.

In internal CIA interviews, Gomez admitted that in March or April 1982, he helped family members who were engaged in drug trafficking and money laundering. In one case, Gomez said he assisted his brother and brother-in-law in transporting cash from New York City to Miami. He admitted that he "knew this act was illegal."

Later, Gomez expanded on his admission, describing how his family members had fallen \$2 million into debt and had gone to Miami to run a money-laundering center for drug traffickers. Gomez said "his brother had many visitors whom [Gomez] assumed to be in the drug trafficking business."

Gomez's brother was arrested on drug charges in June 1982. Three months later, in September 1982, Gomez started his CIA assignment in Costa Rica. Years later, convicted drug trafficker Carlos Cabezas alleged that in the early 1980s, Ivan Gomez was the CIA agent in Costa Rica who was overseeing drug-money donations to the Contras.

Gomez "was to make sure the money was given to the right people [the Contras] and nobody was taking ... profit they weren't supposed to," Cabezas stated publicly.

But the CIA sought to discredit Cabezas at the time because he had trouble identifying Gomez's picture and put Gomez at one meeting in early 1982 before Gomez started his CIA assignment.

While the CIA was able to fend off Cabezas's allegations by pointing to these discrepancies, Hitz's report revealed that the CIA was nevertheless aware of Gomez's direct role in drug-money laundering, a fact the agency hid from Sen. Kerry's investigation in 1987.

### **The Bolivian Connection**

There also was more about Gomez. In November 1985, the FBI learned from an informant that Gomez's two brothers had been large-scale cocaine importers, with one brother arranging shipments from Bolivia's infamous drug kingpin Roberto Suarez.

Suarez already was known as a financier of right-wing causes. In 1980, with the support of Argentina's hardline anti-communist military regime, Suarez bankrolled a coup in Bolivia that ousted the elected left-of-center government.

The violent putsch became known as the Cocaine Coup because it made Bolivia the region's first narco-state. Bolivia's government-protected cocaine shipments helped transform the Medellin cartel from a struggling local operation into a giant corporate-style business for delivering cocaine to the U.S. market.

Some of those profits allegedly found their way into Contra coffers. Flush with cash in the early 1980s, Suarez invested more than \$30 million in various right-wing paramilitary operations, including the Contra forces in

Central America, according to U.S. Senate testimony by an Argentine intelligence officer, Leonardo Sanchez-Reisse.

In 1987, Sanchez-Reisse said the Suarez drug money was laundered through front companies in Miami before going to Central America. There, other Argentine intelligence officers – veterans of the Bolivian coup – trained the Contras.

CIA Inspector General Hitz added another piece to the mystery of the Bolivian-contra connection. One Contra fundraiser, Jose Orlando Bolanos, boasted that the Argentine government was supporting his anti-Sandinista activities, according to a May 1982 cable to CIA headquarters.

Bolanos made the statement during a meeting with undercover DEA agents in Florida. He even offered to introduce them to his Bolivian cocaine supplier.

## **Containing the Scandal**

Despite all this suspicious drug activity around Ivan Gomez and the Contras, the CIA insisted that it did not unmask Gomez until 1987, when he failed a security check and confessed his role in his family's drug business.

The CIA official who interviewed Gomez concluded that "Gomez directly participated in illegal drug transactions, concealed participation in illegal drug transactions, and concealed information about involvement in illegal drug activity," Hitz wrote.

But senior CIA officials still protected Gomez. They refused to refer the Gomez case to the Justice Department, citing the 1982 DOJ-CIA agreement that spared the CIA from a legal obligation to report narcotics crimes by non-employees.

Instead, the CIA eased Gomez, an independent contractor, out of the agency in February 1988, without alerting law enforcement or the congressional oversight committees.

When questioned about the case nearly a decade later, one senior CIA official who had supported the gentle treatment of Gomez had second thoughts.

"It is a striking commentary on me and everyone that this guy's involvement in narcotics didn't weigh more heavily on me or the system," the official acknowledged.

A Medellin drug connection arose in another section of Hitz's report, when he revealed evidence suggesting that some Contra trafficking may have been sanctioned by Reagan's National Security Council.

The protagonist for this part of the Contra-cocaine mystery was Moises Nunez, a Cuban-American who worked for Oliver North's NSC Contra-support operation and for two drug-connected seafood importers, Ocean Hunter in Miami and Frigorificos de Puntarenas in Costa Rica.

Frigorificos de Puntarenas was created in the early 1980s as a cover for drug-money laundering, according to sworn testimony by two of the firm's principals – Carlos Soto and Medellin cartel accountant Ramon Milian Rodriguez.

Drug allegations were swirling around Moises Nunez by the mid-1980s. At the AP, his operation was one of the targets of our investigation.

Finally reacting to these suspicions, the CIA questioned Nunez on March 25, 1987, about his alleged cocaine trafficking. He responded by pointing the finger at his NSC superiors.

“Nunez revealed that since 1985, he had engaged in a clandestine relationship with the National Security Council,” Hitz reported, adding:

“Nunez refused to elaborate on the nature of these actions, but indicated it was difficult to answer questions relating to his involvement in narcotics trafficking because of the specific tasks he had performed at the direction of the NSC. Nunez refused to identify the NSC officials with whom he had been involved.”

After this first round of questioning, CIA headquarters authorized an additional session, but then senior CIA officials reversed the decision. There would be no further efforts at “debriefing Nunez.”

Hitz noted that “the cable [from headquarters] offered no explanation for the decision” to stop the Nunez interrogation.

But the CIA’s Central American task force chief Alan Fiers said the Nunez-NSC drug lead was not pursued “because of the NSC connection and the possibility that this could be somehow connected to the Private Benefactor program [the Contra money handled by North]. A decision was made not to pursue this matter.”

Joseph Fernandez, who had been the CIA’s station chief in Costa Rica, later confirmed to congressional Iran-Contra investigators that Nunez “was involved in a very sensitive operation” for North’s “Enterprise.” The exact nature of that NSC-authorized activity has never been divulged.

At the time of the Nunez-NSC drug admissions and his truncated interrogation, the CIA’s acting director was Robert M. Gates, who is now President George W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense.

### **Miami Vice**

The CIA also worked directly with other drug-connected Cuban-Americans on the Contra project, Hitz found.



One of Nunez's Cuban-American associates, Felipe Vidal, had a criminal record as a narcotics trafficker in the 1970s. But the CIA still hired him to serve as a logistics coordinator for the Contras, Hitz reported.

The CIA also learned that Vidal's drug connections were not only in the past. A December 1984 cable to CIA headquarters revealed Vidal's ties to Rene Corvo, another Cuban-American suspected of drug trafficking. Corvo was working with anti-communist Cuban Frank Castro, who was viewed as a Medellin cartel representative within the Contra movement.

There were other narcotics links to Vidal. In January 1986, the DEA in Miami seized 414 pounds of cocaine concealed in a shipment of yucca that was going from a Contra operative in Costa Rica to Ocean Hunter, the company where Vidal worked.

Despite the evidence, Vidal remained a CIA employee as he collaborated with Frank Castro's assistant, Rene Corvo, in raising money for the Contras, according to a CIA memo in June 1986.

### **Honduras Trafficking**

Hitz revealed that drugs also tainted the highest levels of the Honduran-based FDN, the largest Contra army.

Hitz found that Juan Rivas, a Contra commander who rose to be chief of staff, admitted that he had been a cocaine trafficker in Colombia before the war. The CIA asked Rivas, known as El Quiche, about his background after the DEA began suspecting that Rivas might be an escaped convict from a Colombian prison.

In interviews with CIA officers, Rivas acknowledged that he had been arrested and convicted of packaging and transporting cocaine for the drug trade in Barranquilla, Colombia. After several months in prison, Rivas said, he escaped and moved to Central America where he joined the Contras.

The CIA subsequently protected Rivas from exposure and possible extradition to Colombia. In February 1989, CIA headquarters asked that DEA take no action "in view of the serious political damage to the U.S. Government that could occur should the information about Rivas become public."

Rivas was eased out of the Contra leadership with an explanation of poor health. With U.S. government help, he was allowed to resettle in Miami. Colombia was not informed about his fugitive status.

Another senior FDN official implicated in the drug trade was its chief spokesman in Honduras, Arnoldo Jose “Frank” Arana.

The drug allegations against Arana dated back to 1983 when a federal narcotics task force put him under criminal investigation because of plans “to smuggle 100 kilograms of cocaine into the United States from South America.”

On Jan. 23, 1986, the FBI reported that Arana and his brothers were involved in a drug-smuggling enterprise, although Arana was not charged.

Through their ownership of an air services company called SETCO, the Perez brothers were associated with Juan Matta Ballesteros, a major cocaine kingpin connected to the murder of a DEA agent, according to reports by the DEA and U.S. Customs.

Hitz reported that someone at the CIA scribbled a note on a DEA cable about Arana stating: “Arnold Arana ... still active and working, we [CIA] may have a problem.”

Despite its drug ties to Matta Ballesteros, SETCO emerged as the principal company for ferrying supplies to the Contras in Honduras.

During congressional Iran-Contra hearings, FDN political leader Adolfo Calero testified that SETCO was paid from bank accounts controlled by Oliver North. SETCO also received \$185,924 from the State Department for ferrying supplies to the Contras in 1986.

### **Drug Flights**

Hitz found that other air transport companies used by the Contras were also implicated in the cocaine trade. Even FDN leaders suspected that they were shipping supplies to Central America aboard planes that might be returning with drugs.

Mario Calero, Adolfo Calero’s brother and the chief of Contra logistics, grew so uneasy about one air-freight company that he notified U.S. law enforcement that the FDN only chartered the planes for the flights south, not the return flights north.

Hitz found that some drug pilots simply rotated from one sector of the Contra operation to another. Donald Frixione, who had a drug record in the Dominican Republic, was hired by the CIA to fly Contra missions from 1983-85.

In September 1986, however, Frixione was implicated in smuggling 19,000 pounds of marijuana into the United States. In late 1986 or early 1987, he went to work for Vortex, another U.S.-paid Contra supply company linked to the drug trade.

By the time that Hitz's Volume Two was published in fall 1998, the CIA's defense against Webb's series had shrunk to a fig leaf: that the CIA did not conspire with the Contras to raise money through cocaine trafficking.

But Hitz made clear that the Contra war took precedence over law enforcement and that the CIA withheld evidence of Contra crimes from the Justice Department, the Congress and even the CIA's own analytical division.

Besides tracing the evidence of Contra-drug trafficking through the decade-long Contra war, the inspector general interviewed senior CIA officers who acknowledged that they were aware of the Contra-drug problem but didn't want its exposure to undermine the struggle to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

According to Hitz, the CIA had "one overriding priority: to oust the Sandinista government. ... [CIA officers] were determined that the various difficulties they encountered not be allowed to prevent effective implementation of the Contra program."

Hitz also recounted complaints from CIA analysts that CIA operations officers handling the Contras hid evidence of Contra-drug trafficking even from the CIA's analysts.

Because of the withheld evidence, the CIA analysts incorrectly concluded in the mid-1980s that "only a handful of Contras might have been involved in drug trafficking." That false assessment was passed on to Congress and the major news organizations – serving as an important basis for denouncing Gary Webb and his series in 1996.

**See No Evil**

Although Hitz's report was an extraordinary admission of institutional guilt by the CIA, it passed almost unnoticed by the big American newspapers.

On Oct. 10, 1998, two days after Hitz's Volume Two was posted at the CIA's website, the *New York Times* published a brief article that continued to deride Webb but acknowledged the Contra-drug problem may have been worse than earlier understood.

Several weeks later, the *Washington Post* weighed in with a similarly superficial article. The *Los Angeles Times* never published a story on the release of Volume Two.

To this day, no editor or reporter who missed the Contra-cocaine story has been punished for his or her negligence. Indeed, some of them rose to become top executives at their news organizations. On the other hand, Gary Webb's career never recovered.

Unable to find decent-paying work in a profession where his past awards included a Pulitzer Prize, Webb grew despondent. His marriage broke up. By December 2004, he found himself forced to move out of his rented house near Sacramento.

Instead, Webb decided to end his life.

On the night of Dec. 9, 2004, Webb typed out four suicide notes for his family, laid out a certificate for his cremation, put a note on the door suggesting a call to 911, and removed his father's handgun from a box.

The 49-year-old Webb, a father of three, then raised the gun and shot himself in the head. The first shot was not lethal, so he fired once more.

His body was found the next day after movers, who were scheduled to clear out Webb's rental house, arrived and followed the instructions from the note on the door.

### **A Last Chance**

Webb's suicide offered the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *L.A. Times* one more chance to set matters right, to revisit the CIA's admissions in 1998 and to exact some accountability from the Reagan-era officials implicated in the Contra crimes.

But all that followed Gary Webb's death was more trashing of Gary Webb.

The *L.A. Times* ran its mean-spirited obituary that made no mention of the admissions in the CIA's Volume Two. The *Times* obituary was republished in other newspapers, including the *Washington Post*.

No one reading this obit would understand the profound debt that American history owed to Gary Webb, who deserved the lion's share of the credit for forcing the CIA to make its extraordinary admissions.

Though a personal tragedy, the destruction of Gary Webb had a larger meaning, too. Gary Webb was a kind of canary in the mine shaft, whose fate represented a warning about the dangers that can befall a nation whose journalists care more about their salaries and status than the truth and the public's right to know.

Today, when Americans look at the mounting death toll in Iraq and their nation's loss of prestige around the world, they should recall what happened to Gary Webb when he tried to shed some light amid the shadows of corrupt and covert government actions.

Webb's career destruction in the 1990s and his desperate act of suicide in 2004 were warnings to the American people that they must demand much more from their existing news outlets – or they must build honest new ones.

That understanding may be Gary Webb's enduring legacy.

In a tight primary race with Barack Obama in early 2008, Hillary Clinton increasingly utilized the "experience card," arguing that her eight years in the White House as First Lady as well as her time in the Senate had made her uniquely qualified to deal with the onslaught of political attacks that come with the job of being President.

Parry, however, took issue with these claims, pointing out that the Clinton White House was mostly on the losing end of these partisan battles and that the eight years of Clinton rule had largely been a time of missed opportunities, failing for example to pass universal health care or to deal honestly with the crimes of the Reagan-Bush administrations. Bill Clinton had also enabled growing neoconservative influence in the Democratic Party, Parry pointed out.

## [The Logic of Obama-mania \(Jan. 8, 2008\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Sen. Hillary Clinton is telling Democrats that they shouldn't let their hearts run away with their heads by embracing the lightly experienced Sen. Barack Obama for President. She says she is the battle-tested one who can best carry the Democratic banner.

“Some of us are ready and some of us are not,” she said in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on Jan. 7 as tears welled in her eyes. “Some of us know what we will do on day one and some of us haven’t thought it through enough.”

But while Sen. Clinton says she knows how to combat the right-wing attack machine, the truth is that she and her husband most often ended up on the losing end of those fights.

Under fire from the Right, they botched the best chance in decades to enact universal health care; they oversaw devastating Democratic congressional defeats starting in 1994; Bill Clinton became the first President since Andrew Johnson to be impeached by the House though he managed to survive after the spectacle of a Senate trial; and their missteps set the stage for the restoration of the Bush Dynasty in 2000.

The Clintons also engineered a generational change in the Democratic Party that ushered out – or marginalized – many of the party’s old lions and replaced them with a coterie of careerists and accommodators.

Though the Clintons may have wanted to “do good” for the country, they opted for a strategy of unprincipled compromise and “triangulation,” a concept of endless repositioning that Hillary Clinton championed as First Lady and as a top political adviser to her husband.

In her memoir, *Living History*, Mrs. Clinton claims credit for bringing Republican pollster Dick Morris back into President Clinton’s inner circle in 1994, overriding resistance from others in the White House. “Nobody in the Democratic power structure liked or trusted him,” she acknowledged.

While Morris helped advance Mrs. Clinton’s “triangulation” strategies, he ultimately proved his critics right by betraying the Clintons and going on TV to decry Democrats in the most venomous terms, helped by the insider credibility that Hillary Clinton had bestowed on him.

Her alliance of convenience with Morris was typical of the Clinton brand of politics. The Clintons rarely stood up for decent individuals who suffered for doing the right thing in Washington; usually those people got sold out as the Clintons sought out unprincipled characters on the other side who could be put to short-term use.

## **Real Reasons for Victory**

For similar reasons of self-promotion, the Clintons and their top advisers also misrepresented how they prevailed in 1992 against President George H.W. Bush. Their preferred narrative was contained in James Carville's pithy slogan, "It's the economy, stupid!"

But the economy alone would not have sunk President Bush's re-election bid. After his victory in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, Bush enjoyed record-high poll numbers and was widely admired for his foreign-policy acumen.

However, in the months after the U.S.-led victory over Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in Kuwait, an investigation led by House Banking Committee Chairman Henry Gonzalez, D-Texas, revealed that the Reagan and Bush administrations had helped and coddled Hussein during and after his eight-year war with Iran in the 1980s.

Investigative journalists, such as Murray Waas at the *Los Angeles Times*, expanded on Gonzalez's findings. Evidence emerged that Reagan and Bush had sanctioned indirect military aid to Hussein, including precursor chemicals for weapons, and had supplied the dictator with battlefield intelligence.

This "Iraqgate scandal" took the gloss off President Bush's singular foreign-policy achievement.

Meanwhile, the continuing Iran-Contra investigation ate away at Bush's insistence that he was "not in the loop" on the arms-for-hostage dealings with Iran or the illegal assistance to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua.

Combined, these allegations and suspicions eroded two of President Bush's greatest political strengths – the impression that he was a master of foreign policy and the belief that he was a reasonably honest politician.

Instead of the great foreign-policy sorcerer, Bush looked increasingly like the sorcerer's apprentice who created the messes that needed cleaning up.

In 1992, though then struggling in the polls, Bush remained an accomplished political infighter, knowing how to play dirty when in "campaign mode."

Bill Clinton and his advisers may have seen themselves as a match for Team Bush, but the reality was that at a key moment in fall 1992, Clinton

needed to get bailed out by experienced Democratic operatives on Capitol Hill.

In late September 1992, Bush gave his aides a green light to search through Clinton's passport file looking for some derogatory information that could destroy Clinton, possibly a rumored letter renouncing his citizenship.

Though the purported renunciation letter didn't exist, Bush's operatives cited some staple holes in the corner of Clinton's passport application to fashion a criminal referral that suggested that someone may have removed the letter.

The referral and its nasty insinuation were then leaked to the press, creating a firestorm over whether Clinton was, in effect, a disloyal American.

As Clinton's poll numbers plummeted, congressional investigators dispatched by House Foreign Affairs Committee chief counsel Spencer Oliver examined what had happened with Clinton's passport file. What they discovered was an illegal dirty trick orchestrated by senior Bush administration officials.

So, the Clinton passport gambit blew up in Bush's face, becoming known as "Passportgate." The furor essentially insulated Clinton from other smears that Bush's operatives had planned for the closing days of the campaign.

Then, on the Friday before the election, to Bush's chagrin, the Iran-Contra scandal came back to haunt him. Special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh filed a new indictment against former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger that included documentation undercutting Bush's longtime "not in the loop" claim.

Bush and his top advisers, including then-White House chief of staff James Baker, blamed this series of calamities – the botched passport dirty trick, the last-minute Iran-Contra indictment and the corrosive effect of other scandals like Iraqgate – for their failure to win a second term.

### **Looking to the Future**

After the election, however, Clinton and his inner circle put the spotlight on their own political savvy and Carville's "It's the economy, stupid" slogan. They simultaneously turned their backs on investigators who had stuck their necks out challenging the powerful Bush administration.



The incoming Clinton administration helped sweep the Iraqgate and Iran-Contra investigations under the rug, leaving Rep. Gonzalez and prosecutor Walsh looking like misguided old men.

Spencer Oliver, who had been dealing with Republican dirty tricks since his phone was bugged during the first Watergate break-in in 1972, was offered no prominent job in the new administration. He instead moved to Denmark and became secretary general of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's parliamentary assembly.

As Oliver – an early critic of the rising neoconservatives – was leaving the United States, Clinton was rewarding Democratic neocons who had supported him. Clinton gave the job of CIA director to James Woolsey, a neoconservative Democrat who had worked closely with the Reagan-Bush administrations.

Journalists who had pursued stories of Republican wrongdoing also were left in the lurch. As the new Clinton administration “looked to the future,” the dirty history of the Reagan-Bush years was “left for the historians.” At times, the Democrats even joined in trashing evidence of Republican wrongdoing.

Mocked as “conspiracy theorists,” some journalists and government investigators who had exposed Reagan-Bush abuses saw their careers badly damaged, while others who had played ball with the Reagan-Bush regimes gained stature.

The Clintons had set the stage for a new breed of Democrat, always willing to sacrifice a principle, always ready to strike a deal with the Republicans, never too committed to the truth. Meanwhile, the Republicans – freed from the need to defend the Reagan-Bush years – went on the offensive.

So, when Hillary Clinton harkens back to the 1990s as some golden age when she learned how to handle nasty Republicans, there is a measure of fantasy to the recollection. Despite some real achievements of the Clinton administration, such as balancing the federal budget, the decade was essentially a period of Democratic decline and defeat.

It was a precursor to the Democratic pattern of submission before President George W. Bush in this decade.

Having lost the skills of political warfare – indeed having sidelined many of their best political warriors – the Democrats were left with little choice but to “triangulate” their response to Bush’s expansion of presidential powers. They endorsed the Iraq War; they shied away from battles over Bush’s right-wing Supreme Court nominees; they accepted draconian laws like the Military Commissions Act; they didn’t dare talk about impeachment or seriously challenge Bush’s blank checks for open-ended war.

Now, Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign seeks a reaffirmation of those strategies from the 1990s, more maneuvering to the right as a way to buy some protection from the right-wing machine, more acceptance of the Republican frame of debate while counting on poll-tested phrases to finesse GOP attacks, more promises that some nice government programs might somehow transcend the need to stand up for principle.

By contrast, Obama’s appeal for a new paradigm that relies on the enthusiasm of young voters and the patriotism of rank-and-file Americans to leap past the stale politics of the Clinton and Bush years makes some sense.

Given Obama’s relatively thin résumé, his candidacy may require a leap of faith. But it is at least a leap toward something new and untested, rather than something old and failed.

In short, the gamble of “Obama-mania” may be the Democrats’ safest bet.

Apparently hoping to win over some “Reagan Democrats” in his bid for the Democratic nomination, candidate Barack Obama issued some faint words of praise for Republican President Ronald Reagan, whom Obama credited with introducing accountability to American politics and “changing the trajectory of America.” As Parry pointed out in this article, Obama’s analysis was ahistorical and troubling in its disregard for the many human lives cut short by Reagan’s genocidal policies in Central America.

## [Obama’s Dubious Praise for Reagan \(Jan. 19, 2008\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

Sen. Barack Obama prides himself in transcending the old ideological chasms that have divided the American electorate for decades, so much so that he recently cited Republican icon Ronald Reagan as a leader who “changed the trajectory of America.”

Though Obama's chief point was that Reagan in 1980 "put us on a fundamentally different path" – which may be historically undeniable – the Democratic presidential candidate went further, justifying Reagan's course correction because of "all the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, and government had grown and grown, but there wasn't much sense of accountability."

While Obama later clarified his point to say he didn't mean to endorse Reagan's conservative policies, the Illinois senator seemed to suggest that Reagan's 1980 election administered a needed dose of accountability to the U.S. government. In reality, however, accountability wasn't part of Reagan's medicine for America. Indeed, one could say the opposite.

On the domestic side, Reagan oversaw the dismantling of regulatory structures that restrained the excesses of Wall Street investment banks, the energy industry and other economic powerhouses. Many of today's problems – from the mortgage meltdown to the nation's wasteful energy policies – can be traced to Reagan's contempt for that type of accountability.

Meanwhile, regarding Reagan's approach to the world, the documentary record reveals a foreign policy that was one of the most brutal, most corrupt and least accountable in American history.

Reagan's clandestine dealings with Iran and Iraq remain shrouded in secrecy and deception to this day. Also suppressed has been the full story of how Reagan tolerated drug traffickers who operated under the cover of his favorite covert operations (Nicaragua and Afghanistan).

Even more troubling, Reagan aided and abetted mass slaughters in Central America, including acts of genocide in Guatemala, but neither he nor any of his senior advisers faced any meaningful accountability for their actions.

### **Hailing Reagan**

In the interview with the *Reno Gazette-Journal* on Jan. 14, Obama said, "I think Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not. He put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it.

“I think they felt like with all the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s and government had grown and grown but there wasn’t much sense of accountability in terms of how it was operating. I think people, he just tapped into what people were already feeling, which was we want clarity, we want optimism, we want a return to that sense of dynamism and entrepreneurship that had been missing.”

But Reagan’s election in November 1980 also was welcomed in other quarters. His victory set off celebrations in the well-to-do communities of Central America. After four years of Jimmy Carter’s human rights nagging, the region’s anticommunist hardliners were thrilled that they had someone in the White House who understood their problems.

From his eight years in the White House, there is no indication that he was troubled by the bloodbath and even genocide that occurred in Central America during his presidency, while he was shipping hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to the implicated forces.

The death toll was staggering – an estimated 70,000 or more political killings in El Salvador, possibly 20,000 slain from the Contra war in Nicaragua, about 200 political “disappearances” in Honduras and some 100,000 people eliminated during a resurgence of political violence in Guatemala.

The one consistent element in these slaughters was the overarching Cold War rationalization, emanating from Ronald Reagan’s White House.

### **War Crimes**

Yet, even as the world community has sought to punish war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, no substantive discussion has occurred in the United States about facing up to Reagan’s horrendous record of the 1980s.

Rather than a debate about Reagan as a war criminal, the former President, who died in 2004, has been showered with honors as a conservative icon. His name was attached to Washington National Airport as well as to scores of other government buildings around the country.

As part of this rosy view of the Reagan years, the U.S. news media rarely acknowledges the barbarities of the 1980s in Central America. When the

topic does come up, it is usually a one-day story about how these little countries bravely are facing up to their violent pasts.

At times, the CIA is mentioned abstractly as a bad supporting actor in the violent dramas. But never does the press corps lay much blame on individual American officials – and especially not Ronald Reagan.

Though Reagan portrayed the bloody conflicts as a necessary front in the Cold War, the Central American violence was always more about entrenched ruling elites determined to retain their privileges against impoverished peasants, including descendants of the region's Maya Indians, seeking social, political and economic reforms.

One of the most notorious acts of brutality occurred in December 1981 in and around the Salvadoran town of El Mozote. The government's Atlacatl Battalion – freshly trained and newly armed thanks to Reagan's supportive policies – systematically slaughtered hundreds of men, women and children.

When the atrocity was revealed by reporters at the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the Reagan administration showed off its new strategy of “perception management,” denying the facts and challenging the integrity of the journalists.

Because of that PR offensive, the reality about the El Mozote massacre remained in doubt for almost a decade until the war ended and a United Nations forensic team dug up hundreds of skeletons, including many little ones of children.

### **Skulls as Candle Holders**

In January 2007, the *Washington Post* disclosed another grisly detail. Several months after the massacre, the Salvadoran army returned to the scene and collected skulls of some El Mozote children as novelty items, the *Post* reported.

“They worked well as candle holders,” recalled one of the soldiers, Jose Wilfredo Salgado, “and better as good luck charms.”

Now, a quarter century later, describing his role piling the tiny skulls into sacks as souvenirs, Salgado acknowledged that he had “lost his love of humanity.”

The *Post* reported that “witnessing the aftermath of what his colleagues did in El Mozote and reflecting on those skulls changed his mind about how the war was being fought.” Salgado said his mentor, Col. Domingo Monterrosa, who later died in a helicopter crash, had ordered an act of “genocide” in El Mozote.

“If Monterrosa had lived,” the *Post* reported, “Salgado said, he should have been prosecuted for ‘war crimes like a Hitler.’”<sup>60</sup>

But what about the American officials who were the enablers and the protectors of Central America’s mass murderers?

While Monterrosa may have ordered massacres in El Mozote and other towns in El Salvador, President Reagan and other senior U.S. officials collaborated in and covered up those crimes, along with acts of genocide in Guatemala and terrorism in Nicaragua.

Yet, the U.S. officials who supplied the guns, helicopters, advanced technology and political cover have never been called to account. Some, like former State Department official Elliott Abrams, have moved on to oversee the bloody chaos in Iraq.

Criticism also should fall on Bill Clinton, who was the first President elected after the end of the Cold War but rejected suggestions that he authorize an American truth commission to investigate U.S. complicity in the era’s crimes, as was done in Argentina, South Africa and other countries.

Only late in his eight-year presidency did Clinton agree to declassify documents for use by a Guatemalan truth commission examining three decades of political violence that had torn that Central American country apart and claimed some 200,000 lives.

The worst of the Guatemalan violence – like the bloodletting in El Salvador and Nicaragua – came after the election of Reagan in November 1980.

### **The Guatemalan Genocide**

Once in office, Reagan chipped away at an arms embargo imposed on Guatemala by Carter who was offended by its ghastly human rights record. A fundamental part of Reagan’s strategy was to silence criticism of the

atrocities whether the accusations were coming from the news media, human rights groups or the U.S. intelligence community.

In April 1981, for instance, a secret CIA cable described a Guatemalan army massacre of peasants at Cocob, near Nebaj in the Ixil Indian territory. On April 17, 1981, government troops had attacked the area, which was believed to support leftist guerrillas, the cable said.

According to a CIA source, “the social population appeared to fully support the guerrillas” and “the soldiers were forced to fire at anything that moved.” The CIA cable added that “the Guatemalan authorities admitted that ‘many civilians’ were killed in Cocob, many of whom undoubtedly were non-combatants.”

While keeping the CIA account secret, Reagan permitted Guatemala’s army to buy \$3.2 million in military trucks and jeeps in June 1981. Confident of Reagan’s sympathies, the Guatemalan government continued its political repression without apology.

According to a State Department cable on Oct. 5, 1981, Guatemalan leaders met with Reagan’s roving ambassador, retired Gen. Vernon Walters, and left no doubt about their plans. Guatemala’s military dictator, Gen. Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia, “made clear that his government will continue as before – that the repression will continue,” the cable said.

But the Reagan administration sought to confuse the American public. A State Department “white paper” in December 1981 blamed the violence on leftist “extremist groups” and their “terrorist methods,” inspired and supported by Cuba’s Fidel Castro.

Yet, even as these rationalizations were sold to the American people, U.S. intelligence agencies in Guatemala continued to learn about government-sponsored massacres. One CIA report in February 1982 described an army sweep through the so-called Ixil Triangle in central El Quiche province, an area where descendants of the ancient Maya lived.

“The commanding officers of the units involved have been instructed to destroy all towns and villages which are cooperating with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor [known as the EGP] and eliminate all sources of resistance,” the report said. “Since the operation began, several villages

have been burned to the ground, and a large number of guerrillas and collaborators have been killed.”

The CIA report explained the army’s modus operandi: “When an army patrol meets resistance and takes fire from a town or village, it is assumed that the entire town is hostile and it is subsequently destroyed.”

### **Rios Montt Coup**

In March 1982, the violence continued to ratchet up when Gen. Efraim Rios Montt seized power in a coup d’etat. An avowed fundamentalist Christian, he was hailed by Reagan as “a man of great personal integrity.”

By July 1982, Rios Montt had begun a new scorched-earth campaign. In October, he also gave secret carte blanche to the feared “Archivos” intelligence unit to expand “death squad” operations.

The U.S. embassy was soon hearing more accounts of the army conducting Indian massacres. But the political officers knew that such grim news was not welcome back in Washington and to report it would only damage their careers.

So, the embassy cables increasingly began to spin the evidence in ways that would best serve Reagan’s hardline foreign policy. On Oct. 22, 1982, the embassy sought to explain away the mounting evidence of genocide by arguing that the Rios Montt government was the victim of a communist-inspired “disinformation campaign.”

Reagan picked up on that theme. During a swing through Latin America, he discounted the growing evidence that hundreds of Mayan villages were being eradicated.

On Dec. 4, 1982, after meeting with Rios Montt, Reagan hailed the general as “totally dedicated to democracy” and declared that the Rios Montt government was “getting a bum rap.”

On Jan. 7, 1983, Reagan lifted the ban on military aid to Guatemala and authorized the sale of \$6 million in military hardware. Approval covered spare parts for UH-1H helicopters and A-37 aircraft used in counterinsurgency operations.

In February 1983, a secret CIA cable noted a rise in “suspect[ed] right-wing violence” with kidnappings of students and teachers. Bodies of victims



were appearing in ditches and gullies. CIA sources traced these political murders to Rios Montt's order to the "Archivos" in October 1982 to "apprehend, hold, interrogate and dispose of suspected guerrillas as they saw fit."

### **Sugarcoated Facts**

Despite these grisly realities on the ground, the annual State Department human rights survey sugarcoated the facts for the American public and praised the supposedly improved human rights situation in Guatemala. "The overall conduct of the armed forces had improved by late in the year" 1982, the report stated.

A different picture – far closer to the secret government reports – was coming from independent human rights investigators. On March 17, 1983, Americas Watch representatives condemned the Guatemalan army for human rights atrocities against the Indian population.

New York attorney Stephen L. Kass said these findings included proof that the government carried out "virtually indiscriminate murder of men, women and children of any farm regarded by the army as possibly supportive of guerrilla insurgents."

Rural women suspected of guerrilla sympathies were raped before execution, Kass said. Children were "thrown into burning homes. They are thrown in the air and speared with bayonets. We heard many, many stories of children being picked up by the ankles and swung against poles so their heads are destroyed."<sup>61</sup>

Publicly, however, senior Reagan officials continued to put on a happy face.

On June 12, 1983, special envoy Richard B. Stone praised "positive changes" in Rios Montt's government.

### **Political Taboo**

The election of Bill Clinton – as the first President to take office after the end of the Cold War – offered a unique opportunity to expose the real history of the era and hold American war criminals to account. But Clinton and his advisers saw such investigations as a distraction and chose instead to focus on economic and social legislation.

After 1994, with the Republican congressional landslide, the opportunity was lost. Instead, the Republicans transformed Reagan into an icon.

An honest accounting of what really happened under Reagan's presidency became a political taboo in the United States. Even when Clinton finally released incriminating U.S. documents to a Guatemalan truth commission, the evidence never got the attention that it deserved.

On Feb. 25, 1999, Guatemala's Historical Clarification Commission issued a report on the human rights crimes that Reagan and his administration had aided, abetted – and concealed. The report documented that in the 1980s, the army committed 626 massacres against Mayan villages. "The massacres that eliminated entire Mayan villages ... are neither perfidious allegations nor figments of the imagination, but an authentic chapter in Guatemala's history," the commission concluded.

The army "completely exterminated Mayan communities, destroyed their livestock and crops," the report said. In the northern highlands, the report termed the slaughter a "genocide."

Besides carrying out murder and "disappearances," the army routinely engaged in torture and rape. "The rape of women, during torture or before being murdered, was a common practice" by the military and paramilitary forces, the report found.

The report added that the "government of the United States, through various agencies including the CIA, provided direct and indirect support for some [of these] state operations." The report concluded that the U.S. government also gave money and training to Guatemalan military units that committed "acts of genocide" against the Mayas.

"Believing that the ends justified everything, the military and the state security forces blindly pursued the anticommunist struggle, without respect for any legal principles or the most elemental ethical and religious values, and in this way, completely lost any semblance of human morals," said the commission chairman, Christian Tomuschat, a German jurist.

### **An Apology**

During a visit to Central America, on March 10, 1999, President Clinton apologized for the past U.S. support of right-wing regimes in Guatemala.

“For the United States, it is important that I state clearly that support for military forces and intelligence units which engaged in violence and widespread repression was wrong, and the United States must not repeat that mistake,” Clinton said.

But the story of the Reagan-backed genocide of the Mayan Indians was quickly forgotten, as Republicans and the Washington press corps wrapped Reagan’s legacy in a fuzzy blanket of heroic mythology.

Now, as Sen. Obama seeks to portray himself as a new kind of post-partisan politician, he seems to be buying into those old comfortable happy thoughts about Ronald Reagan. To the delight of right-wingers like Patrick Buchanan, Obama is paying deference to their hero.

While that might help Obama politically with some independents and Republicans, it doesn’t exactly define him as a new kind of politician. For a generation now, Democrats – eager to give themselves some cover on the right – have slipped praise for Reagan into their speeches.

If Obama really wanted to be a different kind of politician, he might instead stand for the truth, even when it is politically difficult and unpopular. He might acknowledge that while Reagan did put the United States on a “fundamentally different path,” it was not a path that led to either accountability or to justice.

On January 20, 2009, some 1.8 million people gathered in Washington, D.C., and countless viewers around the world tuned in on television and the internet for the historic Inauguration of America’s first black president, Barack Obama.

In his Inaugural Address, Obama called his election a sign that Americans had chosen “hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.” He proclaimed “an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics.” He urged Americans to “choose our better history” and rebuild their country free from ideology, prejudice and bigotry.

But just as the dawning of the Obama era promised a hopeful new future, the ending of the Bush era raised fundamental questions about U.S. democracy, including why so many Americans had thought that such an incurious and inarticulate man of privilege could lead the United States in a world of daunting challenges.

In this article, Parry attempted to answer that question, along with how the institutions designed to protect constitutional liberties crumbled so readily.

## [Historical Mystery of Bush's Presidency \(Jan. 20, 2009\)](#)

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After little more than two years of the Watergate scandal, Richard Nixon resigned and his successor, Gerald Ford, famously declared, “our long national nightmare is over.” But the painful end game of Nixon’s presidency was nothing compared to the eight excruciating years of George W. Bush.

Even on Inauguration Day 2009, as most Americans rejoice that Bush’s disastrous presidency is finally heading into the history books, there should be reflection on how this catastrophe could have befallen the United States – and on who else was responsible.

Indeed, it may become one of the great historical mysteries, leaving future scholars to scratch their heads over how a leader with as few qualifications as George W. Bush came to lead the world’s most powerful nation at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

How could a significant number of American voters have thought that an enterprise as vast and complicated as the U.S. government could be guided by a person who had failed at nearly every job he ever had, whose principal qualification was that his father, George H.W. Bush, was fondly remembered as having greater personal morality than Bill Clinton?

What had transformed American politics so much that, for many Americans, personal trivia, like Al Gore’s earth-tone sweaters, trumped serious policy debates, like global warming, health care for citizens, prudent fiscal policies and a responsible foreign policy?

And why did the nation – after the 9/11 attacks – so willingly follow Bush into a radical divergence from traditional U.S. foreign policy and into violations of longstanding national principles of inalienable rights and the rule of law?

**Perceptions of Reality**

Part of the answer to this historical mystery can be found in the complex relationship between the American people and mass media. The multi-billion-dollar stakes involved in selling commercial products to the world's richest market also made the American people the most analyzed population on earth.

Controlling their perceptions of reality and eliciting their emotions became more than just art forms; they were economic imperatives.

Just as Madison Avenue ad executives got rich selling products to American consumers, K Street political consultants earned tidy sums for using the false intimacy of TV to make their candidates appear more "down-to-earth" or "authentic" and their opponents seem "weird" or "dirty."

By 2000, the Republicans also had pulled far ahead of the Democrats in the machinery of political messaging, both in the technological sophistication of the party apparatus and the emergence of an overtly conservative media that stretched from print forms of newspapers, magazines and books to electronic outlets of radio, TV and the internet.

Nothing remotely as advanced existed on the liberal side of American political life. Conservatives liked to call the mainstream news media "liberal," but in reality, its outlook was either corporate with a strong sympathy for many Republican positions or consciously "centrist" with a goal of positioning the news content somewhere in the "middle."

In Campaign 2000, the Republican advantages in media guaranteed a rosier glow around George W. Bush's attributes and a harsher light on Al Gore's shortcomings. Many voters said they found Bush a more likeable fellow – "a regular guy" – while viewing Gore as a wonky know-it-all, who "thinks he's smarter than we are."

That was, at least in part, a reflection of how the two candidates were presented by the dominant news media, from Fox News to the *New York Times*.

The talented Republican image-makers portrayed Bush as a refreshing alternative to the endless parade of consultant-driven, poll-tested candidates – though, in reality, Bush's image was as consultant-driven and poll-tested

as anybody's, down to his purchase of a 1,600-acre ranch in Crawford, Texas, in 1999, just before running for the White House.

### **Post 9/11**

After the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington less than nine months into Bush's presidency, the American people immediately invested their hopes in what the press portrayed as Bush's natural leadership skills. The Democrats also granted Bush extraordinary deference.

But that wasn't enough. Bush's political advisers and the right-wing media sensed the opportunity presented by the 9/11 crisis to strengthen their ideological hand. Karl Rove, for instance, saw the possibility of locking in permanent Republican control of the U.S. government.

With the nation gripped by fear and jingoism, an enforced unity took hold. Bush declared a "war on terror" and oversaw a fundamental transformation of the U.S. constitutional system, asserting the "plenary" – or unlimited – powers of Commander in Chief at a time of war, making him what his advisers called the "unitary executive."

But the "war on terror" was unique in American history because it knew no limits either in time or space. It was an endless conflict on a global battlefield, including the American homeland.

So, under Bush's post-9/11 presidential theories, he could ignore laws passed by Congress. He simply attached a "signing statement" declaring that he would not be bound by any restrictions on his authority. As for laws enacted before his presidency, those, too, could be cast aside if they infringed on his view of his own power.

Bush also could override constitutional provisions that protected the rights of citizens. He could deny the ancient right of habeas corpus which requires some due process for a person to be locked away by the government. All Bush had to do was designate someone an "enemy combatant."

He also could order warrantless searches and wiretaps, waiving the Fourth Amendment's requirement for court-approved search warrants based on "probable cause."

Bush even could authorize U.S. interrogators to abuse and torture captives if he thought that would make them talk. He could order assassinations of

anyone he deemed a “terrorist” or somehow linked to “terrorism.” He could take the nation to war with or without congressional consent.

Former Vice President Gore asked in a 2006 speech: “Can it be true that any President really has such powers under our Constitution? If the answer is ‘yes,’ then under the theory by which these acts are committed, are there any acts that can on their face be prohibited?”

The answer to Gore’s rhetorical question was clearly, “no,” there were no boundaries for Bush’s “plenary” powers. In the President’s opinion, his powers were constrained only by his own judgment. Bush was “the decider.”

### **End of Rights**

Looking at Bush’s arrogation of powers, the troubling conclusion was that the nation’s treasured “unalienable rights,” proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, no longer applied, at least not as something guaranteed or “unalienable.”

Under the Bush theories, the rights were optional. They belonged not to each American citizen as a birthright, but to George W. Bush as Commander in Chief who got to decide how those rights would be parceled out.

The only safeguard left for American citizens – and for people around the world – was Bush’s assurance that his extraordinary authority would be used to stop “bad guys” and to protect the homeland.

Patriotic Americans would not feel any change, he promised. They could still go to the shopping mall or to baseball games. Only those who were judged threats to the national security would find themselves in trouble. That list kept growing, however, to include terrorist “affiliates,” “any person” who aids a terrorist, and government “leakers” who divulged Bush’s secret decisions.

To comfort Americans who feared that Bush was accumulating powers more fitting a King than a President, Bush’s supporters cited previous examples of presidents suspending parts of the Constitution, as Abraham Lincoln did with habeas corpus during the Civil War and Franklin Delano

Roosevelt did in incarcerating thousands of Japanese-Americans after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor at the start of American involvement in World War II. But those conflicts were traditional wars, definable in length and with endings marked by surrenders or treaties. By contrast, the “war on terror” was a global struggle against a tactic – terrorism – that had been employed by armies and irregular forces throughout history.

Administration officials acknowledged that there would be no precise moment when the struggle would be won, no clear-cut surrender ceremony on the deck of a U.S. aircraft carrier. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called the conflict the “long war,” but it could be dubbed the “endless war,” a struggle against elusive and ill-defined enemies.

At times, Bush expanded the scope of the conflict beyond defeating terrorism to eliminating “evil.”

Yet, since there was no reason to think the “war on terror” would ever end, a logical corollary was that the American political system – as redefined by Bush – had changed permanently.

If the war would last forever, so too would the “plenary” powers of the Commander in Chief. With the President’s emergency powers established as routine, the de facto suspension of American constitutional rights also would become permanent. The democratic Republic with its constitutional checks and balances – as envisioned by the Founders – would be no more.

### **Pushing Back**

But the emergence of an imperial presidency did not occur without some resistance. Despite residual fears about another 9/11, many rank-and-file Americans, both liberals and traditional conservatives, grew uneasy over Bush’s power grab. Their voices, however, were rarely heard in the major media, confined mostly to websites and alternative radio outlets.

Then, in 2005, the administration’s incompetence in handling Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans awakened more Americans to the emptiness of Bush’s promises about protecting the homeland. With Bush’s Iraq War also going badly, his approval rating sank below 50 percent on its way to the 20<sup>th</sup> percentiles.



In November 2006, American voters returned control of Congress to the opposition Democrats, and in November 2008, voters stripped the Republican Party of the White House, too.

Barack Obama's election represented a stunning repudiation of George W. Bush's radical concept of unlimited presidential power, but many of the factors that enabled Bush to get as far as he did remain in place to this day.

The major U.S. news media, which either cheered Bush on or looked the other way, has changed little. Indeed, in the days before the Inauguration, President-elect Obama made a point of courting the favor of right-wing columnists, such as Bill Kristol and Charles Krauthammer, and of the mainstream press, like the *Washington Post's* editorial board.

Obama also has reassured the Washington Establishment that he doesn't intend to shake things up too much. He's kept on one of the insiders' favorites, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and has appointed other officials to manage foreign and economic policy who have had a hand in many of the dubious decisions implemented by the Bush administration.

The incoming President also has been paying heed to Establishment voices urging him not to hold Bush and his subordinates accountable for the many crimes they committed. Don't listen to those American citizens who are demanding that the nation's laws be enforced against high-ranking officials, Obama is being counseled.

Yet, beyond the issue of accountability for lawbreaking, there is another even more daunting challenge, how to replace the political and media institutions that aided and abetted the Bush administration's assault on the nation's constitutional principles and on reason itself.

After all, one can only solve the mystery of how George W. Bush became President – and inflicted so much damage – by taking into account the collaboration of Washington's political and media Establishment.

One of President Obama's big policy challenges upon taking office was what to do about the military misadventures that Bush had started, including not only the quagmire in Iraq but also a stalemated war of attrition in Afghanistan.

Although many in the Democratic base – including a vocal anti-war movement that had been protesting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for the previous eight years – wanted nothing less than a complete withdrawal from these costly occupations, Obama instead sided with

the hawks in his administration such as Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton who urged a doubling down in Afghanistan, even while beginning a slow retreat from Iraq.

## [How the War Hawks Caged Obama \(Nov. 30, 2009\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Two of President Barack Obama's most acclaimed Cabinet appointments – keeping Republican Defense Secretary Robert Gates and picking former Democratic rival Hillary Clinton to be Secretary of State – set the risky course that his administration is following toward a military escalation in Afghanistan.

According to a variety of press accounts, Gates and Clinton proved to be a powerful tandem urging a more hawkish approach to the Afghan War and lending crucial political support to Gen. Stanley McChrystal's request for tens of thousands of additional troops.

Gates and Clinton more than counterbalanced the more dovish recommendations from Vice President Joe Biden and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, a former U.S. military commander in Afghanistan who warned about increasing Afghan government dependence on American forces.

So, as Obama prepares to unveil a plan expected to send about 30,000 more American soldiers to Afghanistan – pushing the U.S. total to about 100,000 or roughly double the size of the U.S. force there when President George W. Bush left office – it looks in retrospect as if the Gates-Clinton appointments a year ago effectively baked in this decision.

Though Washington's conventional wisdom remains enamored of those two "Team of Rivals" appointments – and especially the bipartisan appeal of the Gates selection – it is increasingly apparent that warnings from the Democratic rank-and-file about the need to make a clean break with Bush-era warmongering carried some real-life wisdom.

Instead, Obama went with war-time "continuity" and bipartisanship in keeping Gates and U.S. Central Command Gen. David Petraeus. By doing so, Obama ensured that the "surge" escalation strategy that Gates and Petraeus sold in Iraq would be repackaged for Afghanistan.

In April, Obama further locked in the escalation by allowing Gates to fire Gen. David McKiernan, as commander in Afghanistan, and replace him with McChrystal, a Petraeus favorite who had led the ruthless “war on terror” special operations under Bush. McKiernan was regarded as insufficiently aggressive and supposedly lacking the charisma and press savvy of Petraeus and McChrystal.

While Obama basked in some praise from neoconservative editorialists for these national security personnel selections – and for dispatching about 20,000 more troops to Afghanistan in the spring – the President was outflanking himself. That is, assuming he really had any serious notion of pursuing a more diplomatic and less militaristic approach to Afghanistan.

### **A Dire Report**

McChrystal, the new Afghan-theater commander, next prepared a dire report demanding 40,000 more troops to avert defeat. Reflecting the press savvy of these war hawks, the report was promptly leaked, touching off demands from Republicans and right-wing news outlets that Obama stop “dithering” and give his field commanders what they wanted.

Biden and Eikenberry put up a rear-guard battle against the proposed escalation, but they only seemed to have succeeded in giving Obama enough political space to scale back the troop commitments.

The escalation, which is intended to set the stage for a major U.S. offensive into Taliban-dominated Helmand Province, will surely increase U.S. casualties in Afghanistan – now exceeding 925 dead. The escalation also will drain scarce resources from the U.S. Treasury at a time when Republicans are attacking Obama’s social agenda as too expensive.

So, Obama’s much-hailed political strategy of building a “Team of Rivals” is revealing its dark underbelly: Powerful rivals can maneuver you into a corner that ultimately undermines your goals and promotes their own.

It can’t be said that Obama wasn’t warned. Here at *Consortium News*, for instance, we ran story after story raising questions about whether Gates, a longtime Bush Family operative known for his behind-the-scenes maneuvering, would end up undermining Obama’s presidency.

Our articles pointed out that Gates has long collaborated with neocons promoting the foreign policies and intelligence strategies that have brought the United States to its present circumstances.

Gates was linked to secret arms sales in the early 1980s to both Iraq and Iran as the two countries fought an eight-year war. However, because Gates had influential friends among Democrats – the likes of Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Boren – as well as Republican allies, investigations into Gates's roles in the Iran-Contra and Iraqgate scandals faltered.

### **Purging the Analysts**

Also, as an ambitious CIA bureaucrat in the early 1980s, Gates became CIA Director William Casey's action officer in breaking down the CIA analytical division's tradition of providing objective assessments to the President and other senior policymakers.

As Casey's choice to head that division, Gates purged analysts who wouldn't go along with the politicization and promoted those who would, a distortion of a core CIA function that has had devastating consequences through this current decade and the disastrous Iraq War.

A Cold War hardliner in the 1980s, Gates particularly punished analysts who resisted the direst assessments about Soviet power and intentions. Analysts who noted the Soviet Union's rapid decline and Moscow's desire for negotiations were shunted aside in favor of propagandists who were willing to issue alarmist reports.

Gates may have been singularly responsible for the CIA's failure to detect the collapse of the Soviet Empire from 1989 to 1991. For the prior decade, he was the most senior CIA analyst exaggerating threats that justified massive U.S. military build-ups as well as support for violent guerrilla groups.

For instance, Gates made wildly erroneous predictions about dangers posed by leftist-ruled Nicaragua as he espoused policy prescriptions, including the bombing of Nicaragua, that were considered too extreme even by the hawkish Reagan administration.

In a secret Dec. 14, 1984, memorandum to then-CIA Director Casey, Gates ignored many relevant facts that got in the way of his thesis about the need to launch air strikes against Sandinista military targets and to overthrow the supposedly “Marxist-Leninist” regime.

Gates made no mention of the fact that only a month earlier, the Sandinistas had won an election widely praised for its fairness by European and other international observers. But the Reagan administration had pressured pro-U.S. candidate Arturo Cruz into withdrawing when it became clear he would lose – and then denounced the election as a “sham.”

Without assessing whether the Sandinistas had any real commitment to democracy, Gates adopted the Reagan administration’s favored position – that Nicaragua’s elected president Daniel Ortega was, in effect, a Soviet-style dictator.

“The Nicaraguan regime is steadily moving toward consolidation of a Marxist-Leninist government and the establishment of a permanent and well armed ally of the Soviet Union and Cuba on the mainland of the Western Hemisphere,” Gates wrote to Casey.

The Gates assessment, however, turned out to be wrong. Rather than building a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship, the Sandinistas competed six years later in a robust presidential election – even allowing the United States to pour in millions of dollars to help elect Washington’s favored candidate, Violeta Chamorro.

The Sandinistas respected the election results, ceding power to Chamorro. The Sandinistas also have competed in subsequent elections with Ortega finally regaining the presidency in the latest election held in November 2006.

### **Aggressive Intent?**

In the 1984 memo, Gates also promoted another right-wing canard of the era – that Nicaragua’s procurement of weapons was proof of its aggressive intentions, not an attempt at national self-defense.

Again, Gates ignored significant facts, including a history starting in 1980 of first the right-wing Argentine junta and then the United States financing

and training a brutal counterrevolutionary movement, known as the Contras.

By 1984, the Contras had earned a reputation for rape, torture, murder and terrorism – as they ravaged towns especially along Nicaragua’s northern border. In 1983-84, the CIA also had used the cover of the Contra war to plant mines in Nicaragua’s harbors, an operation later condemned by the World Court.

But Gates offered none of this context in his five-page memo to Casey, who was a strong advocate of the Contra cause. The memo made no serious analytical attempt to gauge whether Nicaragua – the target of aggression by a nearby superpower, the United States – might have been trying to build up forces to deter more direct U.S. intervention.

Instead, Gates told his boss what he wanted to hear. “The Soviets and Cubans are turning Nicaragua into an armed camp with military forces far beyond its defensive needs and in a position to intimidate and coerce its neighbors,” Gates wrote.

After laying out his premises, Gates moved to his conclusion – that there was no hope the Sandinistas would accept democracy, even if the Contras remained in the field, and thus there was no choice but to oust the Sandinistas by force. Gates wrote:

It seems to me that the only way that we can prevent disaster in Central America is to acknowledge openly what some have argued privately: that the existence of a Marxist-Leninist regime in Nicaragua closely allied with the Soviet Union and Cuba is unacceptable to the United States and that the United States will do everything in its power short of invasion to put that regime out.

## **Tough Talk**

Dressing up his recommendations as hardheaded realism, Gates added:

Once you accept that ridding the Continent of this regime is important to our national interest and must be our primary objective, the issue then becomes a stark one. You either acknowledge that you are willing to take all necessary measures (short of military invasion) to bring down that regime or you admit that you do not have the will to do anything about the problem and you make the best deal you can.

Casting aside all fictions, it is the latter course we are on. ... Any negotiated agreement simply will offer a cover for the consolidation of the regime and two or three years from now we will be in considerably worse shape than we are now.

Gates then called for withdrawing diplomatic recognition of the Nicaraguan government, backing a government-in-exile, imposing an economic embargo on exports and imports “to maximize the economic dislocation of the regime,” and launching “air strikes to destroy a considerable portion of Nicaragua’s military buildup.”

In the memo, Gates depicted those who would do less as weaklings and fools, including some administration officials who favored focusing on arranging new covert aid to the Contras.

“These are hard measures,” Gates wrote about his recommendations. “They probably are politically unacceptable. But it is time to stop fooling ourselves about what is going to happen in Central America. Putting our heads in the sand will not prevent the events that I outlined at the beginning of this note.”

Despite Gates’s history – as either an opportunist or an extremist depending on whether you think he actually believed his own words or was just currying favor with his boss – he has been embraced as something of a new Wise Man in today’s Washington, a favorite of the city’s insider press corps. After Obama won in November 2008, some of Obama’s clever aides pushed the President-elect to retain Gates as a signal of Obama’s sincere desire for bipartisanship. Similarly, Obama reached out to his chief Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, whose hard line in the Middle East made her a Democrat acceptable to Washington’s influential neocon community.

The Washington press corps fell in love with this narrative based on Doris Kearns Goodwin’s *Team of Rivals*, a book about how Abraham Lincoln assembled his Cabinet. The incoming Obama administration and top Democrats turned a deaf ear to outsiders who warned about the practical consequences of following such a route in modern Washington.

There was always the danger that these powerful “rivals” would fill key staff positions with subordinates who didn’t share the new President’s goals and then essentially hijack a sensitive policy decision.

That situation appears to have arrived as Obama finds himself caged in by war hawks – Gates, Petraeus, McChrystal and Clinton – determined to escalate the war in Afghanistan.

Following a coup in Haiti that deposed popular President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991, Robert Parry deployed to Port-au-Prince to cover the country's political turmoil for PBS "Frontline." Though he was roughed up by Haiti's security forces, his experience covering Haiti instilled in him a lifelong affection for the country and its people, coming to believe that too many Americans view Haitians through a lens of racial bigotry.

There is a very different historical narrative that Parry described in 2010, explaining how Haiti in a very profound way shaped the course of U.S. history. This article was published the day after an earthquake devastated the small Caribbean nation, killing at least 100,000 people.

## [Haiti and America's Historic Debt \(Jan.13, 2010\)](#)

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When Haiti intrudes on U.S. consciousness, it's usually because of some natural disaster or a violent political upheaval, and the U.S. response is often paternalistic, if not tinged with a racist disdain for the country's predominantly black population and its seemingly endless failure to escape cycles of crushing poverty.

However, more than two centuries ago, Haiti represented one of the most important neighbors of the new American Republic and played a central role in enabling the United States to expand westward. If not for Haiti, the course of U.S. history could have been very different, with the United States possibly never expanding much beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

In the 1700s, then-called St. Domingue and covering the western third of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti was a French colony that rivaled the American colonies as the most valuable European possession in the Western Hemisphere. Relying on a ruthless exploitation of African slaves, French plantations there produced nearly one-half the world's coffee and sugar.

Many of the great cities of France owe their grandeur to the wealth that was extracted from Haiti and its slaves. But the human price was unspeakably high. The French had devised a fiendishly cruel slave system that imported enslaved Africans for work in the fields with accounting procedures for their amortization. They were literally worked to death.

The American colonists may have rebelled against Great Britain over issues such as representation in Parliament and arbitrary actions by King George III. But black Haitians confronted a brutal system of slavery. An infamous



French method of executing a troublesome slave was to insert a gunpowder charge into his rectum and then detonate the explosive.

So, as the American colonies fought for their freedom in the 1770s and as that inspiration against tyranny spread to France in the 1780s, the repercussions would eventually reach Haiti, where the Jacobins' cry of "liberty, equality and fraternity" resonated with special force. Slaves demanded that the concepts of freedom be applied universally.

When the brutal French plantation system continued, violent slave uprisings followed. Hundreds of white plantation owners were slain as the rebels overran the colony. A self-educated slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as the revolution's leader, demonstrating skills on the battlefield and in the complexities of politics.

Despite the atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict, the rebels known as the "Black Jacobins" gained the sympathy of the American Federalist Party and particularly Alexander Hamilton, a native of the Caribbean himself and a fierce opponent of slavery. Hamilton, the first U.S. Treasury Secretary, helped L'Ouverture draft a constitution for the new nation.

### **Conspiracies**

But events in Paris and Washington soon conspired to undo the promise of Haiti's new freedom. Despite Hamilton's sympathies, some Founders, including Thomas Jefferson who owned 180 slaves and owed his political strength to agrarian interests, looked nervously at the slave rebellion in St. Domingue. Jefferson feared that slave uprisings might spread northward.

"If something is not done, and soon done," Jefferson wrote in 1797, "we shall be the murderers of our own children."

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the chaos and excesses of the French Revolution led to the ascendance of Napoleon Bonaparte, a brilliant and vain military commander possessed of legendary ambition. As he expanded his power across Europe, Napoleon also dreamed of rebuilding a French empire in the Americas.

In 1801, Jefferson became the third President of the United States and his interests at least temporarily aligned with those of Napoleon. The French

dictator was determined to restore French control of St. Domingue and Jefferson was eager to see the slave rebellion crushed.

Through secret diplomatic channels, Napoleon asked Jefferson if the United States would help a French army traveling by sea to St. Domingue. Jefferson replied that “nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with everything and reduce Toussaint [L’Ouverture] to starvation.”

But Napoleon had a secret second phase of his plan that he didn’t share with Jefferson. Once the French army had subdued L’Ouverture and his rebel force, Napoleon intended to advance to the North American mainland, basing a new French empire in New Orleans and settling the vast territory west of the Mississippi River.

In May 1801, Jefferson picked up the first inklings of Napoleon’s other agenda. Alarmed at the prospect of a major European power controlling New Orleans and thus the mouth of the strategic Mississippi River, Jefferson backpedaled on his commitment to Napoleon, retreating to a posture of neutrality. Still terrified at the prospect of a successful republic organized by freed African slaves Jefferson took no action to block Napoleon’s thrust into the New World.

In 1802, a French expeditionary force achieved initial success against the slave army, driving L’Ouverture’s forces back into the mountains. But, as they retreated, the ex-slaves torched the cities and the plantations, destroying the colony’s once-thriving economic infrastructure.

L’Ouverture, hoping to bring the war to an end, accepted Napoleon’s promise of a negotiated settlement that would ban future slavery in the country. As part of the agreement, L’Ouverture turned himself in. Napoleon, however, broke his word.

Jealous of L’Ouverture, who was regarded by some admirers as a general with skills rivaling Napoleon’s, the French dictator had L’Ouverture shipped in chains back to Europe where he was mistreated and died in prison.

### **Foiled Plans**

Infuriated by the betrayal, L’Ouverture’s young generals resumed the war with a vengeance. In the months that followed, the French army already

decimated by disease was overwhelmed by a fierce enemy fighting in familiar terrain and determined not to be put back into slavery.

Napoleon sent a second French army, but it too was destroyed. Though the famed general had conquered much of Europe, he lost 24,000 men, including some of his best troops, in St. Domingue before abandoning his campaign. The death toll among the ex-slaves was much higher, but they had prevailed, albeit over a devastated land.

By 1803, a frustrated Napoleon denied his foothold in the New World agreed to sell New Orleans and the Louisiana territories to Jefferson. Ironically, the Louisiana Purchase, which opened the heart of the present United States to American settlement, had been made possible by Jefferson's misguided collaboration with Napoleon.

Jefferson also saw the new territory as an opportunity to expand slavery in the United States, creating a lucrative new industry of slave-breeding that would financially benefit Jefferson and his plantation-owning neighbors. But nothing would be done to help Haiti.

"By their long and bitter struggle for independence, St. Domingue's blacks were instrumental in allowing the United States to more than double the size of its territory," wrote Stanford University professor John Chester Miller in his book, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*.

But, Miller observed, "the decisive contribution made by the black freedom fighters went almost unnoticed by the Jeffersonian administration."

The loss of L'Ouverture's leadership dealt a severe blow to Haiti's prospects, according to Jefferson scholar Paul Finkelman of Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

"Had Toussaint lived, it's very likely that he would have remained in power long enough to put the nation on a firm footing, to establish an order of succession," Finkelman told me in an interview. "The entire subsequent history of Haiti might have been different."

Instead, the island nation continued a downward spiral. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the radical slave leader who had replaced L'Ouverture, formally declared the nation's independence and returned it to its original Indian name, Haiti. A year later, apparently fearing a return of the French

and a counterrevolution, Dessalines ordered the massacre of the remaining French whites on the island.

Though the Haitian resistance had blunted Napoleon's planned penetration of the North American mainland, Jefferson reacted to the shocking bloodshed in Haiti by imposing a stiff economic embargo on the island nation. In 1806, Dessalines himself was brutally assassinated, touching off a cycle of political violence that would haunt Haiti for the next two centuries.

### **Jefferson's Blemish**

For some scholars, Jefferson's vengeful policy toward Haiti like his personal ownership of slaves represented an ugly blemish on his legacy as a historic advocate of freedom. Even in his final years, Jefferson remained obsessed with Haiti and its link to the issue of American slavery.

In the 1820s, the former President proposed a scheme for taking away the children born to black slaves in the United States and shipping them to Haiti. In that way, Jefferson posited that both slavery and America's black population could be phased out. Eventually, in Jefferson's view, Haiti would be all black and the United States white.

Jefferson's deportation scheme never was taken very seriously and American slavery would continue for another four decades until it was ended by the Civil War. The official hostility of the United States toward Haiti extended almost as long, ending in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln finally granted diplomatic recognition.

By then, however, Haiti's destructive patterns of political violence and economic chaos had been long established continuing up to the present time. Personal and political connections between Haiti's light-skinned elite and power centers of Washington also have lasted through today.

Recent Republican administrations have been particularly hostile to the popular will of the impoverished Haitian masses. When leftist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was twice elected by overwhelming margins, he was ousted both times first during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and again under President George W. Bush.

Washington's conventional wisdom on Haiti holds that the country is a hopeless basket case that would best be governed by business-oriented

technocrats who would take their marching orders from the United States.

However, the Haitian people have a different perspective. Unlike most Americans who have no idea about their historic debt to Haiti, many Haitians know this history quite well. The bitter memories of Jefferson and Napoleon still feed the distrust that Haitians of all classes feel toward the outside world.

“In Haiti, we became the first black independent country,” Aristide once told me in an interview. “We understand, as we still understand, it wasn’t easy for them American, French and others to accept our independence.”

In late 2010, following the largest publication of classified material in U.S. history – first with exposés of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then with a trove of compromising diplomatic cables that deeply embarrassed the United States – the U.S. government began preparing legal action against WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. But despite Vice President Joe Biden’s assertions that Assange was nothing but a “high-tech terrorist,” Parry explains in this article that his actions were not substantively different than what investigative journalists covering national security topics do every day – namely appeal to sources in the government to break the law by sharing classified information.

Assange, while imprisoned in the United Kingdom’s notorious Belmarsh Prison for his journalistic work, was awarded the Consortium for Independent Journalism’s 2020 Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award.

## [Journalists Are All Julian Assange \(Dec. 16, 2010\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Whatever the unusual aspects of the case, the Obama administration’s reported plan to indict WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for conspiring with Army Pvt. Bradley Manning<sup>z++++</sup> to obtain U.S. secrets strikes at the heart of investigative journalism on national security scandals.

That’s because the process for reporters obtaining classified information about crimes of state most often involves a journalist persuading some government official to break the law either by turning over classified documents or at least by talking about the secret information. There is almost always some level of “conspiracy” between reporter and source.

Contrary to what some outsiders might believe, it’s actually quite uncommon for sensitive material to simply arrive “over the transom”

unsolicited. Indeed, during three decades of reporting on these kinds of stories, I can only recall a few secret documents arriving that way to me.

In most cases, I played some role – either large or small – in locating the classified information or convincing some government official to divulge some secrets. More often than not, I was the instigator of these “conspiracies.”

My “co-conspirators” typically were well-meaning government officials who were aware of some wrongdoing committed under the cloak of national security, but they were never eager to put their careers at risk by talking about these offenses. I usually had to persuade them, whether by appealing to their consciences or by constructing some reasonable justification for them to help.

Other times, I was sneaky in liberating some newsworthy classified information from government control. Indeed, in 1995, Consortiumnews.com was started as a way to publish secret and top-secret information that I had discovered in the files of a closed congressional inquiry during the chaotic period between the Republicans winning the 1994 elections and their actual takeover of Congress in early 1995.

In December 1994, I asked for and was granted access to supposedly unclassified records left behind by a task force that had looked into allegations that Ronald Reagan’s campaign had sabotaged President Jimmy Carter’s hostage negotiations with Iran in 1980.

To my surprise, I discovered that the investigators, apparently in their haste to wrap up their work, had failed to purge the files of all classified material. So, while my “minder” wasn’t paying attention to me, I ran some of the classified material through a copier and left with it in a folder. I later wrote articles about these documents and posted some on the internet.

Such behavior – whether cajoling a nervous government official to expose a secret or exploiting some unauthorized access to classified material – is part of what an investigative journalist does in covering national security abuses. The traditional rule of thumb has been that it’s the government’s job to hide the secrets and a reporter’s job to uncover them.

In the aftermath of significant leaks, the government often tries to convince news executives to spike or water down the stories “for the good of the country.” But it is the news organization’s ultimate decision whether to comply or to publish.

Historically, most of these leaks have caused the government some short-term embarrassment (although usually accompanied by exaggerated howls of protests). In the long run, however, the public has been served by knowing about some government abuse. Reforms often follow as they did during the Iran-Contra scandal that I was involved in exposing in the 1980s.

### **A Nixon Precedent**

Yet, in the WikiLeaks case – instead of simply complaining and moving on – the Obama administration appears to be heading in a direction not seen since the Nixon administration sought to block the publication of the Pentagon Papers secret history of the Vietnam War in 1971.

In doing so, the Obama administration, which came to power vowing a new era of openness, is contemplating a novel strategy for criminalizing traditional journalistic practices, while trying to assure major U.S. news outlets that they won’t be swept up in the Assange-Manning dragnet.

The *New York Times* reported on Thursday that federal prosecutors were reviewing the possibility of indicting Assange on conspiracy charges for allegedly encouraging or assisting Manning in extracting “classified military and State Department files from a government computer system.”

The *Times* article by Charlie Savage notes that if prosecutors determine that Assange provided some help in the process,

they believe they could charge him as a conspirator in the leak, not just as a passive recipient of the documents who then published them.

Among materials prosecutors are studying is an online chat log in which Private Manning is said to claim that he had been directly communicating with Mr. Assange using an encrypted internet conferencing service as the soldier was downloading government files. Private Manning is also said to have claimed that Mr. Assange gave him access to a dedicated server for uploading some of them to WikiLeaks.

Adrian Lamo, an ex-hacker in whom Private Manning confided and who eventually turned him in, said Private Manning detailed those interactions in instant-message conversations with him. He said the special server’s purpose was to allow Private Manning’s submissions to ‘be bumped to the top of the queue for review.’ By Mr. Lamo’s account, Private Manning bragged about this ‘as evidence of his status as the high-profile source for WikiLeaks.’

Though some elements of this suspected Assange-Manning collaboration may be technically unique because of the internet's role – and that may be a relief to more traditional news organizations like the *Times* which has published some of the WikiLeaks documents – the underlying reality is that what WikiLeaks has done is essentially “the same wine” of investigative journalism in “a new bottle” of the internet.

By shunning WikiLeaks as some deviant journalistic hybrid, mainstream U.S. news outlets may breathe easier now but may find themselves caught up in a new legal precedent that could be applied to them later.

As for the Obama administration, its sudden aggressiveness in divining new “crimes” in the publication of truthful information is especially stunning when contrasted with its “see no evil” approach toward openly acknowledged crimes committed by President George W. Bush and his subordinates, including major offenses such as torture, kidnapping and aggressive war.

### **Holder's Move**

The possibility of an indictment of Assange no longer seems to me like rampant paranoia. Initially, I didn't believe that the Obama administration was serious in stretching the law to find ways to prosecute Assange and to shut down WikiLeaks.

But then there was the pressure on WikiLeaks' vendors such as Amazon.com and PayPal along with threats from prominent U.S. political figures, spouting rhetoric about Assange as a “terrorist” comparable to Osama bin Laden and a worthy target of assassination.

Normally, when people engage in such talk of violence, they are the ones who attract the attention of police and prosecutors. In this case, however, the Obama administration appears to be bowing to those who talk loosely about murdering a truth-teller.

Attorney General Eric Holder announced last week that he has taken “significant” steps in the investigation, a possible reference to what an Assange lawyer said he had learned from Swedish authorities about a secret grand jury meeting in Northern Virginia.

The *Times* reported,



Justice Department officials have declined to discuss any grand jury activity. But in interviews, people familiar with the case said the department appeared to be attracted to the possibility of prosecuting Mr. Assange as a co-conspirator to the leaking because it is under intense pressure to make an example of him as a deterrent to further mass leaking of electronic documents over the internet.

By bringing a case against Mr. Assange as a conspirator to Private Manning's leak, the government would not have to confront awkward questions about why it is not also prosecuting traditional news organizations or investigative journalists who also disclose information the government says should be kept secret — including the *New York Times*, which also published some documents originally obtained by WikiLeaks.

In other words, the Obama administration appears to be singling out Assange as an outlier in the journalistic community who is already regarded as something of a pariah. In that way, mainstream media personalities can be invited to join in his persecution without thinking that they might be next.

Though American journalists may understandably want to find some protective cover by pretending that Julian Assange is not like us, the reality is – whether we like it or not – we are all Julian Assange.

The 2010 elections, held half-way through President Obama's first term, ended unified Democratic control of Congress and the White House by giving Republicans a majority in the House of Representatives. Republicans gained 63 seats in the House, the largest shift in seats since 1948. The GOP also picked up seven seats in the Senate but failed to win a majority in that chamber.

Widely characterized as a "Republican wave" election, the GOP's success was mainly attributed to economic issues and right-wing anger over the passing of the Affordable Care Act, which inspired the fiscally conservative, "constitutionalist" Tea Party movement that helped mobilize voters for Republican candidates nationwide. Here, Parry discusses what the Tea Partiers got wrong about the Constitution.

## [The Coming War over the Constitution \(Dec. 30, 2010\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Despite a few victories in the lame-duck session of Congress, Democrats and progressives should be under no illusion about the new flood of know-nothingism that is about to inundate the United States in the guise of a return to "first principles" and a deep respect for the U.S. Constitution.

The same right-wingers who happily accepted George W. Bush's shift toward a police state – his claims of limitless executive power, warrantless wiretaps, repudiation of habeas corpus, redefining cruel and unusual punishment, suppression of dissent, creation of massive databases on citizens, arbitrary no-fly lists, and endless overseas wars – have now reinvented themselves as brave protectors of American liberty.

Indeed, the Tea Party crowd so loves the Constitution that the new Republican House majority will take the apparently unprecedented step of reading the document aloud at the start of the new congressional session, presumably including the part about enslaved African-Americans being counted as three-fifths of a white person for purposes of congressional representation.

One also has to wonder if these “constitutionalists” will mumble over the preamble's assertion that a key purpose of the Constitution is to “promote the general Welfare.” And what to do with Section Eight of Article One, which gives Congress the power to levy taxes, borrow money, regulate commerce among the states, and “establish an uniform Rule of Naturalization”?

If one were to buy into the Tea Party's interpretation of the founding document, you'd have to denounce such concepts as “socialism” and/or “intrusions” on states' rights.

Part of the Tea Party's mythology is that federal taxes are an unconstitutional imposition that the national debt is another new thing, and that regulation of commerce is outside federal authority.

Surely, there can be honest debates about what's the best way to “promote the general Welfare,” or the wisest balance between taxation and debt, or the proper role of states in enforcing laws when there is a federal interest.

But the pretense of the Tea Party is that the U.S. Constitution is definitive on these points and that the Founders favored today's right-wing interpretation of the federal government's powers, i.e. that taxes, debt and regulation of commerce are somehow unconstitutional.

Another curious “reform” from the new Republican House majority will be a requirement to specify what constitutional authority underpins every piece

of legislation, a rather silly idea since every bill can make some claim to constitutionality even if the federal courts might eventually disagree.

But the larger truth that the Tea Partiers don't want to acknowledge is that the Constitution represented a major power grab by the federal government, when compared to the loosely drawn Articles of Confederation, which lacked federal taxing authority and other national powers.

The Founders also recognized that changing circumstances would require modification of the Constitution which is why they provided for amendments. Indeed, the primary limitations on federal authority were included in the first ten amendments, called the Bill of Rights. Subsequent amendments included the eradication of slavery and extending the vote to blacks, and later to women.

### **Civil Liberties?**

Yet, while the Tea Partiers and the Right have embraced a mythical view of the Constitution as some ideal document that opposes federal power to tax, borrow and pass laws that improve "the general Welfare," they have been less interested in the document's protection of civil liberties, especially when the targets of abuse are Muslims, Hispanics, blacks and anti-war dissenters.

Many on the Right have found plenty of justifications to trample on the rights of these minorities, even when the actions violate clear-cut mandates in the Constitution, such as the Fourth Amendment's requirement of "probable cause" before the government can engage in search and seizure and the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on inflicting "cruel and unusual punishment."

Especially when the Right's hero George W. Bush was violating those rights last decade, there were word games to explain the unexplainable.

For instance, in 2007, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales argued that "there is no expressed grant of habeas in the Constitution." But that was a point of sophistry since the Founders took habeas corpus rights for granted under English law and thus limited the reference in the Constitution to the extreme circumstances required before the government could suspend its need to justify a person's incarceration before a judge.

Gonzales's game-playing was similar to the argument made by Tea Party favorite Christine O'Donnell during a Delaware Senate debate – that the Constitution doesn't call for the "separation of church and state," because those specific words aren't used.

The First Amendment does say that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," which Thomas Jefferson paraphrased as the "separation of church and state." But it has become an article of faith among many on the Right that "separation of church and state" is a myth. O'Donnell later described herself as high-fiving her aides, thinking she had won the debating point.

### **Radical Revision**

Curiously, too, while supposedly revering the Constitution and its original intent, the Tea Partiers and their Republican allies simultaneously are proposing a radical revision of the founding document, an amendment that would allow a super-majority of states to overturn laws passed by Congress and signed into law by the president.

This neo-nullificationism smacks of South Carolina's resistance to President Andrew Jackson's federalism in the 1830s, a clash that set the stage for the Confederacy's secession and the Civil War in the 1860s. The proposed Tea Party amendment, which is supported by many Southern officials including incoming House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia, could again wreak havoc on the nation.

Because the proposed amendment would give states the power to veto tax increases without bearing responsibility for appropriations, the unintended consequences would likely be at least as important as the intended.

In other words, the Tea Party and the Republicans are positioning themselves as both fundamentalists embracing the Constitution's "original intent" and radicals determined to rip it up. Still, they are not likely to pay any price for their reckless ideas or their blatant hypocrisy.

If we've learned anything over the past several decades, it is that reason and consistency have little place in the U.S. political/media system. What counts is the size of the megaphone – and the American Right has built a

truly impressive one, while the Left has largely downplayed the need for making an alternate case to the public.

This means that we can expect the Tea Party's myth-based assertions about the Founders' intent to continue, along with the Right's selective concern about the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution.

So, it seems the country is in for a new round of crazy while the voices for sanity stay largely mute.

In early 2011, the Arab Spring broke out with a series of anti-government protests and armed rebellions starting with the Tunisian Revolution and spreading to five other countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. The U.S. government walked a fine line during these events, in some cases supporting the suppression of protests, as in Bahrain, and in other cases actively supporting the rebellions with military aid, as in Libya and Syria.

In this article, Parry assesses the media's biased coverage of these world-changing events, explaining how it largely served to perpetuate falsified conventional wisdom. In particular, he examines the shoddy reporting on Libya's Muammar Gaddafi's supposed role in the bombing of Pan Am 103, despite evidence going in a different direction.

## [Through the US Media Lens Darkly \(March 18, 2011\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

As Americans turn to their news media to make sense of the upheavals in the Middle East, it's worth remembering that the bias of the mainstream U.S. press corps is most powerful when covering a Washington-designated villain.

In that case, all uncertainty about some aspect of his villainy is discarded. Evidence in serious dispute is stated as flat fact. Readers are expected to share this unquestioned belief about the story's frame – and that usually helps manufacture consent behind some desired government action or policy.

At such moments, it's also hard to contest the conventional wisdom. To do so will guarantee that you'll be treated as some kook or pariah. It won't even matter if you're vindicated in the long run. You'll still be remembered as some weirdo who was out of step.

And those who push the misguided consensus will mostly go on to bigger and better things, as people who have proved their worth even if they got it all wrong. Such is the way the national U.S. political/media system now works – or some might say doesn't work.

Perhaps the costliest recent example of this pattern was the Official Certainty about Iraq's WMD in 2002-03. With only a few exceptions, the major U.S. news media, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, bought into the Bush administration's WMD propaganda, partly because Saddam Hussein was so unsavory that no one wanted to be dubbed a "Saddam apologist."

When Iraq's WMD turned out to be a mirage, there was almost no accountability at senior levels of the U.S. news media.

The *Washington Post's* editorial page editor Fred Hiatt, who repeatedly reported Iraq's WMD as "flat fact," is still in the same job eight years later; Bill Keller, who penned an influential article called "The I-Can't-Believe-I'm-a-Hawk Club," got promoted to *New York Times* executive editor after the Iraq-WMD claims exploded, leaving egg on the faces of him and his fellow club members.

So, now as Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi reprises his old role as "mad dog of the Middle East," Americans are being prepped for another Middle East conflict by endlessly reading as flat fact that Libyan intelligence agents blew up Pan Am Flight 103 back in 1988.

These articles never mention that there is strong doubt the Libyans had anything to do with the attack and that the 2001 conviction of Libyan agent Ali al-Megrahi was falling apart in 2009 before he was released on humanitarian grounds, suffering from prostate cancer.

Though it's true that a Scottish court did convict Megrahi – while acquitting a second Libyan – the judgment appears to have been more a political compromise than an act of justice. One of the judges told Dartmouth government professor Dirk Vandewalle about "enormous pressure put on the court to get a conviction."

### **Discredited Testimony**

After the testimony of a key witness was discredited, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission agreed in 2007 to reconsider Megrahi's conviction out of a strong concern that it was a miscarriage of justice. However, again due to intense political pressure, that review was proceeding slowly in 2009 when Scottish authorities agreed to release Megrahi on medical grounds.

Megrahi dropped his appeal in order to gain an early release in the face of a terminal cancer diagnosis, but that doesn't mean he was guilty. He has continued to assert his innocence and an objective press corps would reflect the doubts regarding his conviction.

The Scottish court's purported reason for finding Megrahi guilty – while acquitting his co-defendant Lamin Khalifa Fhimah – was the testimony of Toni Gauci, owner of a clothing store in Malta who allegedly sold Megrahi a shirt, the remnants of which were found with the shards of the suitcase that contained the bomb.

The rest of the case rested on a theory that Megrahi put the luggage on a flight from Malta to Frankfurt, where it was transferred to a connecting flight to London, where it was transferred onto Pan Am 103 bound for New York, a decidedly unlikely way to undertake an act of terrorism given all the random variables involved.

Megrahi would have had to assume that three separate airport security systems – at Malta, Frankfurt and London – would fail to give any serious scrutiny to an unaccompanied suitcase or to detect the bomb despite security officials being on the lookout for just such a threat.

As historian William Blum recounted in a Consortiumnews.com article after Megrahi's 2001 conviction, "The case for the suitcase's hypothetical travels must also deal with the fact that, according to Air Malta, all the documented luggage on KM180 was collected by passengers in Frankfurt and did not continue in transit to London, and that two Pan Am on-duty officials in Frankfurt testified that no unaccompanied luggage was introduced onto Pan Am 103A, the feeder flight to London."

Plus, there were problems with Gauci's belated identification of Megrahi as the shirt-buyer a decade after the fact. Gauci had made contradictory IDs and had earlier given a physical description that didn't match Megrahi.

Gauci also reportedly received a \$2 million reward for his testimony and then moved to Australia, where he went into retirement.

In 2007, the Scottish review panel decided to reconsider Megrahi's conviction after concluding that Gauci's testimony was unbelievable. And without Gauci's testimony, the case against Megrahi was virtually the same as the case against his co-defendant who was acquitted.

Nevertheless, Megrahi's conviction did assuage the understandable human desire to see someone punished for such a heinous crime, albeit a possibly innocent man. The original accusations against him in the early 1990s also fit with the geopolitical interests of powerful figures in Washington and London.

Megrahi's conviction allowed more international pressure to be put on Libya, which was then regarded as the archetypal "rogue" state. Indeed, it was to get those onerous economic sanctions lifted that Libya took "responsibility" for the Pan Am attack even as Libyan officials continued to deny having anything to do with it.

### **Flat Facts**

Yet, despite all these reasonable doubts, the U.S. news media continues to treat Libya's guilt in the Pan Am case as a flat fact.

For instance, the *New York Times* led an article on Friday about the CIA's mixed attitudes toward Libya by noting that the CIA's deputy station chief in Beirut was killed "when Libyan intelligence operatives blew up Pan Am Flight 103 above Scotland in 1988."



One has to assume that if the *Times* didn't have an anti-Gaddafi bias, the article would at least have thrown in an "allegedly" or a "believed to have" – or a "disputed," a word the *Times* and other U.S. news outlets routinely use when dealing, in the opposite way, with another Muslim "designated villain," Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Whenever an American news organization refers to Ahmadinejad's 2009 reelection, the word "disputed" is almost always included, if not stronger language like "stolen" or "rigged." Although it's technically true that the election was "disputed," no credible evidence has been presented to prove that Ahmadinejad used fraud to win.

In fact, the evidence goes the other way. Though widely ignored by the major American news media, a study by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland found little evidence to support allegations of fraud or to conclude that most Iranians view Ahmadinejad as illegitimate.

PIPA analyzed multiple polls of the Iranian public from three different sources, including some before the June 12, 2009, election and some afterwards. The study found that in all the polls, a majority said they planned to vote for Ahmadinejad or had voted for him. The numbers ranged from 52 to 57 percent just before the election to 55 to 66 percent after the election.

"These findings do not prove that there were no irregularities in the election process," said Steven Kull, director of PIPA. "But they do not support the belief that a majority rejected Ahmadinejad."

An analysis by former U.S. national security officials Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett reached a similar conclusion. They found that the "personal political agendas" of American commentators caused them to side with the anti-Ahmadinejad protesters who sought to overturn the election results.

Among those biased American journalists on assignment in Iran in 2009 was *Times* executive editor Keller, one of the "liberal hawks" on Iraq. He coauthored a "news analysis" that opened with an old joke about Ahmadinejad looking into a mirror and saying "male lice to the right,

female lice to the left,” disparaging both his Islamic conservatism and his rise from the street.

The use of the word “disputed” continued to describe the Iranian election even after defeated candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi failed to produce any significant evidence. The best Mousavi’s people could do was accuse Ahmadinejad’s supporters of giving pay raises, passing out food and printing millions of extra ballots – none of which prove election fraud.

Raising pay and handing out food may constitute machine politics, but not fraud. Printing extra paper ballots is simply what is done in elections when it’s unclear how many people will vote or where they will cast their ballots.

However, since Ahmadinejad is designated an American villain, stories are routinely slanted against him. Thus, his election will always be “disputed,” just as the opposite rule will apply to doubts about Libya’s or Megrahi’s guilt on Pan Am 103. That will never be “disputed.”

In a similar way, when a designated enemy sends troops across a border – whether invited by the existing government or not – it is an “invasion.” However, when a U.S. ally like Saudi Arabia sends its troops into Bahrain to help crush a popular uprising, the word “invasion” disappears. Neutral words apply like “troop movement” or “intervention.”

It is through the media’s distorted lens darkly that Americans must discern facts and draw conclusions.

On March 19, 2011, eight years to the day after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Obama administration launched military action against Libya. Initially, the intervention was cast as an attempt to protect civilians and enforce a no-fly zone, but it quickly morphed into a full-fledged regime change operation.

Ultimately Muammar Gaddafi would be overthrown (and brutally murdered) and Libya would become a failed state, with many of its weapons being shuttled to nearby Syria, fueling the civil war there. Gaddafi’s overthrow is also blamed for destabilizing North Africa and leading to the rise of Islamic extremist groups in the region, as well as contributing to a migrant crisis that would rock Europe in subsequent years.

One week into the U.S. intervention, Parry wrote an article warning of the possible dangers, presciently asking if a U.S.-assisted rebel victory in Libya might give Islamic terror groups a foothold in the region.

[The Neocons Regroup on Libyan War \(March 25, 2011\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

American neoconservatives worried that the pro-democracy wave sweeping the Middle East might take out only “moderate” Arab dictators, but the neocons now see hope that uprisings will topple “enemy” regimes in Libya and Syria.

Yet, in rallying U.S. support for these rebellions, the neocons may be repeating the mistake they made by pushing the U.S. invasion of Iraq. They succeeded in ousting Saddam Hussein, who had long been near the top of Israel’s enemies list, but the war also removed him as a bulwark against both Islamic extremists and Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf.

The neocons now are seeking a stronger U.S. military intervention in Libya to oust Col. Muammar Gaddafi (another old Israeli nemesis) and urging more support for protesters in Syria to overthrow the Assad dynasty (regarded as a frontline enemy of Israel).

However, by embracing these uprisings, the neocons are risking unintended consequences, including further Islamic radicalization of the region and deepening anti-Americanism. Indeed, a rebel victory over Gaddafi could put extremists from an al-Qaeda affiliate in a powerful position inside Libya.

So far, the major U.S. news media has aided the neocon cause by focusing on Gaddafi’s historic ties to terrorism, including the dubious charge that he was behind the Pan Am 103 bombing in 1988. There has been little attention paid to his more recent role in combating the surge in al-Qaeda activity, especially in eastern Libya, the base of the revolt against him.

Similarly, Bashar al-Assad’s Syrian government has repressed Islamic extremism inside its borders, in part, because Islamic fundamentalists despise the Alawite religion of Syria’s rulers, considering it a form of apostasy that must be stamped out.

So Assad and Gaddafi have their own political reasons to be enemies of al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization which U.S. officials cite as the greatest national security threat to the American homeland.

As analysts Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman wrote in a report for West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center, “the Syrian and Libyan governments

share the United States' concerns about violent salafi-jihadi ideology and the violence perpetrated by its adherents."

### **Source of Jihadists**

In their report entitled "Al-Qaeda's Foreign Fighters in Iraq," Felter and Fishman also analyzed al-Qaeda documents captured in 2007 showing personnel records of militants who flocked to Iraq for the war. The documents revealed that eastern Libya (the base of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion) was a hotbed for suicide bombers traveling to Iraq to kill American troops.

Felter and Fishman wrote that these so-called Sinjar Records disclosed that while Saudis comprised the largest number of foreign fighters in Iraq, Libyans represented the largest per-capita contingent by far. Those Libyans came overwhelmingly from towns and cities in the east.

"The vast majority of Libyan fighters that included their hometown in the Sinjar Records resided in the country's Northeast, particularly the coastal cities of Darnah 60.2% (53) and Benghazi 23.9% (21)," Felter and Fishman wrote, adding: "Both Darnah and Benghazi have long been associated with Islamic militancy in Libya, in particular for an uprising by Islamist organizations in the mid-1990s."

"The Libyan uprisings [in the 1990s] became extraordinarily violent," Felter and Fishman wrote. "Qadhafi used helicopter gunships in Benghazi, cut telephone, electricity, and water supplies to Darnah and famously claimed that the militants 'deserve to die without trial, like dogs.'"

Some important al-Qaeda leaders operating in Pakistan's tribal regions also are believed to have come from Libya. For instance, "Atiyah," who was guiding the anti-U.S. war strategy in Iraq, was identified as a Libyan named Atiyah Abd al-Rahman.

It was Atiyah who urged a strategy of creating a quagmire for U.S. forces in Iraq, buying time for al-Qaeda headquarters to rebuild its strength in Pakistan.

"Prolonging the war [in Iraq] is in our interest," Atiyah said in a letter that upbraided Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for his hasty and reckless actions in Iraq.

The Atiyah letter was discovered by the U.S. military after Zarqawi was killed by an airstrike in June 2006.

### **Gaddafi's Warning**

As in the anti-Islamist crackdown of the 1990s, Gaddafi has used harsh rhetoric in vowing to crush the latest Benghazi-based rebellion. Those threats were cited by President Barack Obama and other leaders as a key reason for securing a United Nations resolution and establishing a no-fly zone over Libya, to protect the rebels and civilians in eastern Libya.

Yet, while intervening to save lives in eastern Libya, Obama and other Western officials seem to know little about whom they're saving. So far, journalists have failed to identify the leaders behind the revolt.

However, in a personal letter to Obama, Gaddafi cited the role of terrorists in this new uprising.

"We are confronting al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, nothing more," Gaddafi wrote. "What would you do if you found them controlling American cities with the power of weapons? Tell me how would you behave so that I could follow your example?"

Though Gaddafi clearly has a self-interest in portraying the rebels as al-Qaeda terrorists – and the rebels surely include many common citizens simply fed up with Gaddafi's authoritarian rule – the report from West Point's Combating Terrorism Center lends some credence to his claims.

Still, influential American neocons and major U.S. news outlets have portrayed the Libyan clash as simply a case of a brutal dictator who has his own terrorist baggage crushing a popular movement of innocent citizens seeking democracy and freedom.

Despite the warning signs of possible Islamist influences over the rebel forces, American neocons have grabbed the steering wheel of this wider-war bandwagon as it picks up speed.

"The only solution to Libya's crisis, as Mr. Obama first recognized several weeks ago, is the removal of Mr. Gaddafi from power," said a lead editorial in the *Washington Post*, which has become the neocons' preeminent publication. "But the administration still seems to lack a coherent strategy for accomplishing that aim."

Clearly pining for the days of George W. Bush's muscular unilateralism, the *Post's* editors demanded that Obama take the lead in implementing a military strategy that ensures regime change in Tripoli.

"If the regime's heavy weapons were systematically targeted, the rebels could surge forward," the *Post* wrote. "All this would require Mr. Obama to do something he has avoided from the beginning in Libya: Exercise U.S. leadership."

### **The NYT's Certainty**

The *New York Times*, another newspaper with strong neocon tendencies, has taken the case for regime change in Libya into its news columns, as it did regarding Iraq in 2002-03 when the *Times* acted as a conveyor belt for the Bush administration's propaganda about Iraq's non-existent WMD.

This time, the *Times* has reported as flat fact that Gaddafi's regime orchestrated the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 – a conventional wisdom that is now repeated across the U.S. media spectrum despite the many holes in the 2001 conviction of Libyan intelligence agent Ali al-Megrahi.

This combination of ignorance about the internal politics of Libya (i.e. who are the rebels?) and the misplaced certainty of the U.S. press corps about another designated villain (supposed Pan Am 103 terrorist mastermind Gaddafi) has set the stage for a potential repeat of the Iraq disaster.

In Iraq, it turned out that Saddam Hussein, who had destroyed his stockpiles of WMD, was serving as a bulwark against both al-Qaeda-style terrorism and Iranian influence. His removal advanced both Islamic terrorist movements across the region and Iran's power in the Persian Gulf.

Now, the neocons are baiting Obama into a wider war to overthrow Gaddafi. But they appear as ill-informed about the possible consequences in Libya as they did in Iraq: Would a rebel victory give the Islamic terror groups of eastern Libya a foothold in or possible control of the whole country and its oil wealth?

Would the prospect of an al-Qaeda affiliate in charge of a strategically placed Arab country require the United States to commit ground troops to the conflict to prevent an outcome that the U.S. intervention had unintentionally caused?

Over the past several decades as the neocons have grown in influence inside the U.S. political/media circles, one of their consistent characteristics has been to advocate wars against perceived “enemies” in the Muslim world.

But the neocons’ lack of realism – and their enthusiasm to do whatever they think might be helpful to Israel – have often made them the classic sorcerer’s apprentice, stirring up trouble that grows worse and worse without knowing how to bring the chaos under control.

Yet, despite their warmongering incompetence, the neocons have one great strength: they are clever enough – and well-connected enough – to block any accountability. Even when their policies go horribly wrong, they can simply reframe the narrative to make themselves out to be the smart ones.

Until their ability to rewrite the history is countered, the neocons can be expected to continue leading the United States into disaster after disaster.

In late 2011, the Obama administration was completing its long-promised withdrawal of combat forces from Iraq, ending what Robert Parry called a “catastrophe of choice.” The withdrawal would prove short-lived, of course, with the U.S. reinvading in 2014 in order to fight ISIS, but at the time of the 2011 withdrawal, it appeared that the U.S. was indeed ending its engagement. Parry reflects here on the series of lies, distortions and bad decisions that led to the ignominious U.S. defeat.

## [Ending the Iraq Catastrophe \(Oct. 21, 2011\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

President Barack Obama will talk about “a promise kept” as he brings the last U.S. troops in Iraq “home for the holidays”; the neocons will try to spin the war’s outcome as “victory” — albeit one endangered by Obama’s complete withdrawal — but the hard truth is that the Iraq War has been a largely self-inflicted strategic defeat for the United States.

When the last U.S. convoys race for the Kuwaiti border in December, they will be as much in retreat as the Soviet army was when it withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. And, like the staggering Soviet Union then, the United States is reeling now from economic dislocations exacerbated by the overreach of empire.

Of course, the United States is not likely to undergo the political collapse that interred the Soviet system two years after its Afghan debacle ended, but

Washington's vast overspending on imperial ambitions since World War II of which Iraq was one of the more egregious examples has buried the American Dream for many millions of Americans.

When all the costs are finally tallied including caring for wounded veterans the price tag for the Iraq War will surely exceed \$1 trillion. Yet, Iraq totters as a failed state, crippled in its ability to meet the basic needs of its people and torn by sectarian violence. The big strategic winner, as the U.S. leaves, appears to be Iran with many of its Shiite allies now in top jobs in Iraq.

Plus, President George W. Bush's premature pivot from Afghanistan to Iraq in 2002-03 allowed the Afghan War to drag on inconclusively, now passing the decade mark and costing hundreds of billions of dollars more.

The human cost, too, has been sickening, with nearly 4,500 American soldiers killed in Iraq and more than 1,800 dead in Afghanistan. The untallied death tolls for Iraqis and Afghans are even grimmer, with estimates of their fatalities in the hundreds of thousands.

Yet, the history did not have to go this way. This disaster was not inevitable. It was a catastrophe of choice.

Even after the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration had chances to negotiate with the Taliban government in Afghanistan for the capture of al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden. And even if a peaceful resolution were not possible, the opportunities were there in late 2001 to capture or kill bin Laden when he was holed up in the Tora Bora mountain range.

Instead, the headstrong Bush and the ambitious neoconservatives who surrounded him lost focus on al-Qaeda and concentrated on the dream of "regime change" in Iraq, Syria and Iran and then the isolation of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine.

Once the top names on Israel's enemies list had been erased, the thinking went, the Palestinians and other nearby Arabs would have no choice but to accept peace terms dictated by Israeli hardliners. And, the victorious Bush would stand astride the Middle East as a modern-day Alexander the Great, a "war president" of historic majesty.

**Hailing Bush**



The hubris – indeed the madness – of this plan may now be apparent to many, but a decade ago, this scheme of violently reshaping the Middle East was quite the rage in Washington. The major news media oohed and aahed over Bush and his famous “gut,” while the haughty neocons were the toast of the town.

When Bush’s war bandwagon rolled past with the neocons at the controls nearly everyone who mattered clambered onboard, from star Democratic senators like Hillary Clinton and John Kerry to the brightest lights of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, and on and on.

Those of us who raised doubts about the legality or the practicality of this dangerous adventure were ostracized as pariahs, people to be ignored or ridiculed. We were the sorts who simply didn’t believe in “American exceptionalism.”

Much as the economic wizards of the last decade insisted that the old laws of economics had been banished by newfangled financial instruments, like credit default swaps, the neocon ideologues believed that America’s super-high-tech military machine was invulnerable to the crude roadside bombs that simple Arabs might be able to build.

That these parallel examples of arrogance on Wall Street and in Washington reached similarly destructive ends represents the core lesson of the Bush-43 era, a teaching moment that the neocons, the bankers and their various defenders in media and politics don’t want the average American to absorb.

As for the Iraq War along with the final rush to the Kuwaiti border in December and the tearful reunions at American airports before Christmas there will be endless efforts to explain away the debacle as some sort of vague success or at least a contributing factor in the unrelated uprisings of this year’s Arab Spring.

We will hear that the 4,500 U.S. soldiers did not die in vain and that to suggest otherwise is hurtful to the troops and their families.

But the painful reality is that they did die in vain. They died not for the protection of the American Republic or even for the security of the Homeland. They died for what the Nuremberg Tribunal deemed the

“supreme international crime,” a war of aggression. They died for a destructive and crazy ideological vision.

The soldiers can be pitied for their pointless sacrifice. Without doubt, most were motivated by patriotism and a fierce determination to “do the job” assigned to them by the nation’s leaders. It is “the leaders” and their enablers who deserve the blame.

Yet, the final tragedy of the Iraq War as with the Wall Street crash is that the real perpetrators seem beyond the reach of law, accountability or even public humiliation.

George W. Bush sits in a place of honor at Texas Rangers games. Vice President Dick Cheney is hailed as an icon by the American Right. Except for a handful of low-level soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison, no one has been punished for the torture of detainees.

The unabashed neoconservatives are still holding down lucrative think tank jobs (and some key posts in the Obama administration). They regularly opine on the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. They are recruited by leading Republican presidential candidates.

Meanwhile, the handful in Official Washington who did question or criticize the Iraq invasion won few if any plaudits. The nature of the Establishment is to cast out anyone who deviates from the conventional wisdom, even if the person later turns out to be correct. Independent-minded skeptics are not viewed as having foresight or courage; they are deemed kooky and deviant.

At the major news organizations, virtually no one has been hired for getting the Iraq story right, while there has been almost zero accountability among the herd of leading pundits who were stampeded to war with falsehoods about Iraq’s WMD and lies about ties to al-Qaeda.

So, the battle over the next couple of months will be: how to interpret the catastrophe in Iraq. The neocons and the mainstream press will fight hard to make the defeat look like victory. To do otherwise, we’ll be told, would be to insult the troops who sacrificed so much.

But the greater danger is that the real lessons won’t be learned, that Americans will shield themselves from the ugly realities of what the war

unleashed and that the key perpetrators will be empowered again, in 2012, to do it all over.

A few months after they had pushed for military intervention in Libya, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* finally acknowledged the role of radical Islamists in Libya's uprising, leading Parry to question whether they were acting more as propagandists for "regime change" than honest brokers of information. The fact that the Big Media ignored the Islamist issue, along with their repeated claims of Libya's supposed involvement in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103, raised questions about whether any lessons were learned from Iraq, Parry wrote.

## [On Libya, Now They Tell Us \(Sept. 15, 2011\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

During the six-month uprising against Muammar Gaddafi, major U.S. news outlets repeated again and again that the Libyan dictator was behind the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and they ignored warnings that militant Islamists were at the core of the anti-Gaddafi rebel army.

Indeed, for Americans to get alternative views on these points, they had to search out websites like Consortiumnews.com, which had the audacity not to march in lockstep with the rest of the Western media. Only outside the mainstream press would you find significant questions asked about the certainty over Libya's guilt in the Pan Am bombing and about the makeup of the rebels.

Now, after the United States and its NATO allies have engineered the desired "regime change" in Libya under the pretext of "protecting civilians" those two points are coming more into focus.

The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* on Thursday finally acknowledged that radical Islamists, including some with links to al-Qaeda, are consolidating their power inside the new regime in Tripoli.

And, the proverbial dog not barking even as Libya's secret intelligence files have been exposed to the eyes of Western journalists is the absence of any incriminating evidence regarding Libya's role in the Lockerbie case. Earlier interrogations of Libya's ex-intelligence chief Moussa Koussa by Scottish authorities also apparently came up empty, as he was allowed to leave London for Qatar.

Since Gaddafi's fall, news outlets also have reported that Libyan intelligence agent, Ali al-Megrahi, who was convicted of the Lockerbie bombing by a Scottish court and was later released on humanitarian grounds because of terminal prostate cancer, is indeed gravely ill, bedridden and seemingly near death.

Megrahi's trial in 2001 before a panel of Scottish judges was more a kangaroo court than any serious effort to determine guilt. Even a Scottish appeals court expressed concern about a grave miscarriage of justice but the Western press continues to describe Megrahi, without qualification, as the "Lockerbie bomber."

It also was common in the West's news media to smirk at the notion that Megrahi was truly suffering from advanced prostate cancer since he hadn't died as quickly as some doctors thought he might. After Gaddafi's regime fell, Megrahi's family invited BBC and other news organizations to see Megrahi struggling to breathe in his sick bed.

His son, Khaled al-Megrahi, also continued to insist on his father's innocence. "He believes and we know that everybody will see the truth," the younger Megrahi told the BBC. "I know my father is innocent and one day his innocence will come out."

Asked about the people who died in the bombing, the son said: "We feel sorry about all the people who died. We want to know who did this bad thing. We want to know the truth as well."

### **Convicted or Railroaded?**

As more information becomes available inside Libya, the facts may finally be clarified about whether Gaddafi's government did or did not have a hand in the bombing over Lockerbie. However, so far, the indications are that Megrahi may well have been railroaded by the Scottish judges who found a second Libyan defendant innocent and were under political pressure to convict someone for the crime.

After Megrahi's curious conviction, the West imposed harsh economic sanctions on Libya, agreeing to lift them only if Libya accepted "responsibility" for the bombing and paid restitution to the families of the 270 victims. To get rid of the punishing sanctions, Libya accepted the deal

although its officials continued to insist that Libya had nothing to do with the Lockerbie bombing.

However, amid this year's propaganda campaign in support of the Libyan rebels, none of this uncertainty was mentioned in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or other leading U.S. news outlets. Gaddafi's guilt for Lockerbie was simply stated as flat fact, much as the same news organizations endorsed false claims about Iraq's WMD in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of that Arab country.

Similarly, there was scant U.S. media attention given to evidence that eastern Libya, the heart of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion, was a hotbed for Islamic militancy with that region supplying the most per-capita militants fighting U.S. troops in Iraq, often under the banner of al-Qaeda.

Instead, Gaddafi's claims that he was battling Islamic terrorists in the Benghazi region were widely mocked or ignored in the West.

### **Top Libyan Terrorists**

Now, the media is acknowledging to a limited extent the more troubling reality. A *Washington Post* article on Thursday reported the rise of Islamists inside the new power structure in Libya.

"Although it went largely unnoticed during the uprising that toppled Gaddafi last month, Islamists were at the heart of the fight, many as rebel commanders," the *Post* wrote. "Now some are clashing with secularists within the rebels' Transitional National Council, prompting worries among some liberals that the Islamists, who still command the bulk of fighters and weapons, could use their strength to assert an even more dominant role."

Also on Thursday, the *New York Times* led the front page with a similar article, entitled "Islamists' Growing Sway Raises Questions for Libya." It began:

In the emerging post-Qaddafi Libya, the most influential politician may well be Ali Sallabi, who has no formal title but commands broad respect as an Islamic scholar and populist orator who was instrumental in leading the mass uprising. The most powerful military leader is now Abdel Hakim Belhaj, the former leader of a hardline group once believed to be aligned with Al Qaeda.

Belhaj was previously the commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which was associated with al-Qaeda in the past, maintained training

bases in Afghanistan before the 9/11 attacks, and was listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

Though Belhaj and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group deny current allegiance to al-Qaeda, Belhaj was captured during George W. Bush's post-9/11 "war on terror" and was harshly interrogated by the CIA at a "black site" prison in Thailand before being handed over to Gaddafi's government which imprisoned and, Belhaj claims, tortured him.

The *Times* reported that "Belhaj has become so much an insider lately that he is seeking to unseat Mahmoud Jibril, the American-trained economist who is the nominal prime minister of the interim government, after Mr. Jibril obliquely criticized the Islamists."

The *Times* article by correspondents Rod Nordland and David D. Kirkpatrick also cited other recent developments of growing Islamist influence inside the Libyan rebel movement:

Islamist militias in Libya receive weapons and financing directly from foreign benefactors like Qatar; a Muslim Brotherhood figure, Abel al-Rajazk Abu Hajar, leads the Tripoli Municipal Governing Council, where Islamists are reportedly in the majority; in eastern Libya, there has been no resolution of the assassination in July of the leader of the rebel military, Gen. Abdul Fattah Younes, suspected by some to be the work of Islamists.

It may be commendable that the *Post* and *Times* are finally giving serious attention to this unintended consequence of the NATO-backed "regime change" in Libya, but the fact that these premier American newspapers ignored the Islamist issue as well as doubts about Libya's Lockerbie guilt while the U.S. government was whipping up public support for another war in the Muslim world raises questions about whether any lessons were learned from Iraq.

Do these prestige news outlets continue to see their role in such cases as simply getting the American people to line up behind the latest war against a Mideast "bad guy" or will they ever take seriously their journalistic duty to arm the public with as much information as possible?

In the early 2010s, Robert Parry wrote a series of articles exploring the growing body of evidence that in 1968, Richard Nixon's campaign sabotaged President Lyndon Johnson's Paris peace talks, which could have ended the Vietnam War four years earlier. If Johnson had negotiated an end to the war, not only would countless American and Vietnamese lives have been spared, but the deep political divisions on the home front might have been healed and Vice President Hubert Humphrey would almost certainly have won the 1968 election. All

this would have led to a profoundly different version of American history unfolding over the next several decades.

Johnson first learned about what he called Nixon's "treason" from a leak out of a Wall Street meeting in which a Nixon financial backer was placing bets on stocks and bonds based on inside knowledge that Nixon would block a peace deal, as Parry describes in the article below.<sup>888</sup>

## [Profiting Off Nixon's Vietnam 'Treason' \(March 4, 2012\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

As I pored over documents from what the archivists at Lyndon Johnson's presidential library call their "X-File" chronicling Richard Nixon's apparent sabotage of Vietnam peace talks in 1968 I was surprised by one fact in particular, how Johnson's White House got wind of what Johnson later labeled Nixon's "treason."

According to the records, Eugene Rostow, Johnson's Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, got a tip in late October 1968 from a Wall Street source who said that one of Nixon's closest financial backers was describing Nixon's plan to "block" a peace settlement of the Vietnam War. The backer was sharing this information with his banking colleagues to help them place their bets on stocks and bonds.

In other words, these investment bankers were colluding over how to make money with their inside knowledge of Nixon's scheme to extend the Vietnam War. Such an image of these "masters of the universe" sitting around a table plotting financial strategies while a half million American soldiers were sitting in a war zone is a picture that even the harshest critics of Wall Street might find hard to envision.

Yet, that tip about Nixon's Wall Street friends discussing his apparent tip on the likely course of the Vietnam War was the first clear indication that Johnson's White House had that the sudden resistance from South Vietnamese President Nguyen van Thieu to Paris peace talks may have involved a collaboration with Nixon, the Republican candidate for president who feared progress toward peace could cost him the election.

On Oct. 29, Eugene Rostow passed on the information to his brother, Walt W. Rostow, Johnson's national security adviser. Eugene Rostow also wrote a memo about the tip, reporting that he had learned the news from a source in New York who had gotten it from "a member of the banking community" who was "very close to Nixon."

Eugene Rostow's source said the conversation occurred among a group of Wall Street bankers who attended a working lunch to assess likely market trends and to decide where to invest. Nixon's associate, who is never identified in the White House documents, told his fellow bankers that Nixon was obstructing the peace talks.

"The conversation was in the context of a professional discussion about the future of the financial markets in the near term," Eugene Rostow wrote. "The speaker said he thought the prospects for a bombing halt or a ceasefire were dim, because Nixon was playing the problem as he did the Fortas affair to block.

"They would incite Saigon to be difficult, and Hanoi to wait. Part of his strategy was an expectation that an offensive would break out soon, that we would have to spend a great deal more (and incur more casualties) a fact which would adversely affect the stock market and the bond market. NVN [North Vietnamese] offensive action was a definite element in their thinking about the future."

A separate memo from Eugene Rostow said the unidentified speaker at the lunch had added that Nixon "was trying to frustrate the President, by inciting Saigon to step up its demands, and by letting Hanoi know that when he [Nixon] took office 'he could accept anything and blame it on his predecessor.'"

So, according to the speaker, Nixon was trying to convince both the South and North Vietnamese that they would get a better deal if they stalled Johnson's peace initiative.

In a later memo providing a chronology of the affair, Walt Rostow said he got the news about the Wall Street lunch from his brother shortly before attending a morning meeting at which President Johnson was informed by U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker about "Thieu's sudden intransigence."



Walt Rostow said “the diplomatic information previously received plus the information from New York took on new and serious significance,” leading to an FBI investigation ordered by Johnson that uncovered the framework of Nixon’s blocking operation.

The Rostow memos are contained in a file with scores of secret and top secret documents tracing Nixon’s Vietnam peace-talk gambit as Johnson tried frantically to stop Nixon’s blocking operation and still reach a peace agreement in the waning days of his presidency.

After Nixon narrowly prevailed in the 1968 election and as Johnson was leaving the White House without a peace agreement in hand, the outgoing President instructed Walt Rostow to take the file with him. Rostow kept the documents in what he called “The ‘X’ Envelope,” although the archivists at the LBJ Library in Austin, Texas, have dubbed it the “X-File” after the once popular TV series.

Rostow’s “‘X’ Envelope” was not opened until 1994, which began a process of declassifying the contents, some of which remain secret to this day.

After Johnson’s peace initiative failed, the Vietnam War dragged on another four years, leading to the deaths of an additional 20,763 U.S. soldiers, with 111,230 wounded. An estimated one million more Vietnamese also died.

The neocons saw an opportunity to reestablish their absolute dominance of Washington with the candidacy of Mitt Romney in Election 2012. The former Massachusetts governor hired a slew of neoconservative advisers who advocated the same sort of aggressive policies that had led to debacles such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, with 17 of his 24 foreign policy advisers having served in the Bush-43 administration.

But even while this neoconservative ideology of regime change and endless war was being revived by the Romney campaign, the emerging history of 9/11 was revealing that President George W. Bush’s failure to protect the nation resulted from neocon insistence that Iraq, not al-Qaeda, was the real threat, wrote Robert Parry in this article.

## [The Neocons and 9/11 \(Sept. 11, 2012\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

Eleven years after the fact, the key relevance of 9/11 to Campaign 2012 is that Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney has surrounded himself with neoconservative foreign policy advisers much as George W. Bush did

in 2001, when the neocons let their ideological obsessions blind them to the threat from al-Qaeda.

In spring and summer 2001, the CIA and counterterrorism experts frantically rang warning bells, trying to get President Bush to order a full-court press aimed at stopping an attack that al-Qaeda was plotting. U.S. intelligence agencies weren't sure exactly where al-Qaeda would strike but they were sure that something big was coming.

The neocons, however, had regarded the Clinton administration's fear about al-Qaeda terrorism as a distraction, a relatively minor concern when compared to the neocon certainty that the far greater Middle East danger came from Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

In the neocon world view, "regime change" in Iraq would be the great "game changer," setting in motion the toppling of hostile governments in Syria and Iran and ultimately enabling Israel to dictate surrender terms to its main adversaries, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

So, when many Clinton holdovers renewed their alarms in 2001, the warnings fell mostly on deaf ears inside the Bush administration. Indeed, some of Bush's top neocons believed the CIA analysts were being tricked into getting the inexperienced young President to take his eye off the ball, that is, off Iraq.

In an op-ed for the *New York Times* on the eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, journalist Kurt Eichenwald fills in some missing pieces to the pre-9/11 narrative, putting into context the infamous "Presidential Daily Brief" of Aug. 6, 2001, which was entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S."

Since the PDB was declassified in 2004, Bush's defenders have argued that the President's indifference to the warning was because the PDB was mostly a historical recounting of past al-Qaeda operations. But Eichenwald writes that the PDB was only one of a series of alarming reports that counterintelligence officers were putting before Bush and his national security team.

"While those documents are still not public, I have read excerpts from many of them, along with other recently declassified records, and come to an inescapable conclusion: the administration's reaction to what Mr. Bush was

told in the weeks before that infamous briefing reflected significantly more negligence than has been disclosed,” Eichenwald writes. “In other words, the Aug. 6 document, for all of the controversy it provoked, is not nearly as shocking as the briefs that came before it.”

### **‘Imminent’ Strike**

For instance, Eichenwald reports that by May 1, 2001, the CIA had informed the White House that “a group presently in the United States” was plotting a terrorist attack. By June 22, a PDB called the expected al-Qaeda strike “imminent” although the precise timing was considered flexible.

So, when the Aug. 6 PDB arrived, it already had a troubling context, mounting evidence that al-Qaeda had placed a team of terrorists inside the United States with plans for a dramatic attack on American soil. Yet, Bush brushed aside the Aug. 6 warning while vacationing at his Texas ranch and literally went fishing. Why?

Eichenwald writes that Bush’s nonchalance could be traced to the success of neocon advisers in convincing the President that the warning was “just bluster.” The neocons have never been known to be humble in their assessment of their own intellectual prowess and that self-certainty apparently swayed Bush.

According to Eichenwald, “An intelligence official and a member of the Bush administration both told me in interviews that the neoconservative leaders who had recently assumed power at the Pentagon were warning the White House that the C.I.A. had been fooled; according to this theory, Bin Laden was merely pretending to be planning an attack to distract the administration from Saddam Hussein, whom the neoconservatives saw as a greater threat.”

Although intelligence officials rejected the idea of Islamic fundamentalist bin Laden conspiring with secularist Hussein as ridiculous, the neoconservative arguments won Bush over. The CIA prepared an analysis in a last-ditch effort to convince White House that the danger from al-Qaeda was real.

Eichenwald writes that a PDB of June 29 read, “The U.S. is not the target of a disinformation campaign by Usama Bin Laden.” The brief listed

evidence, “including an interview that month with a Middle Eastern journalist in which Bin Laden aides warned of a coming attack.”

The CIA continued to build on its case, including comments from operatives close to bin Laden that the impending attack would have “dramatic consequences” with heavy casualties. “Yet, the White House failed to take significant action,” Eichenwald writes.

Bush was told on July 24 that the attack was still being prepared, Eichenwald reports, but the President did not feel the intelligence was sufficient. Bush asked for a historical analysis on al-Qaeda, and in response, the CIA produced the Aug. 6 PDB.

### **More Witnesses**

Over the past several years, other senior intelligence officials have commented on the mounting evidence of a planned attack and the failure of Bush to react.

“It all came together in the third week of June,” said Richard Clarke, who was the White House coordinator for counterterrorism. “The CIA’s view was that a major terrorist attack was coming in the next several weeks.”

In late June, CIA Director George Tenet was reported “nearly frantic” about the likelihood of an al-Qaeda attack. He was described as running around “with his hair on fire” because the warning system was “blinking red.”

Some information even began to reach Washington reporters, but apparently not enough or the right ones. *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller, in a 2006 interview with *Alternet*, said a well-placed CIA official briefed her on an al-Qaeda intercept over the July Fourth holiday in 2001.

“One al-Qaeda operative was overheard saying to the other, ‘Don’t worry; we’re planning something so big now that the U.S. will have to respond,’” Miller said.

Miller, who herself had close ties to the neocons, expressed regret that she had not been able to nail down enough details about the intercept to get the story into the newspaper. The *Alternet* interview was published in May 2006 after Miller resigned from the *Times*, in part, over her cozy ties with key neocons in Bush’s administration.

On July 5, 2001, at a meeting in the White House Situation Room, counterterrorism chief Clarke told officials from a dozen federal agencies that “something really spectacular is going to happen here, and it’s going to happen soon.” But instead of sparking an intensified administration reaction to the danger, the flickering light of White House interest in the terror threat continued to sputter.

By July 10, senior CIA counterterrorism officials, including Cofer Black, had collected a body of intelligence that they presented to Director Tenet.

“The briefing [Black] gave me literally made my hair stand on end,” Tenet wrote in his memoir, *At the Center of the Storm*. “When he was through, I picked up the big white secure phone on the left side of my desk the one with a direct line to [national security adviser] Condi Rice and told her that I needed to see her immediately to provide an update on the al-Qa’ida threat.”

After reaching the White House, a CIA briefer, identified in Tenet’s book only as Rich B., started his presentation by saying: “There will be a significant terrorist attack in the coming weeks or months!”

Rich B. then displayed a chart showing “seven specific pieces of intelligence gathered over the past 24 hours, all of them predicting an imminent attack,” Tenet wrote. The briefer presented another chart with “the more chilling statements we had in our possession through intelligence.”

These comments included a mid-June statement by Osama bin Laden to trainees about an attack in the near future, talk about decisive acts and a “big event,” and fresh intelligence about predictions of “a stunning turn of events in the weeks ahead,” Tenet wrote.

Rich B. told Rice that the attack will be “spectacular” and designed to inflict heavy casualties against U.S. targets. “Attack preparations have been made,” Rich B. said about al-Qaeda’s plans. “Multiple and simultaneous attacks are possible, and they will occur with little or no warning.”

When Rice asked what needed to be done, the CIA’s Black responded, “This country needs to go on a war footing now.” The CIA officials sought

approval for broad covert-action authority that had been languishing since March, Tenet wrote.

### **Dismissive Aides**

Despite the July 10 briefing, other senior Bush administration officials continued to pooh-pooh the seriousness of the al-Qaeda threat. Two leading neoconservatives at the Pentagon Stephen Cambone and Paul Wolfowitz suggested that the CIA might be falling for a disinformation campaign, Tenet recalled.

But the evidence of an impending attack kept pouring in. At one CIA meeting in late July, Tenet wrote that Rich B. told senior officials bluntly, “they’re coming here,” a declaration that was followed by stunned silence.

Through the sweltering heat of July 2001, Bush turned his attention to an issue dear to the hearts of his right-wing base, the use of human embryos in stem-cell research.

Medical scientists felt stem cells promised potential cures for debilitating and life-threatening injuries and illnesses, from spinal damage to Alzheimer’s disease. Yet, despite this promise, the Christian Right objected on moral grounds to the extraction of cells from embryos, even if those destined for destruction as waste at fertility clinics.

While the team of al-Qaeda terrorists made final preparations for their attack, the U.S. press corps also missed the drama playing out inside the U.S. intelligence agencies. The hot stories that steamy summer were shark attacks and the mystery of a missing Capitol Hill intern Chandra Levy, who’d had an affair with Rep. Gary Condit, a California Democrat.

The news media pretended that its obsession with Levy’s disappearance was a heartfelt concern to help her parents find their missing daughter; the sexual gossip about Levy and Condit proved to be just a fortuitous byproduct. Yet, as cable news played the Chandra Levy case 24/7, a far more significant life-or-death drama was playing out inside the FBI and CIA.

### **Flight Schools**

At the FBI’s Phoenix field office, FBI agent Kenneth Williams noted the curious fact that suspected followers of bin Laden were learning to fly

airplanes at schools inside the United States.

Citing “an inordinate number of individuals of investigative interest” attending American flight schools, Williams sent a July 10, 2001, memo to FBI headquarters warning of the “possibility of a coordinated effort by Usama Bin Laden” to send student pilots to the United States. But the memo produced no follow-up.

CIA officials encountered similar foot-dragging at the White House. At least two officials in the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center were so apoplectic about the blasé reactions from the Bush administration that they considered resigning and going public with their concerns. Instead, the CIA hierarchy made one more stab at startling Bush into action.

So, on Aug. 6, 2001, the CIA dispatched senior analysts to brief Bush who was starting a month-long vacation at his Crawford ranch. They carried a highly classified report with the blunt title “Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US.” This PDB summarized the history of bin Laden’s interest in launching attacks inside the United States and ended with a carefully phrased warning about recent intelligence threat data:

FBI information indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijackings or other types of attacks, including recent surveillance of federal buildings in New York. The FBI is conducting approximately 70 full field investigations throughout the US that it considers Bin Ladin-related. CIA and the FBI are investigating a call to our Embassy in the UAE in May saying that a group of Bin Ladin supporters was in the US planning attacks with explosives.

Bush was not pleased by the CIA’s intrusion on his vacation nor with the report’s lack of specific targets and dates. He glared at the CIA briefer and snapped, “All right, you’ve covered your ass,” according to an account in author Ron Suskind’s *The One Percent Doctrine*, which relied heavily on senior CIA officials.

Putting the CIA’s warning in the back of his mind and ordering no special response, Bush returned to a vacation of fishing, clearing brush and working on a speech about stem-cell research.

Yet, inside the FBI as the month wore on, there were more warnings that went unheeded. FBI agents in Minneapolis arrested Zacarias Moussaoui in August because of his suspicious behavior in trying to learn to fly commercial jetliners when he lacked even rudimentary skills.

FBI agent Harry Samit, who interrogated Moussaoui, sent 70 warnings to his superiors about suspicions that the al-Qaeda operative had been taking flight training in Minnesota because he was planning to hijack a plane for a terrorist operation.

But FBI officials in Washington showed “criminal negligence” in blocking requests for a search warrant on Moussaoui’s computer or taking other preventive action, Samit testified more than four years later at Moussaoui’s criminal trial.

### **No Urgency**

A big part of the problem was the lack of urgency at the top. Counterterrorism coordinator Clarke said the 9/11 attacks might have been averted if Bush had shown some initiative in “shaking the trees” by having high-level officials from the FBI, CIA, Customs and other federal agencies go back to their bureaucracies and demand any information about the terrorist threat.

If they had, they might well have found the memos from the FBI agents in Arizona and Minnesota. Clarke contrasted President Bill Clinton’s urgency over the intelligence warnings that preceded the Millennium events with the lackadaisical approach of Bush and his national security team.

“In December 1999, we received intelligence reports that there were going to be major al-Qaeda attacks,” Clarke said in an interview.

He continued:

President Clinton asked his national security adviser Sandy Berger to hold daily meetings with the attorney general, the FBI director, the CIA director and stop the attacks.

Every day they went back from the White House to the FBI, to the Justice Department, to the CIA and they shook the trees to find out if there was any information. You know, when you know the United States is going to be attacked, the top people in the United States government ought to be working hands-on to prevent it and working together.

Now, contrast that with what happened in the summer of 2001, when we even had more clear indications that there was going to be an attack. Did the President ask for daily meetings of his team to try to stop the attack? Did Condi Rice hold meetings of her counterparts to try to stop the attack? No.

In his book, *Against All Enemies*, Clarke offered other examples of pre-9/11 mistakes by the Bush administration, including a downgrading in importance of the counterterrorism office, a shifting of budget priorities, an



obsession with Saddam Hussein's Iraq and an emphasis on conservative ideological issues, such as Reagan's missile defense program.

As the clock ticked down to 9/11, the Bush administration continued to have other priorities. On Aug. 9, Bush gave a nationally televised speech on stem cells, delivering his judgment permitting federal funding for research on 60 preexisting stem-cell lines, but barring government support for work on any other lines of stem cells that would be derived from human embryos.

Scientists complained that the existing lines were too tainted with mouse cells and too limited to be of much value. But the news media mostly hailed Bush's split decision as "Solomon-like" and proof he had greater gravitas than his critics would acknowledge.

### **One Last Pitch**

CIA Director Tenet said he made one last push to focus Bush on the impending terrorism crisis, but the encounter veered off into meaningless small talk.

"A few weeks after the August 6 PDB was delivered, I followed it to Crawford to make sure the President stayed current on events," Tenet wrote in his memoir. "This was my first visit to the ranch. I remember the President graciously driving me around the spread in his pickup and my trying to make small talk about the flora and the fauna, none of which were native to Queens," where Tenet had grown up.

Bush and his neocon advisers continued their hostility toward what they viewed as the old Clinton phobia about terrorism and this little-known group called al-Qaeda. On Sept. 6, 2001, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld threatened a presidential veto of a proposal by Sen. Carl Levin, D-Michigan, seeking to transfer money from strategic missile defense to counterterrorism.

Also on Sept. 6, former Sen. Gary Hart tried to galvanize the Bush administration into showing some urgency about the terrorist threat. Hart met with Condoleezza Rice and urged the White House to move faster. Rice agreed to pass on Hart's concerns to higher-ups. However, nothing was done before al-Qaeda struck on Sept. 11.

When the first plane crashed into the North Tower at the World Trade Center in New York at 8:46 a.m., President Bush was on a trip to Florida, visiting a second-grade classroom. After the second plane hit the South Tower at 9:03 a.m., White House chief of staff Andrew Card whispered into Bush's ear that "America is under attack."

Bush sat dumbstruck for seven minutes holding a book, *My Pet Goat*. He later said he didn't react immediately because he didn't want to alarm the children.

Though Bush's neocon advisers had been disastrously wrong about anticipating al-Qaeda's terrorist strike, they quickly turned the catastrophe to their advantage by convincing Bush that he should go beyond simply striking back at al-Qaeda; that he should seize the opportunity to take out Saddam Hussein as well.

The Bush administration was soon on course to launch not only an invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, but Iraq as well. The neocons also revived their dreams about using Iraq as a launching pad for additional "regime change" in Syria and Iran. In the short term, the 9/11 disaster worked out so well for the neocons that some began to suspect that the neocons had secretly wished for the attack all along.

As the years wore on, neocon hubris contributed heavily to the bloody mess in Iraq as nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers died along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. The war in Afghanistan became a blood-soaked quagmire, too. The price tags for the wars were soon exceeding \$1 trillion.

Bush's military overreach set the stage for the 2008 election of Barack Obama who famously opposed the Iraq invasion as a young aspiring politician in Chicago. Yet, despite the calamities in their wake, the neocons never went far from the center of Washington influence and power. They retreated to high-paying jobs at think tanks, wrote books and sought out a new Republican presidential hopeful.

### **The Romney Retreads**

The smart neocon bet was soon placed on Mitt Romney, who like Bush was a relative neophyte on foreign policy. The smooth-talking neocons quickly earned a place of trust in the Romney camp. The former Massachusetts

governor largely delegated to the neocons the job of writing his foreign policy white paper, “An American Century.”

Romney allowed the title to be an obvious homage to the neocon Project for the New American Century, which in the 1990s built the ideological framework for the Iraq War and other “regime change” strategies of President Bush. Romney recruited Eliot Cohen, a founding member of the Project for the New American Century and a protégé of prominent neocons Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, to write the foreword.

Romney’s white paper chastised Barack Obama for committing himself to pulling out the 30,000 “surge troops” from Afghanistan by mid-2012 and conducting a gradual withdrawal of the remaining 70,000 by the end of 2014. Romney’s white paper argued that Obama should have followed the advice of field commanders like then-Gen. David Petraeus and made withdrawals either more slowly or contingent on American military success. The white paper also opposed a full withdrawal from Iraq.

The white paper made clear that if Romney wins the White House, he is determined to reconstruct much of Bush’s foreign policy, complete with a renewed insistence on U.S. military dominance of the world and a full restoration of neocon influence.

Romney’s neocons also attacked Obama for even modestly trimming the U.S. military budget, which is now is roughly equal to what is spent by all other nations on the planet combined. According to “An American Century,” Romney will modernize and replace the aging inventories of the Air Force, Army, and Marines, and selectively strengthen our force structure, acknowledging that “this will not be a cost-free process.”

The white paper added: “Romney will begin by reversing Obama-era defense cuts and return to the budget baseline established by Secretary Robert Gates in 2010, with the goal of setting core defense spending, meaning funds devoted to the fundamental military components of personnel, operations and maintenance, procurement, and research and development, at a floor of 4 percent of GDP,” or about \$565 billion.

Romney also suggested an expansion of legal authority for U.S. officials conducting the “war on terror.” His white paper said: “Our counterterrorism professionals will need to continue to develop ‘fusion centers’ and other

innovative systems to collect and systematically analyze information about domestic activities. They will need the capacity, consistent with U.S. law, to collect and unflinchingly analyze communications between terrorist networks abroad and people within our borders.”

It’s always hard to know what neocons mean when they say “consistent with U.S. law,” since they devised the Bush administration’s doctrine of unlimited presidential powers, but the word “unflinchingly” suggests they envision a robust domestic spying program.

With most political observers predicting a close election in November, the neocons hope that they can ride back into power in Washington behind a President Romney and then resume their role as his foreign policy foremen, advising the inexperienced Romney much as they did the novice Bush.

One of the questions that American voters might want to consider before Nov. 6 is whether a Romney presidency, staffed with belligerent neocons, would make the United States safer or put its citizens more at risk.

A 2007 hit movie starring Tom Hanks became a guiding light for U.S. policy in Afghanistan, offering sage stay-the-course wisdom for decision-makers in the White House, State Department and the Pentagon. But a document discovered by Parry in early 2013 undercut a key storyline of the anti-Soviet Afghan war of the 1980s, calling into question the basic premise of *Charlie Wilson’s War*, and underscoring the dangers of Hollywood promoting false histories.

## [Hollywood’s Dangerous Afghan Illusion \(April 7, 2013\)](#)

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Official Washington’s conventional wisdom about Afghanistan derives to a dangerous degree from a Hollywood movie, *Charlie Wilson’s War*, which depicted the anti-Soviet war of the 1980s as a fight pitting good “freedom fighters” vs. evil “occupiers” and which blamed Afghanistan’s later descent into chaos on feckless U.S. politicians quitting as soon as Soviet troops left in 1989.

The Tom Hanks movie also pushed the theme that the war was really the pet project of a maverick Democratic congressman from Texas, Charlie Wilson, who fell in love with the Afghan mujahedeen after falling in love with a

glamorous Texas oil woman, Joanne Herring, who was committed to their anti-communist cause.

However, *Charlie Wilson's War*, like many Hollywood films, took extraordinary license with the facts, presenting many of the war's core elements incorrectly. That in itself might not be a serious problem, except that key U.S. policymakers have cited these mythical "facts" as lessons to guide the current U.S. military occupation of Afghanistan.

The degree to which Ronald Reagan's White House saw Wilson as more puppet than puppet-master is underscored by a newly discovered document at Reagan's presidential library in Simi Valley, California. I found the document in the files of former CIA propaganda chief Walter Raymond Jr., who in the 1980s oversaw the selling of U.S. interventions in Central America and Afghanistan from his office at the National Security Council.

The handwritten note to Raymond appears to be initialed by then-National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane and instructs Raymond to recruit Wilson into the Reagan administration's effort to drum up more Afghan war money for the fiscal 1985 budget. The note reads: "Walt, Go see Charlie Wilson (D-TX). Seek to bring him into circle as discrete Hill connection.

He can be very helpful in getting money. M." <sup>9\*\*\*</sup>

Raymond appears to have followed up those instructions, as Wilson began to play a bigger and bigger role in unleashing the great Afghan spending spree of 1985 and as Raymond asserted himself behind the scenes on how the war should be sold to the American people.

At the time, the White House saw a need to step up its domestic propaganda operations in support of President Reagan's desire to intervene more aggressively in Central America and Afghanistan. The American people still stung by the agony of the Vietnam War were not eager to engage in more foreign adventures.

So, Reagan's team took aim at "kicking the Vietnam Syndrome" mostly by wildly exaggerating the Soviet threat. It became crucial to convince Americans that the Soviets were on the rise and on the march, though in reality the Soviets were on the decline and eager for accommodations with the West.

From the NSC, Raymond organized inter-agency task forces to bombard the U.S. public with hyped-up propaganda about the Soviet threat in Central America and in Afghanistan. Raymond's goal was to change the way Americans viewed these dangers, a process that the Reagan administration internally called "perception management."

Scores of documents about this operation were released during the Iran-Contra scandal in 1987, but Washington-based journalists never paid much attention to the evidence about how they had been manipulated by these propaganda tactics, which included rewarding cooperative reporters with government-sponsored "leaks" and punishing those who wouldn't parrot the lies with whispering campaigns in the ears of their editors and bureau chiefs.

Even after the Iran-Contra scandal was exposed in 1986 and Casey died of brain cancer in 1987, the Republicans fought to keep secret the remarkable story of this propaganda apparatus. As part of a deal to get three moderate Republican senators to join Democrats in signing the Iran-Contra report, Democratic leaders dropped a draft chapter on the CIA's domestic propaganda role.

Thus, the American people were spared the chapter's troubling conclusion: that a covert propaganda apparatus had existed, run by "one of the CIA's most senior specialists, sent to the NSC by Bill Casey, to create and coordinate an inter-agency public-diplomacy mechanism [which] did what a covert CIA operation in a foreign country might do. [It] attempted to manipulate the media, the Congress and public opinion to support the Reagan administration's policies."

### **Raping Russians**

Hiding the unspeakable realities of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan was almost as high a priority as concealing the U.S.-backed slaughter in Central America. Reagan's pet "freedom fighters" in Afghanistan as in Nicaragua were tainted by the drug trade as well as by well-documented cases of torture, rape and murder.

Yet, Raymond and his propagandists were always looking for new ways to "sell" the wars to the American people, leading to a clash with CIA officer

Gust Avrakotos, who was overseeing the Afghan conflict and who had developed his own close ties to Rep. Charlie Wilson.

According to author George Crile, whose book *Charlie Wilson's War* provided a loose framework for the movie of the same name, Avrakotos clashed with Raymond and other senior Reagan administration officials when they proposed unrealistic propaganda themes regarding Afghanistan.

One of Raymond's ideas was to get some Russian soldiers to "defect" and then fly them from Afghanistan to Washington where they would renounce communism. The problem, as Avrakotos explained, was that the Afghan mujahedeen routinely tortured and then murdered any Soviet soldier who fell into their hands, except for a few who were kept around for anal rape.

"Avrakotos thought North and Perle were 'cuckoos of the Far Right,'" Crile wrote, "and he soon felt quite certain that Raymond, the man who seemed to be the intellectual ringleader, was truly detached from reality. 'What Russian in his right mind would defect to those fuckers all armed to the teeth,' Avrakotos said in frustration. 'To begin with, anyone defecting to the Dushman would have to be a crook, a thief or someone who wanted to get cornholed every day, because nine out of ten prisoners were dead within twenty-four hours and they were always turned into concubines by the mujahideen. I felt so sorry for them I wanted to have them all shot.'"

When it proved nearly impossible to find any Russian defectors, for propaganda purposes, the CIA ponied up \$50,000 to bribe the Afghans to deliver two live prisoners. "These two guys were basket cases," said Avrakotos in Crile's book. "One had been fucked so many times he didn't know what was going on."

Despite this knowledge about the true nature of the Afghan "freedom fighters," the Reagan administration and the *Charlie Wilson's War* moviemakers concealed from the American people the inhuman brutality of the jihadists who were receiving billions of dollars in U.S. and Saudi largesse. The movie depicted the Soviet soldiers as sadistic monsters and the mujahedeen as noble warriors, just as Ronald Reagan and Walter Raymond would have wanted. (Raymond died in 2003; Reagan in 2004; the movie appeared in 2007.)

But the Reagan administration did calculate correctly that Wilson from his key position on a House Appropriations defense subcommittee could open the spigot on funding for the Afghan “muj.”

### **Learning Wrong Lessons**

While it’s not unusual for Hollywood to produce a Cold War propaganda film, what was different about *Charlie Wilson’s War* was how it was treated by Official Washington as something close to a documentary. That attitude was somewhat a tribute to the likeable Tom Hanks who portrayed the womanizing and hard-drinking Charlie Wilson.

Yet, perhaps the biggest danger in viewing the movie as truth was its treatment of why the anti-Soviet jihad led to Afghanistan becoming home to the Taliban and Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda terrorists in the 1990s. The movie pushed the myth that the United States abruptly abandoned Afghanistan as soon as the Soviet troops left on Feb. 15, 1989.

All across Official Washington, pundits and policymakers have embraced the lesson that the United States must not make that “mistake” again and thus must leave behind a sizeable force of U.S. troops.

For instance, the *New York Times*’ lead editorial on May 1, 2012, criticized President Barack Obama for not explaining how he would prevent Afghanistan from imploding after the scheduled U.S. troop withdrawal in 2014, though the *Times* added that the plan’s “longer-term commitment [of aid] sends an important message to Afghans that Washington will not abandon them as it did after the Soviets were driven out.”

The abandonment myth also has been cited by senior Obama administration officials, including U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, as they explained the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s and al-Qaeda’s use of Afghanistan for plotting the 9/11 attacks on the United States in 2001.

In late 2009, Defense Secretary Gates reprised this phony conventional wisdom, telling reporters: “We will not repeat the mistakes of 1989, when we abandoned the country only to see it descend into civil war and into Taliban hands.” However, that narrative was based on a faux reality drawn from a fictional movie.



Gates knew the real history. After all, in 1989, he was deputy national security adviser under President George H.W. Bush when the key decisions were made to continue covert U.S. aid to the mujahedeen, not cut it off.

The truth was that the end game in Afghanistan was messed up not because the United States cut the mujahedeen off but because Washington pressed for a clear-cut victory, rebuffing Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's proposals for a power-sharing arrangement. And we know that Gates knows this reality because he recounted it in his 1996 memoir, *From the Shadows*.

### **The Real History**

Here's what that history actually shows: In 1988, Gorbachev promised to remove Soviet troops from Afghanistan and sought a negotiated settlement. He hoped for a unity government that would include elements of Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah's Soviet-backed regime in Kabul and the CIA-backed Islamic fundamentalist rebels.

Gates, who in 1988 was deputy CIA director, opposed Gorbachev's plan, disbelieving that the Soviets would really depart and insisting that if they did the CIA's mujahedeen could quickly defeat Najibullah's army.

Inside the Reagan administration, Gates's judgment was opposed by State Department analysts who foresaw a drawn-out struggle. Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead and the department's intelligence chief Morton Abramowitz warned that Najibullah's army might hold on longer than the CIA expected.

But Gates prevailed in the policy debates, pushing the CIA's faith in its mujahedeen clients and expecting a rapid Najibullah collapse if the Soviets left. In the memoir, Gates recalled briefing Secretary of State George Shultz and his senior aides on the CIA's predictions prior to Shultz flying to Moscow in February 1988.

"I told them that most [CIA] analysts did not believe Najibullah's government could last without active Soviet military support," wrote Gates.

After the Soviets did withdraw in February 1989 proving Gates wrong on that point some U.S. officials felt Washington's geostrategic aims had been achieved and a move toward peace was in order. There also was mounting

concern about the Afghan mujahedeen, especially their tendencies toward brutality, heroin trafficking and fundamentalist religious practices.

However, the new administration of George H.W. Bush with Gates moving from the CIA to the White House as deputy national security adviser rebuffed Gorbachev and chose to continue U.S. covert support for the mujahedeen, aid which was being funneled primarily through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the ISI.

At the time, I was a *Newsweek* national security correspondent and asked my CIA contacts why the U.S. government didn't just collect its winnings from the Soviet withdrawal and agree to some kind of national-unity government in Kabul that could end the war and bring some stability to the country. One of the CIA hardliners responded to my question with disgust. "We want to see Najibullah strung up by a light pole," he snarled.

Back in Afghanistan, Najibullah's regime defied the CIA's expectation of a rapid collapse, using Soviet weapons and advisers to beat back a mujahedeen offensive in 1990. As Najibullah hung on, the war, the violence and the disorder continued.

Gates finally recognized that his CIA analysis had been wrong. In his memoir, he wrote: "As it turned out, Whitehead and Abramowitz were right" in their warning that Najibullah's regime might not fall quickly. Gates's memoir also acknowledged that the U.S. government did not abandon Afghanistan immediately after the Soviet departure.

"Najibullah would remain in power for another three years [after the Soviet pull-out], as the United States and the USSR continued to aid their respective sides," Gates wrote. Indeed, Moscow's and Washington's supplies continued to flow until several months after the Soviet Union collapsed in summer 1991, according to Gates.

### **Crile's Account**

And other U.S. assistance continued even longer, according to Crile's *Charlie Wilson's War*. In the book, Crile described how Wilson kept the funding spigot open for the Afghan rebels not only after the Soviet departure in 1989 but even after the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.

Eventually, the mujahedeen did capture the strategic city of Khost, but turned it into a ghost town as civilians fled or faced the mujahedeen's fundamentalist fury. Western aid workers found themselves "following the liberators in a desperate attempt to persuade them not to murder and pillage," Crile wrote.

U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley began to wonder who were the worse bad guys, the Soviet-backed communists or the U.S.-supported mujahedeen.

"It was the leaders of the Afghan puppet government who were saying all the right things, even paying lip service to democratic change," Crile reported. "The mujahideen, on the other hand, were committing unspeakable atrocities and couldn't even put aside their bickering and murderous thoughts long enough to capture Kabul."

In 1991, as the Soviet Union careened toward its final crackup, the Senate Intelligence Committee approved nothing for Afghanistan, Crile wrote. "But no one could just turn off Charlie Wilson's war like that," Crile noted. "For Charlie Wilson, there was something fundamentally wrong with his war ending then and there. He didn't like the idea of the United States going out with a whimper."

Wilson made an impassioned appeal to the House Intelligence Committee and carried the day. The committee first considered a \$100 million annual appropriation, but Wilson got them to boost it to \$200 million, which with the Saudi matching funds totaled \$400 million, Crile reported.

"And so, as the mujahideen were poised for their thirteenth year of war, instead of being cut off, it turned out to be a banner year," Crile wrote. "They found themselves with not only a \$400 million budget but also with a cornucopia of new weaponry sources that opened up when the United States decided to send the Iraqi weapons captured during the Gulf War to the mujahideen."

But even then the Afghan rebels needed an external event to prevail on the battlefield, the stunning disintegration of the Soviet Union in the latter half of 1991. Only then did Moscow cut off its aid to Najibullah. His government finally fell in 1992. But its collapse didn't stop the war or the mujahedeen infighting.

The capital of Kabul came under the control of a relatively moderate rebel force led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, an Islamist but not a fanatic. However, Massoud, a Tajik, was not favored by Pakistan's ISI, which backed more extreme Pashtun elements of the mujahedeen.

Rival Afghan warlords battled with each other for another four years destroying much of Kabul. Finally, a disgusted Washington began to turn away. Crile reported that the Cross Border Humanitarian Aid Program, which was the only sustained U.S. program aimed at rebuilding Afghanistan, was cut off at the end of 1993, almost five years after the Soviets left.

### **Rise of the Taliban**

While chaos continued to reign across Afghanistan, the ISI readied its own army of Islamic extremists drawn from Pashtun refugee camps inside Pakistan. This group, known as the Taliban, entered Afghanistan with the promise of restoring order.

The Taliban seized the capital of Kabul in September 1996, driving Massoud into a northward retreat. The ousted communist leader Najibullah, who had stayed in Kabul, sought shelter in the United Nations compound, but was captured. The Taliban tortured, castrated and killed him, his mutilated body hung from a light pole just as the CIA hardliner had wished seven years earlier.

The triumphant Taliban imposed harsh Islamic law on Afghanistan. Their rule was especially cruel to women who had made gains toward equal rights under the communists, but were forced by the Taliban to live under highly restrictive rules, to cover themselves when in public, and to forgo schooling.

The Taliban also granted refuge to Saudi exile Osama bin Laden, who had fought with the Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviets in the 1980s. Bin Laden then used Afghanistan as the base of operations for his terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, setting the stage for the next Afghan War in 2001.

So, the real history is quite different from the Hollywood version that Official Washington has absorbed as its short-hand understanding of the anti-Soviet Afghan war of the 1980s.

The newly discovered document about bringing Charlie Wilson into the White House “circle as discrete Hill connection” suggests that even the impression that it was “Charlie Wilson’s war” may have been more illusion than reality. Though Wilson surely became a true believer in the CIA’s largest covert action of the Cold War, Reagan’s White House team appears to have viewed him as a useful Democratic front man who would be “very helpful in getting money.”

Most significantly, the mythology enshrined in the movie and embraced by the policymakers obscured the key lessons of the 1980s: the dangerous futility of trying to impose a Western or military solution on Afghanistan as well as the need to explore negotiation and compromise even when dealing with unsavory foes. It wasn’t the mythical U.S. “abandonment” of Afghanistan in February 1989 that caused the devastation of the past two decades, but rather the uncompromising policies of the Reagan-Bush-41 administrations.

First, there was the ascendance of propaganda over truth. The U.S. government was well aware of the gross human rights crimes of the Afghan “muj” but still sold them as honorable “freedom fighters” to the American people. Second, there was the triumphalism of Gates and other war hawks, who insisted on rubbing Moscow’s nose in its Afghan defeat and thus blocked cooperation on a negotiated settlement which held out the promise of a less destructive outcome.

Those two factors – the deceit and the hubris – set the stage for the 9/11 attacks in 2001, a renewed Afghan War bogging down tens of thousands of U.S. troops, America’s disastrous detour into Iraq, and now a costly long-term U.S. commitment to Afghanistan that is expected to last at least until 2024. With a distorted account of *Charlie Wilson’s War*, Tom Hanks and Hollywood didn’t help.

Following a sarin nerve gas attack that left hundreds dead in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on Aug. 21, 2013, it looked very much like the decision had been made in Washington to commit the U.S. on a path of military action to enforce the proverbial “red line” that President Obama had drawn a year earlier regarding the Syrian war.

With a list of possible targets for a military strike reportedly circulating in the White House, Obama even gave a speech at the United Nations unequivocally blaming the Bashar al-Assad regime for the attack, which Obama said would undermine the international norm against chemical weapons if left unchecked.

Robert Parry, however, along with a handful of other skeptics, noted that the Obama administration's case for war was even shakier than the bogus evidence that the Bush administration had offered for the invasion of Iraq. A dossier released Aug. 30, 2013, had no direct quotes, no photographic evidence, no named sources – essentially nothing but “trust us,” noted Parry.

## [A Dodgy Dossier on Syrian War \(Aug. 30, 2013\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

The Obama administration's three-page white paper making the case that the Syrian government used chemical weapons on Aug. 21 is even skimpier than the “evidence” that George W. Bush's team put out to “prove” that Iraq was hiding WMD in 2003.

The white paper against Syria is noteworthy in that it lacks any specifics that can be assessed independently, in contrast to, say, Secretary of State Colin Powell's infamous presentation to the UN Security Council which included intercepted quotes from Iraqi officials and satellite photographs of suspected Iraqi WMD locations.

As it turned out, Powell had misquoted the Iraqi officials to make their intercepted comments appear more sinister and the satellite photos ended up not proving anything at all.

But there was at least a presentation that however misleading didn't simply call on the American people and the world to “trust us.” That is pretty much all that the Obama administration is saying in its indictment of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for allegedly deploying deadly chemical weapons last week.

The white paper states: “The United States Government assesses with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21, 2013. We further assess that the regime used a nerve agent in the attack. These all-source assessments are based on human, signals, and geospatial intelligence as well as a significant body of open source reporting.”

But the white paper offers no verifiable details to support any of its conclusions. For instance, it states:

We have intelligence that leads us to assess that Syrian chemical weapons personnel including personnel assessed to be associated with the SSRC [the Scientific Studies and Research Center, which oversees Syria's chemical weapons arsenal] were preparing chemical munitions prior to the attack.

In the three days prior to the attack, we collected streams of human, signals and geospatial intelligence that reveal regime activities that we assess were associated with preparations for a chemical weapons attack. Syrian chemical weapons personnel were operating in the Damascus suburb of 'Adra from Sunday, August 18 until early in the morning on Wednesday, August 21 near an area that the regime uses to mix chemical weapons, including sarin.

On August 21, a Syrian regime element prepared for a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus area, including through the utilization of gas masks. Our intelligence sources in the Damascus area did not detect any indications in the days prior to the attack that opposition affiliates were planning to use chemical weapons.

Yet, despite these seemingly incriminating assertions, no supporting evidence is cited: no satellite or other photos of these military movements were released, no names of individuals mentioned, no communications intercepts published. Just assertions attributed to "sources" with no way to assess their reliability.

In 2003, Secretary Powell also cited "sources" to buttress his case that Iraq was hiding WMD and only after the Iraq War was underway did the public learn that these "sources" had code names like "Curve Ball" or were connected to self-interested outfits like the Iraqi National Congress.

Perhaps, the Obama administration's most damning claim on Friday was that "We intercepted communications involving a senior official intimately familiar with the offensive who confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime on August 21 and was concerned with the UN inspectors obtaining evidence. On the afternoon of August 21, we have intelligence that Syrian chemical weapons personnel were directed to cease operations."

However, again, the identity of the "senior official" is not included, nor is the direct quote cited. Given the history of the U.S. government doctoring quotes to make a case – besides Powell in 2003, the Reagan administration also did it in accusing the Soviet Union of intentionally shooting down KAL flight 007 in 1983 – you might have thought the Obama administration would take pains to include the actual words and put them in their proper context. But no.

## Propaganda Gold

Following Powell's speech to the UN Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003, the few skeptical voices in the mainstream U.S. news media were silenced after Powell laid it on thick.

One of Powell's techniques was to play excerpts of intercepted Iraqi telephone conversations in which the precise topic was unclear, but Powell applied the worst possible interpretation. In one such conversation, an Iraqi official said, "we evacuated everything. We don't have anything left."

Powell added, "Note what he says: 'We evacuated everything.' We didn't destroy it. We didn't line it up for inspection. We didn't turn it into the inspectors. We evacuated it to make sure it was not around when the inspectors showed up." But Powell was speculating that the "everything" referred to WMDs.

In another excerpt, Powell embellished an original State Department translation to cast more suspicion on the Iraqis. To prove that Iraqis were removing illegal weapons before a UN inspection team arrived, Powell read from one supposed transcript of an Iraqi official giving orders: "We sent you a message yesterday to clean out all of the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas. Make sure there is nothing there."

What the original State Department transcript said, however, was: "We sent you a message to inspect the scrap areas and the abandoned areas." There was no order to "clean out all of the areas" and there was no instruction to "make sure there is nothing there." Powell's gamesmanship with the intercept was later reported by Gilbert Cranberg, a former editor of the *Des Moines Register's* editorial pages, when he compared Powell's testimony to the original State Department translation.

Powell used the needled transcript to draw a powerful conclusion. "This is all part of a system of hiding things and moving things out of the way and making sure they have left nothing behind," he said. "They were trying to clean up the area to leave no evidence behind of the presence of weapons of mass destruction. And they can claim that nothing was there. And the inspectors can look all they want, and they will find nothing."



However, as deceptive as Powell and the Bush administration were regarding Iraq, they at least provided details that could be checked out independently. A careful journalist or an attentive citizen could do what Gilbert Cranberg did, overlay the official story on top of the raw data to see if they matched.

With the Obama administration's white paper on Syria, not even that is possible. The claims are so lacking in detail that they amount to an insistence that the American people and the world's public simply trust the U.S. government not to mislead them – again.

Weary from a decade-plus of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and still skeptical of government officials pushing for military action based on shoddy evidence and dubious reasoning, the American people generally rejected the Obama administration's push for war in Syria in late summer 2013. Only nine percent supported an attack and 60 percent said Congress should vote against authorizing President Obama's war plans, with the White House's main dilemma being the considerable doubt surrounding the primary *casus belli* for the war – the fact that there was no hard evidence to implicate the Bashar al-Assad regime in the Aug. 21 chemical attack.

While independent experts pointed out that there was no way to be able to decisively assign blame for the attacks without forensic data and some foreign governments arguing that the attacks were likely perpetrated by the Syrian rebels as a false flag to provoke foreign military intervention in the Syrian conflict, the Obama administration's case for war was being discredited from all sides.

In this article, Parry notes that even senior U.S. intelligence analysts disagreed with the administration's certainty that the Syrian government was behind the Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack. That dissent was suppressed, however, amid the rush to a near war, wrote Parry.

## [Fixing Intel Around the Syria Policy \(Nov. 14, 2013\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

After the Aug. 21 chemical weapons incident in Syria, a number of senior U.S. intelligence analysts disagreed with the Obama administration's rush to judgment blaming the Syrian government, but their dissent on this question of war or peace was concealed from the American people.

The administration kept the dissent secret by circumventing the normal intelligence process and issuing on Aug. 30 something called a "Government Assessment," posted at the White House press office's

website and fingering the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad as the guilty party.

Normally, such an important issue — a possible U.S. military engagement — would be the focus of a National Intelligence Estimate, but that would also cite the disagreements expressed within the intelligence community. By avoiding an NIE, the Obama administration was able to keep the lid on how much dissent there was over the Assad-did-it conclusion.

Once the “Government Assessment” was issued, Secretary of State John Kerry was put forward to present the case for launching a military strike against Syria, an attack that was only averted because President Barack Obama abruptly decided to ask congressional approval and then reached a diplomatic agreement, with the help of the Russian government, in which the Syrian government agreed to dispose of its chemical weapons arsenal (while still denying that it was responsible for the Aug. 21 attack).

Although war was averted, the Obama administration’s deception of the American public by pretending that there was a government-wide consensus regarding Syrian government guilt when there wasn’t was reminiscent of the lies and distortions used by President George W. Bush to trick the nation into war with Iraq over bogus WMD claims in 2003.

The behavior of the rest of Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. news media also shows that little has changed from a decade ago. Obvious indications of a deception were ignored and the few voices who raised the alarm were treated with the same mocking contempt that greeted skeptics of Bush’s case for invading Iraq.

Writers for Consortiumnews.com were among the few in the American media who noted the glaring flaws in the Obama administration’s case, including its refusal to release any of its supposed proof to support its conclusions and the curious absence of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper from the public presentation of the administration’s *casus belli*.

The reason for keeping the DNI on the sidelines was that he otherwise might have been asked if there was a consensus in the intelligence community supporting the administration’s certitude that Assad’s regime was responsible. At that point, Clapper would have had to acknowledge the

disagreement from rank-and-file analysts (or face the likelihood that they would speak out).

### **Inspectors' Doubts**

Similarly, it appears that on-the-ground inspectors for the United Nations had their own doubts about the Syrian government's responsibility, especially since Assad's regime had allowed a UN team into Damascus on Aug. 18 to investigate what the regime claimed was evidence of rebels using chemical weapons.

It never made sense to some of these inspectors that Assad just three days later would launch a chemical weapons attack on the outskirts of Damascus just a few miles from the hotel where the UN inspectors were staying. Assad would have known that the Aug. 21 incident would mean serious trouble for his government, very possibly drawing the U.S. military into the Syrian civil war on the side of the rebels.

The UN inspectors also failed to find sarin or other chemical agents at one of the two sites that they subsequently examined near Damascus, and they inserted a qualification in their report about apparent tampering at the one area where sarin was found.

However, instead of noting the many holes in the U.S. "Government Assessment" and the UN report, the mainstream U.S. news media simply joined the rush to judgment, hyping dubious claims from both U.S. government officials and non-governmental organizations favoring U.S. military intervention in Syria.

The *New York Times* and other major news outlets that swallowed Bush's false claims about Iraq WMD a decade ago also began reporting Obama's dubious assertions about Syria as flat fact, not as issues in serious dispute. One typically credulous *Times* story accepted as indisputable fact that the Syrian government was behind the Aug. 21 attack despite significant doubts among independent analysts, UN inspectors and U.S. intelligence analysts.

New details of the rebellion among the intelligence analysts have just been reported by former CIA officer Philip Giraldi for the *American Conservative* magazine. According to Giraldi's account, a "mass

resignation of a significant number of analysts” was threatened if the Obama administration issued an NIE without acknowledging their dissent.

A “hurriedly updated” NIE had reflected the Syrian government’s suspected use of chemical weapons against rebels and civilians, “while conceding that there was no conclusive proof,” Giraldi wrote, adding:

There was considerable dissent from even that equivocation, including by many analysts who felt that the evidence for a Syrian government role was subject to interpretation and possibly even fabricated. Some believed the complete absence of U.S. satellite intelligence on the extensive preparations that the government would have needed to make in order to mix its binary chemical system and deliver it on target was particularly disturbing.

These concerns were reinforced by subsequent UN reports suggesting that the rebels might have access to their own chemical weapons. The White House, meanwhile, considered the somewhat ambiguous conclusion of the NIE to be unsatisfactory, resulting in considerable pushback against the senior analysts who had authored the report.

## **Demands from Above**

The Obama administration’s “solution” to this analyst revolt was to circumvent the normal intelligence process and issue a white paper that would be called a “Government Assessment,” declaring the Syrian government’s guilt as indisputable fact and leaving out the doubts of the intelligence community.

While this subterfuge may have satisfied the institutional concerns of the intelligence community which didn’t want another Iraq-War-style violation of its procedural protocols on how NIEs are handled it still left the American people vulnerable to a government deception on a question of war or peace.

Yes, there was no scene comparable to the positioning of CIA Director George Tenet behind Secretary of State Colin Powell as he delivered his deceptive Iraq War speech to the UN Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003. Both Clapper and Brennan were absent from the administration’s testimony to Congress, leaving Secretary Kerry to do most of the talking with Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey bracketing Kerry as mostly silent wing men.

And, yes, one could argue that the Obama administration’s hyping of its case against the Assad regime had a happy ending, the Syrian government’s agreement to eliminate its entire CW arsenal. Indeed, most of the grousing

about the Syrian outcome has come from neocons who wanted to ride the rush to judgment all the way to another regime-changing war.

### **Dogs Not Barking**

But Americans should be alarmed that a decade after they were deceived into a disastrous war in Iraq based on bogus intelligence and the complete breakdown of Official Washington's checks and balances a very similar process could unfold, bringing the country to the brink of another war.

Besides the disturbing fact that the Obama administration refused to release any actual evidence to support its case for war, there was the gullibility (or complicity) of leading news outlets in failing to show even a modicum of skepticism.

The *New York Times* and other major news organizations failed to note the dogs not barking. Why, for instance, was there no NIE? Why were the U.S. government's top intelligence officials absent from public presentations of what amounted to an intelligence issue? It shouldn't have required a Sherlock Holmes to sniff out the silenced intelligence analysts.

When a government leader refuses to reveal any of his supposed proof for a claim and conceals the professionals who don't agree with his claim, any reasonably savvy person should draw the conclusion that the government leader doesn't really have a case.

Though some Americans may cite the work of a few websites, like our own *Consortium News*, as having challenged the misguided conventional wisdom on Syria as we also did on Iraq, they should not draw too much comfort from this. After all, our readership is tiny when compared to the many sources of misinformation being disseminated to the broad American public.

The dangerous reality is that the United States remains vulnerable to the kinds of stampedes in judgment that can end up crushing people around the world.

In late 2019, a whistleblower emerged that called into question the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' assessment of a 2018 chlorine attack in Dhouma, Syria. This whistleblower was then joined by several other colleagues who claimed that the OPCW had misrepresented some of the facts about the attack, leading to complaints from Russia that the watchdog had been politicized by the West and testimony by a former OPCW

inspection team leader at the UN Security Council that their findings had been manipulated and suppressed.

Several years earlier, in 2013, Robert Parry explained how the U.S. had for many years been pressuring UN agencies, forcing out honest actors, and undermining their independence. In question at that time was a 2013 chemical weapons attack near Damascus, which the U.S. government sought to blame Assad for despite evidence pointing in a different direction.

## [How US Pressure Bends UN Agencies \(Oct. 16, 2013\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

For at least the past dozen years, the U.S. government has aggressively sought to gain control of the leadership of key United Nations agencies, including the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) which is central to the dispute over the Syrian government's alleged use of sarin gas on Aug. 21.

Yet, despite evidence that this U.S. manipulation can twist the findings of these UN groups in ways favored by Official Washington, the mainstream American press usually leaves out this context and treats UN findings — or at least those that side with the U.S. government — as independent and beyond reproach, including the OPCW's recent reporting on the Syrian dispute.

For instance, the background of the current OPCW director-general, Ahmet Uzumcu, is rarely if ever mentioned in American news articles about the OPCW's work in Syria. Yet, his biography raises questions about whether he and thus his organization can be truly objective about the Syrian civil war.

Uzumcu, who was chosen to take over the top OPCW job in 2010, is a career Turkish diplomat who previously served as Turkey's consul in Aleppo, Syria, now a rebel stronghold in the war to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad; as Turkey's ambassador to Israel, which has publicly come out in favor of the rebels; and as Turkey's permanent representative to NATO, which is dominated by the United States and other Western powers hostile to Assad. Uzumcu's home country of Turkey also has been a principal backer of the rebel cause.

While Uzumcu's history does not necessarily mean he would pressure his staff to slant the OPCW's findings against the Syrian government, his objectivity surely could be put in question given his past diplomatic postings and the interests of his home government. Plus, even if Uzumcu were inclined to defy Turkey and its NATO allies and insist on being evenhanded in his approach toward Syria he surely would remember what happened to one of his predecessors who got on the wrong side of U.S. geopolitical interests.

That history about how the world's only superpower can influence purportedly honest-broker UN outfits was recalled on Monday in an article by Marlise Simons of the *New York Times*, describing how George W. Bush's administration ousted OPCW's director-general Jose Mauricio Bustani in 2002 because he was seen as an obstacle to invading Iraq.

Bustani, who had been reelected unanimously to the post less than a year earlier, described in an interview with the *Times* how Bush's emissary, Under-Secretary of State John Bolton, marched into Bustani's office and announced that he would be fired.

"The story behind [Bustani's] ouster has been the subject of interpretation and speculation for years, and Mr. Bustani, a Brazilian diplomat, has kept a low profile since then," wrote Simons. "But with the agency thrust into the spotlight with news of the Nobel [Peace] Prize last week, Mr. Bustani agreed to discuss what he said was the real reason: the Bush administration's fear that chemical weapons inspections in Iraq would conflict with Washington's rationale for invading it. Several officials involved in the events, some speaking publicly about them for the first time, confirmed his account."

Bolton, a blunt-speaking neocon who later became Bush's Ambassador to the United Nations, continued to insist in a recent interview with the *New York Times* that Bustani was ousted for incompetence. But Bustani and other diplomats close to the case reported that Bustani's real offense was drawing Iraq into acceptance of the OPCW's conventions for eliminating chemical weapons, just as the Bush administration was planning to pin its propaganda campaign for invading Iraq on the country's alleged secret stockpile of WMD.

Bustani's ouster gave President Bush a clearer path to the invasion by letting him frighten the American people about the prospects of Iraq sharing its chemical weapons and possibly a nuclear bomb with al-Qaeda terrorists.

Brushing aside Iraq's insistence that it had destroyed its chemical weapons and didn't have a nuclear weapons project, Bush launched the invasion in March 2003, only for the world to discover later that the Iraqi government was telling the truth. As a result of the Iraq War, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died, along with nearly 4,500 American soldiers, with the estimated costs to the U.S. taxpayers running into the trillions of dollars.

### **Bush's Bullying**

But U.S. bullying of UN agencies did not start or stop with replacing the OPCW's Bustani. Prior to Bustani's ouster, the Bush administration employed similar bare-knuckled tactics against UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary C. Robinson, who had dared criticize human rights abuses committed by Israel and Bush's "war on terror." The Bush administration lobbied hard against her reappointment. Officially, she said she was retiring on her own accord.

The Bush administration also forced out Robert Watson, the chairman of the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Under his leadership, the panel had reached a consensus that human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, contributed to global warming. ExxonMobil sent a memo to Bush's White House asking, "Can Watson be replaced now at the request of the U.S.?"

The ExxonMobil memo, obtained by the Natural Resources Defense Council through the Freedom of Information Act, urged the White House to "restructure U.S. attendance at the IPCC meetings to assure no Clinton/Gore proponents are involved in decisional activities." On April 19, 2002, the Bush administration succeeded in replacing Watson with Rajendra Pachauri, an Indian economist.

Commenting on his removal, Watson said, "U.S. support was, of course, an important factor. They [the IPCC] came under a lot of pressure from ExxonMobil who asked the White House to try and remove me."



This pattern of pressure continued into the Obama administration which used its own diplomatic and economic muscle to insert a malleable Japanese diplomat, Yukiya Amano, into the leadership of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, which was playing a key role in the dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

Before his appointment, Amano had portrayed himself as an independent-minded fellow who was resisting U.S.-Israeli propaganda about the Iranian nuclear program. Yet behind the scenes, he was meeting with U.S. and Israeli officials to coordinate on how to serve their interests. His professed doubts about an Iranian nuclear-bomb project was only a theatrical device to intensify the later impact if he declared that Iran indeed was building a nuke.

But this ploy was spoiled by Pvt. Bradley Manning's leaking of hundreds of thousands of pages of U.S. diplomatic cables. Among them were reports on Amano's secret collaboration with U.S. and Israeli officials.

### **The Syrian Dossiers**

This history is relevant now because the credibility of the UN's chemical weapons office has been central to conclusions drawn by the mainstream U.S. news media that the OPCW's report on the alleged chemical weapons attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21 pointed to the Syrian government as the responsible party.

Though the OPCW report did not formally assess blame for the attack, which purportedly killed hundreds of Syrian civilians, the report included details that the U.S. press and some non-governmental organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, used to extrapolate the guilt of Assad's government.

Yet, elements of the OPCW's official report appeared stretched to create the public impression that the Syrian government carried out the attack despite apparent doubts by OPCW field investigators whose concerns were downplayed or buried in tables and footnotes.

For instance, the UN inspectors found surprisingly little evidence of sarin gas at the first neighborhood that they visited on Aug. 26, Moadamiyah, south of Damascus. Of the 13 environmental samples collected that day,

none tested positive for sarin or other chemical-warfare agents. The two laboratories used by the inspectors also had conflicting results regarding trace amounts of chemical residue that can be left behind by sarin after being degraded by intense heat.

By contrast, tests for sarin were more clearly positive from samples taken two and three days later on Aug. 28-29 in the eastern suburban area of Zamalka/Ein Tarma. There, Lab One found sarin in 11 of 17 samples and Lab Two found sarin in all 17 samples.

Though the UN report concludes that sarin was present in Moadamiyah despite the failure to identify actual chemical-warfare agents the report does not explain why the Aug. 26 samples in Moadamiyah would test so negatively when the Aug. 28-29 samples in Zamalka/Ein Tarma would test much more positively.

One would have thought that the earlier samples would test more strongly than later samples after two or three more days of exposure to sun and other elements. An obvious explanation would be that the release of sarin was concentrated in the eastern suburb and that the spotty residue detected in the south came from other factors, such as false positives for secondary chemicals especially from Lab Two.

If the Aug. 21 attack centered on Zamalka/Ein Tarma as the UN results suggest, that would indicate a much less expansive use of chemical weapons than a U.S. government white paper claimed. The alleged breadth of the attack served as a primary argument for blaming the Syrian government given its greater military capabilities than the rebels.

### **Obama's Claims**

That point was driven home by President Barack Obama in his nationally televised address on Sept. 10 when he asserted that 11 neighborhoods had come under chemical bombardment on Aug. 21.

However, even the U.S. "Government Assessment" on the attack, issued on Aug. 30 explicitly blaming the Syrian government, suggested that the initial reports of about a dozen targets around Damascus may have been exaggerated. A footnote contained in a White House-released map of the supposed locations of the attack read:

“Reports of chemical attacks originating from some locations may reflect the movement of patients exposed in one neighborhood to field hospitals and medical facilities in the surrounding area. They may also reflect confusion and panic triggered by the ongoing artillery and rocket barrage, and reports of chemical use in other neighborhoods.”

In other words, victims from one location could have rushed to clinics in other neighborhoods, creating the impression of a more widespread attack than actually occurred. That possibility would seem to be underscored by the divergent findings of the UN inspectors when they took soil and other environmental samples from the southern and eastern areas and got strikingly different results.

The UN inspectors also revealed how dependent they were on Syrian rebels for access to the areas of the alleged chemical attacks and to witnesses, with one rebel commander even asked to take “custody” of the UN inspection.

At the suspected attack sites, the inspectors also detected signs that evidence had been “moved” and “possibly manipulated.” Regarding the Moadamiyah area, the UN report noted, “Fragments [of rockets] and other possible evidence have clearly been handled/moved prior to the arrival of the investigative team.”

In the Zamalka/Ein Tarma neighborhood, where a crudely made missile apparently delivered the poison gas, the inspectors stated that “the locations have been well traveled by other individuals prior to the arrival of the Mission. During the time spent at these locations, individuals arrived carrying other suspected munitions indicating that such potential evidence is being moved and possibly manipulated.”

### **Media’s Conventional Wisdom**

The UN inspectors did not draw any specific conclusion from their research as to whether Syrian government forces or the rebels were responsible for the hundreds of civilian deaths that resulted from the apparent use of sarin gas. However, major U.S. news outlets, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, concluded that the findings implicated the Syrian government.

Those accounts cited weapons “experts” as asserting that the type of missiles used and the supposed sophistication of the sarin were beyond the known capabilities of the rebels. The articles also said the rough calculations by the UN inspectors of the likely missile trajectories suggested that the launches occurred in government-controlled areas with the missiles landing in areas where the rebels dominate.

These mainstream U.S. news reports did not cite the cautionary comments contained in the UN report about possible tampering with evidence, nor did they take into account the conflicting lab results in Moadamiyah compared with Zamalka/Ein Tarma, nor the fact that the OPCW’s director-general is a career Turkish diplomat.

Reinforcing the Assad-did-it conventional wisdom, Secretary of State John Kerry and President Obama moved to assign any remaining doubters to the loony bin of conspiracy theorists. “We really don’t have time today to pretend that anyone can have their own set of facts,” Kerry sniffed in response to continuing Russian government’s doubts.

President Obama drove home the same point in his annual address to the UN General Assembly: “It’s an insult to human reason and to the legitimacy of this institution to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack.”

Yet, the doubters reportedly include U.S. intelligence analysts, who I’m told have briefed Obama personally about the uncertainty of the evidence. Clearly, if the Obama administration had the entire intelligence community onboard, there would have been no need for such a dodgy dossier as the “Government Assessment” posted by the White House press office on Aug. 30, rather than a National Intelligence Estimate that would have reflected the views of the 16 intelligence agencies and been released by the Director of National Intelligence.

### **Doubts in the Field**

And, Robert Fisk, a veteran reporter for London’s *Independent* newspaper, found a lack of consensus among UN officials and other international observers in Damascus despite the career risks that they faced by deviating from the conventional wisdom on Assad’s guilt.

“In a country indeed a world where propaganda is more influential than truth, discovering the origin of the chemicals that suffocated so many Syrians a month ago is an investigation fraught with journalistic perils,” Fisk wrote. “Nevertheless, it also has to be said that grave doubts are being expressed by the UN and other international organisations in Damascus that the sarin gas missiles were fired by Assad’s army.

“While these international employees cannot be identified, some of them were in Damascus on 21 August and asked a series of questions to which no one has yet supplied an answer. Why, for example, would Syria wait until the UN inspectors were ensconced in Damascus on 18 August before using sarin gas little more than two days later and only four miles from the hotel in which the UN had just checked in? ...

“As one Western NGO put it ‘if Assad really wanted to use sarin gas, why for God’s sake, did he wait for two years and then when the UN was actually on the ground to investigate?’”

Further adding to these doubts about the Official Story of the Aug. 21 poison-gas attack is the 11-year-old story about how the U.S. government engineered a change in the leadership of the UN’s OPCW because the director-general committed the unpardonable sin of getting in the way of a U.S. geopolitical/propaganda priority — and the question about the impartiality of the Turkish diplomat now running the agency.

For the most part uninterested in events that take place outside of U.S. borders, Americans were shocked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, seeing it largely through media’s narrative of Vladimir Putin’s alleged ambitions to “restore the Soviet Union” through brute force. While the horrific war that Putin launched was clearly an illegal war of aggression – with civilians as usual paying the highest price – the simplistic analysis offered to the American people by TV pundits failed to provide context necessary to understand the origins of the conflict, which date back to a U.S.-backed coup eight years earlier, on February 22, 2014.

In this article, published a day after Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich’s violent ouster from power, Parry details the roots of the coup and the strange celebration in U.S. political and media circles over the toppling of a democratically elected president. Rather than being a triumph of a democratic grassroots movement, American neocons had helped destabilize Ukraine and engineered the overthrow of its elected government, a “regime change” on Russia’s western border. But the coup and the neo-Nazi militias at the forefront also revealed divisions within the Obama administration, Parry explained.

## [Neocons and the Ukraine Coup \(Feb. 23, 2014\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

More than five years into his presidency, Barack Obama has failed to take full control over his foreign policy, with powerful positions filled by neoconservatives who are more attuned to hardline positions than to promoting peace. The latest example is Ukraine where U.S. diplomats, including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, are celebrating the overthrow of an elected pro-Russian government.

Occurring during the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, the coup in Ukraine dealt an embarrassing black eye to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had offended neocon sensibilities by quietly cooperating with Obama to reduce tensions over Iran and Syria, where the neocons favored military options.

Over the past several weeks, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was undercut by a destabilization campaign encouraged by Nuland and Pyatt and then deposed in a coup spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias. Even after Yanukovych and the political opposition agreed to an orderly transition toward early elections, right-wing armed patrols shattered the agreement and took strategic positions around Kyiv.

Despite these ominous signs, Ambassador Pyatt hailed the coup as “a day for the history books.” Most of the mainstream U.S. news media also sided with the coup, with commentators praising the overthrow of an elected government as “reform.” But a few dissonant reports have pierced the happy talk by noting that the armed militias are part of the Pravy Sektor, a right-wing nationalist group which is often compared to the Nazis.

Thus, the Ukrainian coup could become the latest neocon-initiated “regime change” that ousted a target government but failed to take into account who would fill the void.

Some of these same American neocons pushed for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, not realizing that removing Saddam Hussein would touch off a sectarian conflict and lead to a pro-Iranian Shiite regime. Similarly, U.S. military intervention in Libya in 2011 eliminated Muammar Gaddafi but also empowered Islamic extremists who later murdered the U.S. ambassador and spread unrest beyond Libya’s borders to nearby Mali.

One might trace this neocons' blindness to consequences back to Afghanistan in the 1980s when the Reagan administration supported Islamic militants, including Osama bin Laden, in a war against Soviet troops, only to have Muslim extremists take control of Afghanistan and provide a base for al-Qaeda to plot the 9/11 attacks against the United States.

Regarding Ukraine, today's State Department bureaucracy seems to be continuing the same anti-Moscow geopolitical strategy set during those Reagan-Bush years.

Robert Gates described the approach in his new memoir, *Duty*, explaining the view of President George H.W. Bush's Defense Secretary Dick Cheney: "When the Soviet Union was collapsing in late 1991, Dick wanted to see the dismantlement not only of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire but of Russia itself, so it could never again be a threat to the rest of the world."

Vice President Cheney and the neocons pursued a similar strategy during George W. Bush's presidency, expanding NATO aggressively to the east and backing anti-Russian regimes in the region including the hardline Georgian government, which provoked a military confrontation with Moscow in 2008, ironically, during the Summer Olympics in China.

### **Obama's Strategy**

As President, Obama has sought a more cooperative relationship with Russia's Putin and, generally, a less belligerent approach toward adversarial countries. Obama has been supported by an inner circle at the White House with analytical assistance from some elements of the U.S. intelligence community.

But the neocon momentum at the State Department and from other parts of the U.S. government has continued in the direction set by George W. Bush's neocon administration and by neocon-lite Democrats who surrounded Secretary of State Clinton during Obama's first term.

The two competing currents of geopolitical thinking a less combative one from the White House and a more aggressive one from the foreign policy bureaucracy have often worked at cross-purposes. But Obama, with only a

few exceptions, has been unwilling to confront the hardliners or even fully articulate his foreign policy vision publicly.

For instance, Obama succumbed to the insistence of Gates, Clinton and Gen. David Petraeus to escalate the war in Afghanistan in 2009, though the President reportedly felt trapped into the decision which he soon regretted. In 2010, Obama backed away from a Brazilian-Turkish-brokered deal with Iran to curtail its nuclear program after Clinton denounced the arrangement and pushed for economic sanctions and confrontation as favored by the neocons and Israel.

Just last summer, Obama only at the last second reversed a course charted by the State Department favoring a military intervention in Syria over disputed U.S. claims that the Syrian government had launched a chemical weapons attack on civilians. Putin helped arrange a way out for Obama by getting the Syrian government to agree to surrender its chemical weapons.

### **Stirring Up Trouble**

Now, you have Assistant Secretary of State Nuland, the wife of prominent neocon Robert Kagan, acting as a leading instigator in the Ukrainian unrest, explicitly seeking to pry the country out of the Russian orbit. Last December, she reminded Ukrainian business leaders that, to help Ukraine achieve “its European aspirations, we have invested more than \$5 billion.” She said the U.S. goal was to take “Ukraine into the future that it deserves.”

The Kagan family includes other important neocons, such as Frederick Kagan, who was a principal architect of the Iraq and Afghan “surge” strategies. In *Duty*, Gates writes that “an important way station in my ‘pilgrim’s progress’ from skepticism to support of more troops [in Afghanistan] was an essay by the historian Fred Kagan, who sent me a prepublication draft.

“I knew and respected Kagan. He had been a prominent proponent of the surge in Iraq, and we had talked from time to time about both wars, including one long evening conversation on the veranda of one of Saddam’s palaces in Baghdad.”

Now, another member of the Kagan family, albeit an in-law, has been orchestrating the escalation of tensions in Ukraine with an eye toward one



more “regime change.”

As for Nuland’s sidekick, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Pyatt previously served as a U.S. diplomat in Vienna involved in bringing the International Atomic Energy Agency into line with U.S. and Israeli hostility toward Iran. A July 9, 2009, cable from Pyatt, which was released by Pvt. Bradley Manning and published by WikiLeaks, revealed Pyatt to be the middleman who coordinated strategy with the U.S.-installed IAEA director-general Yukiya Amano.

Pyatt reported that Amano offered to cooperate with the U.S. and Israel on Iran, including having private meetings with Israeli officials, supporting U.S. sanctions, and agreeing to IAEA personnel changes favored by the United States. According to the cable, Pyatt promised strong U.S. backing for Amano and Amano asked for more U.S. money.

It was Ambassador Pyatt who was on the other end of Nuland’s infamous Jan. 28 phone call in which she discussed how to manipulate Ukraine’s tensions and who to elevate into the country’s leadership. According to the conversation, which was intercepted and made public, Nuland ruled out one opposition figure, Vitali Klitschko, a popular former boxer, because he lacked experience.

Nuland also favored the UN as mediator over the European Union, at which point in the conversation she exclaimed, “Fuck the EU” to which Pyatt responded, “Oh, exactly ...”

Ultimately, the Ukrainian unrest over a policy debate whether Ukraine should move toward entering the European Union led to a violent showdown in which neo-fascist storm troopers battled police, leaving scores dead. To ease the crisis, President Yanukovich agreed to a power-sharing government and to accelerated elections. But no sooner was that agreement signed than the hard-right faction threw it out and pressed for power in an apparent coup.

Again, the American neocons had performed the role of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, unleashing forces and creating chaos that soon was spinning out of control. But this latest “regime change,” which humiliated President Putin, could also do long-term damage to U.S.-Russian cooperation vital to

resolving other crises, with Iran and Syria, two more countries where the neocons are also eager for confrontation.

## PART IV

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### NARRATIVE CONTROL

*“In this age of pervasive media, the primary method of social control is through the creation of narratives delivered to the public through newspapers, TV, radio, computers, cell phones and any other gadget that can convey information. This reality has given rise to an obsession among the power elite to control as much of this messaging as possible.”*

- Robert Parry

Understanding how America’s founding narrative had been hijacked, Robert Parry believed, was fundamental to understanding modern-day control over information.

In this article, published on Independence Day 2014, Parry explains that although many Americans view Thomas Jefferson fondly as the beloved author of the Declaration of Independence and one of America’s greatest political thinkers, the real Jefferson may have been America’s founding sociopath, a man of racist self-interest and endless hypocrisies.

### Thomas Jefferson: America’s Founding Sociopath (July 4, 2014)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

On July Fourth, the people of the United States extravagantly celebrate the high-blown expressions on human rights that Thomas Jefferson penned in the Declaration of Independence, especially the noble phrase “all men are created equal.” But Jefferson really didn’t believe that or much else that he said and wrote during his lifetime. He was, in reality, a skilled propagandist and a world-class hypocrite.

Yet, rather than subject Jefferson to a rigorous examination for his multiple hypocrisies, many Americans insist on protecting Jefferson’s reputation. From the Left, there is a desire to shield the lofty principles contained in the Declaration. From the Right, there is value in pretending that Jefferson’s revisionist concept of the Constitution on favoring states’ rights over the federal government was the “originalist” view of that founding document.

So, Jefferson perhaps more than any figure in U.S. history gets a pass for what he really was: a self-absorbed aristocrat who had one set of principles for himself and another for everybody else. Beyond the glaring contradiction between his “all men are created equal” pronouncement and his racist views on African-American slaves, he also lectured others about the need for frugality and the avoidance of debt while he lived a life of personal extravagance and was constantly in arrears to creditors.

Jefferson also wrote provocatively that “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.” That is one of Jefferson’s famous quotes repeated endlessly these days by both the right-wing Tea Party and would-be leftist revolutionaries.

But Jefferson’s bravado was more a rhetorical flourish than a principle that he was ready to live or die by. In 1781, when he had a chance to put his own blood where his mouth was when a Loyalist force led by the infamous traitor Benedict Arnold advanced on Richmond, Virginia, then-Gov. Jefferson fled for his life on the fastest horse he could find.

Jefferson hopped on the horse and fled again when a British cavalry force under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton approached Charlottesville and Monticello. Gov. Jefferson abandoned his neighbors in Charlottesville and left his slaves behind at Monticello to deal with the notoriously brutal Tarleton.

In other words, Jefferson may have been America’s original “chicken hawk,” talking cavalierly about other people’s blood as the “manure” of liberty but finding his own too precious to risk.

Nevertheless, Jefferson later built his political career by questioning the revolutionary commitment of Alexander Hamilton and even George Washington, who repeatedly did risk their lives in fighting for American liberty.

But what Jefferson’s many apologists have most desperately tried to obscure was his wretched record on race. Some pro-Jefferson scholars still talk about his rhapsodic depictions of the natural beauty of Virginia in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, but they skirt the book’s sickening racism, including his pseudo-science of assessing physiological and mental traits of African-Americans to prove that all men were not created equal.

## **A Question of Rape**

For generations, these apologists also have challenged slave Sally Hemings's late-in-life remembrance to one of her sons, Madison Hemings, describing how Jefferson had imposed himself on her sexually in Paris after she arrived in 1787 as a teenage slave girl attending one of his daughters.

According to Madison Hemings's account, his mother "became Mr. Jefferson's concubine [in Paris]. And when he was called back home she was enciente [pregnant] by him." Jefferson was insistent that Sally Hemings return with him, but her awareness of the absence of slavery in France gave her the leverage to insist on a transactional trade-off; she would continue to provide sex to Jefferson in exchange for his promise of good treatment and the freedom of her children when they turned 21, Madison Hemings said.

The traditional defense of Jefferson was to portray Sally Hemings as a promiscuous vixen who lied about her relationship with the Great Man to enhance her humble standing. After all, whose word would you believe, that of the estimable Jefferson who publicly decried race mixing or a lowly African-American slave girl?

For decades, the defenders stuck to that dismissive response despite the curious coincidence that Hemings tended to give birth nine months after one of Jefferson's visits to Monticello and the discovery of male Jefferson DNA in Hemings's descendants.

Still, the Jefferson apologists raised finicky demands for conclusive proof of the liaison, as if it were absurd to envision that a relatively young man then in his mid-40s, a widower since his wife died in 1782, would have initiated a sexual relationship with an African-American female, even an attractive light-skinned mulatto like Hemings (who was the illegitimate daughter of Jefferson's father-in-law and thus Jefferson's late wife's half-sister).

Though it's true that unequivocal evidence does not exist, historians have increasingly come to accept the reality of Jefferson's sexual relationship with his young slave girl who was only 14 when she moved into Jefferson's residence in Paris.

So, with this ground shifting under Jefferson's defensive lines, his apologists retreated to a new position, that the relationship was a true love affair. Hemings was transformed into a kind of modern-day independent woman making her own choices about matters of the heart. However, given her age and her status as Jefferson's property the relationship could be more accurately described as serial rape.

But the reality may be even worse. Recent historical examinations of records at Jefferson's Monticello plantation have provided support for contemporaneous accounts of Jefferson having sexual relations with at least one other slave girl beside Hemings and possibly more.

### **Fathering of Slaves**

Some scholars, such as historian Henry Wiencek in his 2012 book, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves*, give credence to old reports about Jefferson having a direct role in populating Monticello by fathering his own dark-skinned lookalikes.

"In ways that no one completely understands, Monticello became populated by a number of mixed-race people who looked astonishingly like Thomas Jefferson," wrote Wiencek. "We know this not from what Jefferson's detractors have claimed but from what his grandson Jeff Randolph openly admitted. According to him, not only Sally Hemings but another Hemings woman as well 'had children which resembled Mr. Jefferson so closely that it was plain that they had his blood in their veins.'"

During a dinner at Monticello, Jeff Randolph recounted a scene in which a Thomas Jefferson lookalike was a servant tending to the table where Jefferson was seated. Randolph recalled the reaction of one guest: "In one instance, a gentleman dining with Mr. Jefferson, looked so startled as he raised his eyes from the latter to the servant behind him, that his discovery of the resemblance was perfectly obvious to all."

In the 1850s, Jeff Randolph told a visiting author that his grandfather did not hide the slaves who bore these close resemblances, since Sally Hemings "was a house servant and her children were brought up house servants so that the likeness between master and slave was blazoned to all the multitudes who visited this political Mecca."

This daily reality was also a troubling concern among Jefferson's white family though the Great Man would never confirm or deny his parentage of a number of Monticello's slaves.

"Frigid indifference forms a useful shield for a public character against his political enemies, but Jefferson deployed it against his own daughter Martha, who was deeply upset by the sexual allegations against her father and wanted a straight answer Yes or no? an answer he would not deign to give," wrote Wiencek.

Before his death, Jefferson did free several of Sally Hemings's children or let them run away presumably fulfilling the commitment made in Paris before Hemings agreed to return to Monticello to remain his slave concubine. "Jefferson went to his grave without giving his family any denial of the Hemings charges," Wiencek wrote.

The historical record increasingly makes Jefferson out to be a serial rapist, exploiting at least one and possibly more girls who were trapped on his property, who indeed were his property, and thus had little choice but to tolerate his sexual advances.

### **Whipping the Children**

The evidence of Jefferson's sexual predations must also be viewed in the context of his overall treatment of his slaves at Monticello. Though Jefferson's apologists pretend that he was a kind master distressed over the inequities of a slave system that he could somehow neither correct nor escape, the latest evidence – much of it concealed for generations to protect Jefferson's image – reveal him to be a cruel slave-owner who carefully calculated the net worth that his human chattel provided him and having boys as young as 10 whipped.

Some of Jefferson's mistreatment of his slaves derived from another of his hypocrisies, his views about simplicity and solvency. As historian John Chester Miller wrote in his 1977 book, *The Wolf by the Ears*, "Jefferson preached frugality, temperance, and the simple life of the American farmer. Buy nothing whatever on credit, he exhorted his countrymen, and buy only what was essential."

But Jefferson himself amassed huge debts and lived the life of a bon vivant, spending way beyond his means. In Paris, he bought fancy clothes, collected fine wines, and acquired expensive books, furniture and artwork. It was, however, his slaves back at Monticello who paid the price for his excesses.

“Living in a style befitting a French nobleman, his small salary often in arrears, and burdened by debts to British merchants which he saw no way of paying, Jefferson was driven to financial shifts, some of which were made at the expense of his slaves. In 1787, for example, he decided to hire out some of his slaves, a practice he had hitherto avoided because of the hardship it wreaked upon the slaves themselves,” Miller wrote.

Upon returning to the United States, Jefferson reinvented himself as a more modestly attired republican, but his tastes for the grandiose did not abate. He ordered elaborate renovations to Monticello, which deepened his debt and compelled his slaves to undertake strenuous labor to implement Jefferson’s ambitious architectural designs.

Needing to squeeze more value from his slaves, Jefferson was an aggressive master, not the gentle patrician that his apologists have long depicted.

According to historian Wiencek, Jefferson “directed his manager, Nicholas Lewis, to extract ‘extraordinary exertions’ of labor from the slaves to stay current with his debt payments. Some slaves had endured years of harsh treatment at the hands of strangers, for to raise cash, Jefferson had also instructed Lewis to hire out slaves. He demanded extraordinary exertions from the elderly: ‘The negroes too old to be hired, could they not make a good profit by cultivating cotton?’”

Jefferson was callous as well toward his young slaves. Reviewing long-neglected records at Monticello, Wiencek noted that one plantation report to Jefferson recounted that the nail factory was doing well because “the small ones” ages 10, 11 and 12 were being whipped by overseer, Gabriel Lilly, “for truancy.”

His plantation records also show that he viewed fertile female slaves as exceptionally valuable because their offspring would increase his assets and thus enable him to incur more debt. He ordered his plantation manager to take special care of these “breeding” women.



“A child raised every 2. years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man,” Jefferson wrote. “[I]n this, as in all other cases, providence has made our duties and our interests coincide perfectly.”

According to Wiencek, “The enslaved people were yielding him a bonanza, a perpetual human dividend at compound interest. Jefferson wrote, ‘I allow nothing for losses by death, but, on the contrary, shall presently take credit four per cent. per annum, for their increase over and above keeping up their own numbers.’ His plantation was producing inexhaustible human assets. The percentage was predictable.”

To justify this profiting off slavery, Jefferson claimed that he was merely acting in accordance with “Providence,” which in Jefferson’s peculiar view of religion always happened to endorse whatever action Jefferson wanted to take.

### **Twisting the Founding Narrative**

Yet, while Jefferson’s rationalizations for slavery were repugnant, his twisting of the Founding Narrative may have been even more significant and long-lasting, setting the nation on course for the Civil War, then a near century of segregation and carrying forward to the present day with the Tea Party’s claims that states are “sovereign” and that actions by the federal government to promote the general welfare are “unconstitutional.”

The reason the Tea Partiers get away with presenting themselves as “conservative constitutionalists” is that Thomas Jefferson engineered a revisionist interpretation of the Founding document, which as written by the Federalists and ratified by the states created a federal government that could do almost anything that Congress and the President agreed was necessary for the good of the country.

That was the constitutional interpretation of both the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, who mounted a fierce though unsuccessful campaign to defeat the Constitution’s ratification because they recognized how powerful the Constitution’s federal government was.

Southern Anti-Federalists, such as Patrick Henry and George Mason, argued that the Constitution, though it implicitly accepted slavery, would eventually be used by the North to free the slaves. Or, as Patrick Henry

colorfully told Virginia's ratifying convention in 1788, "they'll free your niggers!"

Though the Constitution eked through to passage, the fear of Southern plantation owners that they would lose their huge investment in human chattel did not disappear. Indeed, their trepidation intensified as it became clear that many leading Federalists, including the new government's chief architect Alexander Hamilton, were ardent abolitionists. Hamilton had grown up poor in the West Indies and witnessed first-hand the depravity of slavery.

By contrast, Jefferson had grown up the pampered son of a major Virginia slave-owner, but he developed his own critical view of the evils of slavery. As a young politician, Jefferson had cautiously and unsuccessfully backed some reforms to ameliorate the injustices. In a deleted section of his draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson had denounced slavery, citing it as one of King George III's crimes.

However, after the Revolution, Jefferson recognized that any anti-slavery position would destroy his political viability among his fellow plantation owners in the South. While in Paris as the U.S. representative, Jefferson rebuffed offers to join the abolitionist *Amis des Noirs* because by associating with abolitionists he would impair his ability to do "good" in Virginia, historian John Chester Miller noted, adding:

"Jefferson's political instinct proved sound: as a member of the *Amis des Noirs* he would have been a marked man in the Old Dominion."

### **Self-Interest Over Principle**

With his personal financial and political interests aligned with the perpetuation of slavery, Jefferson emerged as the most important leader of the slave South, seeking to reinterpret the Constitution to blunt the potential that the federal government might eventually outlaw slavery.

So, in the 1790s, as Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists worked to create the new government that the Constitution had authorized, Jefferson's counter-movement emerged to reassert states' rights as defined by the earlier Articles of Confederation, which the Constitution had obliterated.

Jefferson skillfully reframed the Constitution's powers not by asserting an explicit defense of slavery but by voicing resistance to a strong central government and reasserting the primacy of the states. Though Jefferson had played no role in drafting the Constitution or the Bill of Rights – he was in Paris at the time – he simply interpreted the Constitution as he wished, similar to his frequent invocation of Providence as always favoring whatever he wanted.

Most significantly, Jefferson developed the concept of “strict construction,” insisting that the federal government could only perform functions specifically mentioned in the text of the Constitution, such as coining money, and setting up post offices. Though Jefferson's concept was silly because the Framers understood that the young country would face unanticipated opportunities and challenges that the government would have to address, but Jefferson built a potent political party to make his idea stick.

Jefferson's strategy was to simply ignore the Constitution's clear language, particularly its mandate in Article I, Section 8 that Congress “provide for the general Welfare of the United States” and its grant to Congress the power “to make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States.”

Jefferson simply insisted that the Framers hadn't meant what the Framers had written. Jefferson went even further and reaffirmed the concept of state sovereignty and independence that George Washington, James Madison and other Framers had despised and intentionally expunged when they threw out the Articles of Confederation. The Constitution had shifted national sovereignty away from the states to “We the People of the United States.”

Despite the Constitution's explicit reference to making federal law “the supreme law of the land,” Jefferson exploited the lingering resentments over ratification to reassert the states' supremacy over the federal government. Often working behind the scenes even while serving as Vice President under President John Adams, Jefferson promoted each state's right to nullify federal law and even to secede from the Union.

Aiding Jefferson's cause was the shifting allegiances of James Madison, an early Federalist who had been tapped by Washington to be the principal

architect of the Constitution. However, like Jefferson, Madison was a major Virginian slave-holder who recognized that both his political future and his personal fortune were dependent on the continuation of slavery.

So, Madison sold out his earlier Federalist allies and shifted his allegiance to his neighbor, Jefferson. Madison's break with Washington and Hamilton gave Jefferson's revisionist take on the Constitution a patina of legitimacy given Madison's key role as one of the Framers.

Jefferson spelled out this political reality in a 1795 letter to Madison in which Jefferson cited what he called "the Southern interest," because, as author Jon Meacham observed, "the South was his personal home and his political base." It was the same for Madison.

### **Warring with the Federalists**

In his rise to power, Jefferson waged a nasty propaganda war against the Federalists as they struggled to form a new government and endeavored to stay out of a renewed conflict between Great Britain and France. Jefferson secretly funded newspaper editors who spread damaging personal rumors about key Federalists, particularly Hamilton who as Treasury Secretary was spearheading the new government's formation.

Jefferson's governmental actions almost always dovetailed with the interests of slaveholders and his own personal finances. For instance, as Secretary of State during Washington's first term, Jefferson protested the Federalists' disinterest in pursuing compensation from Great Britain for slaves freed during the Revolutionary War, a high priority for Jefferson and his plantation-owning allies. Jefferson correctly perceived that Hamilton and John Jay, two staunch opponents of slavery, had chosen not to make compensation a high priority.

Jefferson's interest in siding with France against Great Britain was also partly colored by his large financial debts owed to London lenders, debts that might be voided or postponed if the United States went to war against Great Britain.

Then, in the latter 1790s with French agents aggressively intervening in U.S. politics to push President John Adams into that war against Great Britain, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition

Acts, which Jefferson's political movement deftly exploited to rally opposition to the overreaching Federalists.

By the election of 1800, Jefferson had merged his political base in the slave-economy South with an anti-Federalist faction in New York to defeat Adams for reelection. The three-fifths clause, a concession by the Constitutional Convention to the South allowing slaves to be counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation, proved crucial to Jefferson's victory.

As President, Jefferson took more actions that advanced the cause of his slaveholding constituency, largely by solidifying his "states' rights" interpretation of the Constitution. But Jefferson and his revisionist views faced a formidable opponent in Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, a fellow Virginian though one who considered slavery the likely ruin of the South.

As historian Miller wrote: "The question of slavery never bulked larger on Jefferson's horizon than when John Marshall, from the eminence of the Supreme Court, struck down acts of the state legislatures and aggrandized the powers of the federal government. For slavery could not be divorced from the conflict between the states and the general government: as the Supreme Court went, so might slavery itself go.

"States' rights were the first line of defense of slavery against antislavery sentiment in Congress, and Jefferson had no intention of standing by idly while this vital perimeter was breached by a troop of black-robed jurists."

### **Inviting the Civil War**

Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase opened up huge opportunities for Southern slaveholders, especially because the Constitution had called for the end of slave importation in 1808, meaning that the value of the domestic slave trade skyrocketed. That was especially important for established slave states like Virginia where the soil for farming was depleted.

Breeding slaves became a big business for the Commonwealth and enhanced Jefferson's personal net worth, underscoring his notations about valuing female "breeder" slaves even above the strongest males.

But the danger to the nation was that spreading slavery to the Louisiana Territories and admitting a large number of slave states would worsen tensions between North and South. Keeping the new territories and states open to slavery became a major goal of Jefferson as President and after he left office.

In the last major political fight of his life, Jefferson battled Northern efforts to block the spread of slavery into Missouri. “With the alarm bell sounding in his ears, Jefferson buckled on the armor of Hector and took up the shield of states’ rights,” wrote Miller. “Jefferson, in short, assumed the accoutrements of an ardent and an uncompromising champion of Southern rights. Possessed by this martial spirit, Jefferson now asserted that Congress had no power over slavery in the territories.

“Now he was willing to accord Congress power only to protect slavery in the territories and he converted the doctrine of states’ rights into a protective shield for slavery against interference by a hostile federal government,” Miller wrote, noting that “the Missouri dispute seemed to mark the strange death of Jeffersonian liberalism.”

### **Rationalizing Slavery**

Jefferson’s fight to extend slavery into Missouri also influenced his last notable personal achievement, the founding of the University of Virginia. He saw the establishment of a first-rate educational institution in Charlottesville, Virginia, as an important antidote to elite Northern schools influencing the Southern aristocracy with ideas that could undermine what Jefferson dubbed “Missourism,” or the right of all states carved from the Louisiana Territories to practice slavery.

Jefferson complained that Southern men, who traveled North for their college education, were infused with “opinions and principles in discord with those of their own country,” by which he meant the South, Miller wrote, adding:

Particularly if they attended Harvard University, they returned home imbued with “anti-Missourism,” dazzled by the vision of “a single and splendid government of an aristocracy, founded on banking institutions and moneyed corporations” and utterly indifferent to or even contemptuous of the old-fashioned Southern patriots who still manned the defenses of freedom, equality, and democracy.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 that barred slavery in new states north of the 36-degree-30 parallel “made the creation of such a center of learning imperative” to Jefferson, wrote Miller, thus driving his determination to make the University of Virginia a Southern school that would rival the great colleges of the North and would train young Southern minds to resist federal “consolidationism.”

Even the Jefferson-admiring Meacham noted the influence of the Missouri dispute in Jefferson’s zeal to launch his university in Charlottesville. “The Missouri question made Jefferson even more eager to get on with the building of the University of Virginia for he believed the rising generation of leaders should be trained at home, in climes hospitable to his view of the world, rather than sent north,” Meacham wrote.

In short, Jefferson had melded the twin concepts of slavery and states’ rights into a seamless ideology. As Miller concluded, “Jefferson began his career as a Virginian; he became an American; and in his old age he was in the process of becoming a Southern nationalist.”

When he died on July 4, 1826, a half century after the Declaration of Independence was first read to the American people, Jefferson had set the nation on course for the Civil War.

However, even to this day, Jefferson’s vision of “victimhood” for white Southerners seeing themselves as persecuted by Northern power yet blinded to the racist cruelty that they inflict on blacks remains a powerful motivation for white anger, now spreading beyond the South.

Today, we see Jefferson’s racist legacy in the nearly deranged hatred directed at the first African-American president and in the unbridled fury unleashed against the federal government that Barack Obama heads.

As unpleasant as it may be for Americans who prefer especially on July Fourth to ponder the pleasant image of Jefferson as the aristocratic republican with a taste for fine art and a fondness for free-thinking, it is well past time to look at the Declaration’s author as the person he really was, America’s founding sociopath.

President Donald Trump was impeached in 2019 for a phone call to newly elected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy congratulating him on his victory and urging him to look into alleged corrupt activities and conflicts of interests in the country by Joe Biden and his

son Hunter. The impeachment hearings on Capitol Hill focused on how this phone call and subsequent pausing of U.S. military aid could have undermined Ukrainian security but glossed over the origins of Ukraine's security problems, which dated back to the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich five years earlier.

In this article, Parry provides context for understanding why the United States supported this coup, including the geopolitical considerations and a possible "natural gas motive," with neocons such as Victoria Nuland at the center of the storm and Hunter Biden a willing beneficiary.

At the time that this article was published, war was raging in Ukraine's Donbas region, with Kyiv forces mounting an "anti-terrorist operation" and pro-Russian separatists fighting for control of territory. Although the bloodshed was largely contained in the eastern part of the country, the growing stakes of a nuclear confrontation between Washington and Moscow led Parry to wonder whether the actual motives behind this conflict could best be explained as economic or perhaps better understood through the prism of neocon extremism.

## [The Whys Behind the Ukraine Crisis \(Sept. 3, 2014\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

A senior U.S. diplomat told me recently that if Russia were to occupy all of Ukraine that there would be zero impact on U.S. national interests. The diplomat wasn't advocating that, of course, but was noting the curious reality that Official Washington's current war hysteria over Ukraine doesn't connect to genuine security concerns.

So why has so much of the Washington Establishment from prominent government officials to all the major media pundits devoted so much time this past year to pounding their chests over the need to confront Russia regarding Ukraine? Who is benefiting from this eminently avoidable yet extremely dangerous crisis? What's driving the madness?

Of course, Washington's conventional wisdom is that America only wants "democracy" for the people of Ukraine and that Russian President Vladimir Putin provoked this confrontation as part of an imperialist design to reclaim Russian territory lost during the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. But that "groupthink" doesn't withstand examination.

The Ukraine crisis was provoked not by Putin but by a combination of the European Union's reckless move to expand its influence eastward and the machinations of U.S. neoconservatives who were angered by Putin's



collaboration with President Barack Obama to tamp down confrontations in Syria and Iran, two neocon targets for “regime change.”

Plus, if “democracy promotion” were the real motive, there were obviously better ways to achieve it. Democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovych pledged on Feb. 21 in an agreement guaranteed by three European nations to surrender much of his power and hold early elections so he could be voted out of office if the people wanted.

However, on Feb. 22, the agreement was brushed aside as neo-Nazi militias stormed presidential buildings and forced Yanukovych and other officials to flee for their lives. Rather than stand behind the Feb. 21 arrangement, the U.S. State Department quickly endorsed the coup regime that emerged as “legitimate” and the mainstream U.S. press dutifully demonized Yanukovych by noting, for instance, that a house being built for him had a pricy sauna.

The key role of the neo-Nazis, who were given several ministries in recognition of their importance to the putsch, was studiously ignored or immediately forgotten by all the big U.S. news outlets.

So, it’s hard for any rational person to swallow the official line that the U.S. interest in the spiraling catastrophe of Ukraine, now including thousands of ethnic Russians killed by the coup regime’s brutal “anti-terrorist operation,” was either to stop Putin’s imperial designs or to bring “democracy” to the Ukrainians.

That skepticism combined with the extraordinary danger of stoking a hot war on the border of nuclear-armed Russia has caused many observers to search for more strategic explanations behind the crisis, such as the West’s desires to “frack” eastern Ukraine for shale gas or the American determination to protect the dollar as the world’s currency.

### **Thermo-Nuclear War Anyone?**

The thinking is that when the potential cost of such an adventure – i.e. thermo-nuclear warfare that could end all life on the planet – is so high, the motivation must be commensurate. And there is logic behind that thinking although it’s hard to conceive what financial payoff is big enough to risk wiping out all humanity including the people on Wall Street.

But sometimes gambles are made with the assumption that lots of money can be pocketed before cooler heads intervene to prevent total devastation – or even the more immediate risk that the Ukraine crisis will pitch Europe into a triple-dip recession that could destabilize the fragile U.S. economy, too.

In the Ukraine case, the temptation has been to think that Moscow hit with escalating economic sanctions will back down even as the EU and U.S. energy interests seize control of eastern Ukraine's energy reserves. The fracking could mean both a financial bonanza to investors and an end to Russia's dominance of the natural gas supplies feeding central and eastern Europe. So the economic and geopolitical payoff could be substantial.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Ukraine has Europe's third-largest shale gas reserves at 42 trillion cubic feet, an inviting target especially since other European nations, such as Britain, Poland, France and Bulgaria, have resisted fracking technology because of environmental concerns. An economically supine Ukraine would presumably be less able to say no.

Further supporting the "natural gas motive" is the fact that it was Vice President Joe Biden who demanded that President Yanukovich pull back his police on Feb. 21, a move that opened the way for the neo-Nazi militias and the U.S.-backed coup. Then, just three months later, Ukraine's largest private gas firm, Burisma Holdings, appointed Biden's son, Hunter Biden, to its board of directors.

While that might strike some as a serious conflict of interest, even vocal advocates for ethics in government lost their voices amid Washington's near-universal applause for the ouster of Yanukovich and warm affection for the coup regime in Kyiv.

For instance, Melanie Sloan, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, dismissed the idea that Hunter Biden's new job should raise eyebrows, telling Reuters: "It can't be that because your dad is the vice president, you can't do anything,"

**Who Is Behind Burisma?**

Soon, Burisma, a shadowy Cyprus-based company, was lining up well-connected lobbyists, some with ties to Secretary of State John Kerry, including Kerry's former Senate chief of staff David Leiter, according to lobbying disclosures.

As *Time* magazine reported, "Leiter's involvement in the firm rounds out a power-packed team of politically-connected Americans that also includes a second new board member, Devon Archer, a Democratic bundler and former adviser to John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign. Both Archer and Hunter Biden have worked as business partners with Kerry's son-in-law, Christopher Heinz, the founding partner of Rosemont Capital, a private-equity company."

According to investigative journalism in Ukraine, the ownership of Burisma has been traced to Privat Bank, which is controlled by the thuggish billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky, who was appointed by the coup regime to be governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, a south-central province of Ukraine. Kolomoysky also has been associated with the financing of brutal paramilitary forces killing ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine.

Also, regarding this energy motive, it shouldn't be forgotten that on Dec. 13, 2013, when neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland reminded Ukrainian business leaders that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their "European aspirations," she was at a conference sponsored by Chevron. She even stood next to the company's logo.

So, clearly energy resources and the billions of dollars that go with them should be factored in when trying to solve the mystery of why Official Washington has gone so berserk about a confrontation with Russia that boils down to whether ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine should be allowed some measure of autonomy or be put firmly under the thumb of U.S.-friendly authorities in Kyiv.

There's also the issue of Russia's interest in exploring with China and other emerging economies the possibility of escaping the financial hegemony of the U.S. dollar, a move that could seriously threaten American economic dominance. According to this line of thinking, the U.S. and its close allies need to bring Moscow to its geopolitical knees where it was under the late

Boris Yeltsin to stop any experimentation with other currencies for global trade.

Again, the advocates for this theory have a point. Protecting the Mighty Dollar is of utmost importance to Wall Street. The financial cataclysm of a potential ouster of the U.S. dollar as the world's benchmark currency might understandably prompt some powerful people to play a dangerous game of chicken with nuclear-armed Russia.

Of course, there's also the budgetary interest of NATO and the U.S. "military-industrial complex" (which helps fund many of Washington's think tanks) to hype every propaganda opportunity to scare the American people about the "Russian threat."

There are also other reasons to disdain Putin, from his bare-chested horseback riding to his retrograde policies on gay rights.

### **The Neocons' 'Samson Option'**

So, while it's reasonable to see multiple motives behind the brinksmanship with Russia over Ukraine, the sheer recklessness of the confrontation has, to me, the feel of an ideology or an "ism," where people are ready to risk it all for some larger vision that is central to their being.

That is why I have long considered the Ukraine crisis to be an outgrowth of the neoconservative obsession with Israel's interests in the Middle East.

Not only did key neocons – the likes of Assistant Secretary Nuland and Sen. John McCain – put themselves at the center of the coup plotting last winter but the neocons had an overriding motive: they wanted to destroy the behind-the-scenes collaboration between President Obama and President Putin who had worked together to avert a U.S. bombing campaign against the Syrian government a year ago and then advanced negotiations with Iran over limiting but not eliminating its nuclear program.

Those Obama-Putin diplomatic initiatives frustrated the desires of Israeli officials and the neocons to engineer "regime change" in those two countries. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even believed that bombing Iran's nuclear plants was an "existential" necessity.

Further, there was the possibility that an expansion of the Obama-Putin cooperation could have supplanted Israel's powerful position as a key

arbiter of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Thus, the Obama-Putin relationship had to be blown up and the Ukraine crisis was the perfect explosive for the destruction.

Though I'm told that Obama now understands how the neocons and other hardliners outmaneuvered him over Ukraine, he has felt compelled to join in Official Washington's endless Putin-bashing, causing a furious Putin to make clear that he cannot be counted on to assist Obama on tricky foreign policy predicaments like Syria and Iran.

Yet, the neocons have pushed the envelope further. It has become something like a global version of Israel's "Samson Option," the readiness to use nuclear weapons in a self-destructive commitment to eliminate your enemies whatever the cost to yourself.

What is particularly shocking in this case is how virtually everyone in U.S. officialdom and across the mainstream media spectrum has bought into this madness.

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration had pioneered "perception management" to get the American people to "kick the Vietnam Syndrome" and accept more U.S. interventionism. The project proved effective in promoting the desired "themes" in U.S. political discourse and was refined over the decades – focused not just on shaping American public opinion to support specific military engagements on a case-by-case basis, but to promote acceptance of a new paradigm of endless war on a global battlefield with ever-shifting enemies.

By the end of 2014, the United States was engaged in several active conflicts and President Obama had ordered airstrikes in at least seven different countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, and Iraq. (In the case of Iraq, Obama had the dubious honor of being the fourth U.S. President in a row to bomb the beleaguered Middle East nation.) The military engagements had become so routine by the 2010s that they rarely elicited criticism or were even substantively debated in Congress or in the media.

As Robert Parry explains here, this widespread acquiescence can be traced back to the CIA's perception management project of the 1980s.

## [Endless War and the Victory of 'Perception Management' \(Dec. 30, 2014\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

To understand how the American people find themselves trapped in today's Orwellian dystopia of endless warfare against an ever-shifting collection of "evil" enemies, you have to think back to the Vietnam War and the shock to

the ruling elite caused by an unprecedented popular uprising against that war.

While on the surface Official Washington pretended that the mass protests didn't change policy, a panicky reality existed behind the scenes, a recognition that a major investment in domestic propaganda would be needed to ensure that future imperial adventures would have the public's eager support or at least its confused acquiescence.

This commitment to what the insiders called "perception management" began in earnest with the Reagan administration in the 1980s but it would come to be the accepted practice of all subsequent administrations, including the present one of President Barack Obama.

In that sense, propaganda in pursuit of foreign policy goals would trump the democratic ideal of an informed electorate. The point would be not to honestly inform the American people about events around the world but to manage their perceptions by ramping up fear in some cases and defusing outrage in others – depending on the U.S. government's needs.

Thus, you have the current hysteria over Russia's supposed "aggression" in Ukraine when the crisis was actually provoked by the West, including by U.S. neocons who helped create today's humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine that they now cynically blame on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Yet, many of these same U.S. foreign policy operatives – outraged over Russia's limited intervention to protect ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine – are demanding that President Obama launch an air war against the Syrian military as a "humanitarian" intervention there.

In other words, if the Russians act to shield ethnic Russians on their border who are being bombarded by a coup regime in Kyiv that was installed with U.S. support, the Russians are the villains blamed for the thousands of civilian deaths, even though the vast majority of the casualties have been inflicted by the Kyiv regime from indiscriminate bombing and from dispatching neo-Nazi militias to do the street fighting.

In Ukraine, the exigent circumstances don't matter, including the violent overthrow of the constitutionally elected president last February. It's all

about white hats for the current Kyiv regime and black hats for the ethnic Russians and especially for Putin.

But an entirely different set of standards has applied to Syria where a U.S.-backed rebellion, which included violent Sunni jihadists from the start, wore the white hats and the relatively secular Syrian government, which has responded with excessive violence of its own, wears the black hats. A problem to that neat dichotomy arose when one of the major Sunni rebel forces, the Islamic State, started seizing Iraqi territory and beheading Westerners.

Faced with those grisly scenes, President Obama authorized bombing the Islamic State forces in both Iraq and Syria, but neocons and other U.S. hardliners have been hectoring Obama to go after their preferred target, Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, despite the risk that destroying the Syrian military could open the gates of Damascus to the Islamic State or al-Qaeda's Nusra Front.

### **Lost on the Dark Side**

You might think that the American public would begin to rebel against these messy entangling alliances with the 1984-like demonizing of one new "enemy" after another. Not only have these endless wars drained trillions of dollars from the U.S. taxpayers, they have led to the deaths of thousands of U.S. troops and to the tarnishing of America's image from the attendant evils of war, including a lengthy detour into the "dark side" of torture, assassinations and "collateral" killings of children and other innocents.

But that is where the history of "perception management" comes in, the need to keep the American people compliant and confused. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration was determined to "kick the Vietnam Syndrome," the revulsion that many Americans felt for warfare after all those years in the blood-soaked jungles of Vietnam and all the lies that clumsily justified the war.

So, the challenge for the U.S. government became how to present the actions of "enemies" always in the darkest light while bathing the behavior of the U.S. "side" in a rosy glow. It was also necessary to stage this propaganda theater in an ostensibly "free country" with a supposedly "independent press."

From documents declassified or leaked over the past several decades, including an unpublished draft chapter of the congressional Iran-Contra investigation, we now know a great deal about how this remarkable project was undertaken and who the key players were.

Perhaps not surprisingly much of the initiative came from the Central Intelligence Agency, which housed the expertise for manipulating target populations through propaganda and disinformation. The only difference this time would be that the American people would be the target population.

For this project, Ronald Reagan's CIA Director William J. Casey sent his top propaganda specialist Walter Raymond Jr. to the National Security Council staff to manage the inter-agency task forces that would brainstorm and coordinate this "public diplomacy" strategy.

Many of the old intelligence operatives, including Casey and Raymond, are now dead, but other influential Washington figures who were deeply involved by these strategies remain, such as neocon stalwart Robert Kagan, whose first major job in Washington was as chief of Reagan's State Department Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America.

Now a fellow at the Brookings Institution and a columnist at the *Washington Post*, Kagan remains an expert in presenting foreign policy initiatives within the "good guy/bad guy" frames that he learned in the 1980s. He is also the husband of Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who oversaw the overthrow of Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich last February amid a very effective U.S. propaganda strategy.

During the Reagan years, Kagan worked closely on propaganda schemes with Elliott Abrams, then the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America. After getting convicted and then pardoned in the Iran-Contra scandal, Abrams reemerged on President George W. Bush's National Security Council handling Middle East issues, including the Iraq War, and later "global democracy strategy." Abrams is now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

These and other neocons were among the most diligent students learning the art of "perception management" from the likes of Raymond and Casey, but those propaganda skills have spread much more widely as "public



diplomacy” and “information warfare” have now become an integral part of every U.S. foreign policy initiative.

### **A Propaganda Bureaucracy**

Declassified documents now reveal how extensive Reagan’s propaganda project became with inter-agency task forces assigned to develop “themes” that would push American “hot buttons.” Scores of documents came out during the Iran-Contra scandal in 1987 and hundreds more are now available at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California.

What the documents reveal is that at the start of the Reagan administration, CIA Director Casey faced a daunting challenge in trying to rally public opinion behind aggressive U.S. interventions, especially in Central America. Bitter memories of the Vietnam War were still fresh and many Americans were horrified at the brutality of right-wing regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador, where Salvadoran soldiers raped and murdered four American churchwomen in December 1980.

The new leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua also was not viewed with much alarm. After all, Nicaragua was an impoverished country of only about three million people who had just cast off the brutal dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza.

So, Reagan’s initial strategy of bolstering the Salvadoran and Guatemalan armies required defusing the negative publicity about them and somehow rallying the American people into supporting a covert CIA intervention inside Nicaragua via a counterrevolutionary force known as the Contras led by Somoza’s ex-National Guard officers.

Reagan’s task was made tougher by the fact that the Cold War’s anti-communist arguments had so recently been discredited in Vietnam. As deputy assistant secretary to the Air Force, J. Michael Kelly, put it, “the most critical special operations mission we have ... is to persuade the American people that the communists are out to get us.”

At the same time, the White House worked to weed out American reporters who uncovered facts that undercut the desired public images. As part of that effort, the administration attacked *New York Times* correspondent Raymond Bonner for disclosing the Salvadoran regime’s massacre of about 800 men,

women and children in the village of El Mozote in northeast El Salvador in December 1981. Accuracy In Media and conservative news organizations, such as the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page, joined in pummeling Bonner, who was soon ousted from his job.

But these were largely ad hoc efforts. A more comprehensive “public diplomacy” operation took shape beginning in 1982 when Raymond, a 30-year veteran of CIA clandestine services, was transferred to the NSC. Raymond would become the sparkplug for this high-powered propaganda network, according to a draft chapter of the Iran-Contra report.

Though the draft chapter didn't use Raymond's name in its opening pages, apparently because some of the information came from classified depositions, Raymond's name was used later in the chapter and the earlier citations matched Raymond's known role. According to the draft report, the CIA officer who was recruited for the NSC job had served as Director of the Covert Action Staff at the CIA from 1978 to 1982 and was a “specialist in propaganda and disinformation.”

As administration officials reached out to wealthy supporters, lines against domestic propaganda soon were crossed as the operation took aim not only at foreign audiences but at U.S. public opinion, the press and congressional Democrats who opposed funding the Nicaraguan Contras. The Reagan administration created a full-blown, clandestine propaganda network.

In January 1983, President Reagan took the first formal step to create this unprecedented peacetime propaganda bureaucracy by signing National Security Decision Directive 77, entitled “Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security.” Reagan deemed it “necessary to strengthen the organization, planning and coordination of the various aspects of public diplomacy of the United States Government.”

Reagan ordered the creation of a special planning group within the National Security Council to direct these “public diplomacy” campaigns. The planning group would be headed by the CIA's Walter Raymond Jr. and one of its principal arms would be a new Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America, housed at the State Department but under the control of the NSC.

Worried about the legal prohibition barring the CIA from engaging in domestic propaganda, Raymond formally resigned from the CIA in April

1983, so, he said, “there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this.” But Raymond continued to act toward the U.S. public much like a CIA officer would in directing a propaganda operation in a hostile foreign country.

### **Casey’s Hand**

As the Reagan administration struggled to manage public perceptions, CIA Director Casey kept his personal hand in the effort. On one muggy day in August 1983, Casey convened a meeting of Reagan administration officials and five leading ad executives at the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House to come up with ideas for selling Reagan’s Central American policies to the American people.

Earlier that day, a national security aide had warmed the PR men to their task with dire predictions that leftist governments would send waves of refugees into the United States and cynically flood America with drugs. The PR executives jotted down some thoughts over lunch and then pitched their ideas to the CIA director in the afternoon as he sat hunched behind a desk taking notes.

“Casey was kind of spearheading a recommendation” for better public relations for Reagan’s Central America policies, recalled William I. Greener Jr., one of the ad men. Two top proposals arising from the meeting were for a high-powered communications operation inside the White House and private money for an outreach program to build support for U.S. intervention.

The results from the discussions were summed up in an Aug. 9, 1983, memo written by Raymond who described Casey’s participation in the meeting to brainstorm how “to sell a ‘new product’ – Central America – by generating interest across-the-spectrum.”

In the memo to then-U.S. Information Agency director Charles Wick, Raymond also noted that “via Murdock [sic] may be able to draw down added funds” to support pro-Reagan initiatives. Raymond’s reference to Rupert Murdoch possibly drawing down “added funds” suggests that the right-wing media mogul had been recruited to be part of the covert propaganda operation. During this period, Wick arranged at least two face-to-face meetings between Murdoch and Reagan.

In line with the clandestine nature of the operation, Raymond also suggested routing the “funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center.” (Freedom House would later emerge as a principal beneficiary of funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, which was also created under the umbrella of Raymond’s operation.)

As the Reagan administration pushed the envelope on public diplomacy, Raymond continued to worry about Casey’s involvement. In an Aug. 29, 1983, memo, Raymond recounted a call from Casey pushing his PR ideas. Alarmed at a CIA director participating so brazenly in domestic propaganda, Raymond wrote that “I philosophized a bit with Bill Casey (in an effort to get him out of the loop)” but with little success.

### **Enduring Legacy**

Though Reagan’s creation of a domestic propaganda bureaucracy began more than three decades ago, the legacy of those actions continue to reverberate today in how the perceptions of the American people are now routinely managed. That was true during last decade’s Iraq War and this decade’s conflicts in Libya, Syria and Ukraine as well as the economic sanctions against Iran and Russia.

Indeed, while the older generation that pioneered these domestic propaganda techniques has passed from the scene, many of their protégés are still around along with some of the same organizations. The National Endowment for Democracy, which was formed in 1983 at the urging of CIA Director Casey and under the supervision of Walter Raymond’s NSC operation, is still run by the same neocon, Carl Gershman, and has an even bigger budget, now exceeding \$100 million a year.

Gershman and his NED played important behind-the-scenes roles in instigating the Ukraine crisis by financing activists, journalists and other operatives who supported the coup against elected President Yanukovich. The NED-backed Freedom House also beat the propaganda drums.

Two other Reagan-era veterans, Elliott Abrams and Robert Kagan, have both provided important intellectual support for continuing U.S. interventionism around the world. Earlier this year, Kagan’s article for *The New Republic*, entitled “Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire,” touched such a

raw nerve with President Obama that he hosted Kagan at a White House lunch and crafted the presidential commencement speech at West Point to deflect some of Kagan's criticism of Obama's hesitancy to use military force.

A *New York Times* article about Kagan's influence over Obama reported that Kagan's wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, apparently had a hand in crafting the attack on her ostensible boss, President Obama.

According to the *Times* article, the husband-and-wife team share both a common world view and professional ambitions, Nuland editing Kagan's articles and Kagan "not permitted to use any official information he overhears or picks up around the house" – a suggestion that Kagan's thinking at least may be informed by foreign policy secrets passed on by his wife.

Though Nuland wouldn't comment specifically on Kagan's attack on President Obama, she indicated that she holds similar views. "But suffice to say," Nuland said, "that nothing goes out of the house that I don't think is worthy of his talents. Let's put it that way."

### **Misguided Media**

In the three decades since Reagan's propaganda machine was launched, the American press corps also has fallen more and more into line with an aggressive U.S. government's foreign policy strategies. Those of us in the mainstream media who resisted the propaganda pressures mostly saw our careers suffer while those who played along moved steadily up the ranks into positions of more money and more status.

Even after the Iraq War debacle when nearly the entire mainstream media went with the pro-invasion flow, there was almost no accountability for that historic journalistic failure. Indeed, the neocon influence at major newspapers, such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, only has solidified since.

Today's coverage of the Syrian civil war or the Ukraine crisis is so firmly in line with the State Department's propaganda "themes" that it would put smiles on the faces of William Casey and Walter Raymond if they were around today to see how seamlessly the "perception management" now

works. There's no need any more to send out "public diplomacy" teams to bully editors and news executives. Everyone is already onboard.

Rupert Murdoch's media empire is bigger than ever, but his neocon messaging barely stands out as distinctive, given how the neocons also have gained control of the editorial and foreign-reporting sections of the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and virtually every other major news outlet. For instance, the demonizing of Russian President Putin is now so total that no honest person could look at those articles and see anything approaching objective or evenhanded journalism. Yet, no one loses a job over this lack of professionalism.

The Reagan administration's dreams of harnessing private foundations and non-governmental organizations have also come true. The Orwellian circle has been completed with many American "anti-war" groups advocating for "humanitarian" wars in Syria and other countries targeted by U.S. propaganda.

Much as Reagan's "public diplomacy" apparatus once sent around "defectors" to lambaste Nicaragua's Sandinistas by citing hyped-up human rights violations now the work is done by NGOs with barely perceptible threads back to the U.S. government. Just as Freedom House had "credibility" in the 1980s because of its earlier reputation as a human rights group, now other groups carrying the "human rights" tag, such as Human Rights Watch, are in the forefront of urging U.S. military interventions based on murky or propagandistic claims.

At this advanced stage of America's quiet surrender to "perception management," it is even hard to envision how one could retrace the many steps that would lead back to the concept of a democratic Republic based on an informed electorate. Many on the American Right remain entranced by the old propaganda theme about the "liberal media" and still embrace Reagan as their beloved icon. Meanwhile, many liberals can't break away from their own wistful trust in the *New York Times* and their empty hope that the media really is "liberal."

To confront the hard truth is not easy. Indeed, in this case, it can cause despair because there are so few voices to trust and they are easily drowned out by floods of disinformation that can come from any angle – right, left or

center. Yet, for the American democratic Republic to reset its goal toward an informed electorate, there is no option other than to build institutions that are determinedly committed to the truth.

In July 2021 the Fairfax County, Virginia Board of Supervisors set up a task force to suggest renaming two major roads in the county named after Confederate generals. Several years ahead of his time, Parry argued in this 2015 article that Confederate leaders should not be honored with streets named after them, focusing specifically on Jefferson Davis Highway in northern Virginia, and describing the resistance he met to his idea of changing its name.

## [Lynching and the Jeff Davis Highway \(Feb. 12, 2015\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

A new study of Southern lynching of blacks, sharply raising the total to nearly 4,000 victims, adds some context to the decision in 1920 to attach the name of Confederate President Jefferson Davis to parts of Route One, including stretches near and through African-American neighborhoods. That period was a time when the number of lynchings surged across the South and whites were reasserting their impunity.

According to the study by the Equal Justice Initiative, the use of lynch mob killings and mutilations of blacks by hanging, burning alive, castration, torture and other means was nearly as high around 1920 as it was in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a gradual decline in lynchings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the pattern reversed and the use of lynching surged to about 500 during a five-year period heading into 1920.

That period also marked a determination by many Southern whites to reaffirm the rightness of the Confederate cause and to reassert white supremacy. Thus, in 1920, to drive home the point of who was in charge, the Daughters of the Confederacy had Southern states name portions of Route One after Jefferson Davis, who was hailed as the “champion of a slave society” when he was chosen to lead the Confederacy in 1861.

Besides honoring a dyed-in-the-wool white supremacist who favored keeping African-Americans in chains forever, the Daughters of the Confederacy saw these designations of Route One as a counterpoint to

plans in the North for a Lincoln Highway in honor of assassinated President Abraham Lincoln.

But bestowing this honor on Jefferson Davis was also a political message of pro-Confederate defiance that was not limited to the brutal era of 1920. The Jefferson Davis designation was extended to parts of Route 110 near the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, in 1964 as Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement were pressing for landmark civil rights legislation to end segregation and as white Virginian politicians were vowing to resist integration at all costs.

A year or so ago, I wrote to the five members of the Arlington County Board and urged them to seek an end to this grotesque honor bestowed on a notorious white racist. When my letter went public, it was treated with some amusement by the local paper, the *Sun-Gazette*, which described me as “rankled,” and prompted some hate mail.

One letter from an Arlington resident declared that it was now her turn to be “RANKLED by outsiders like Mr. Parry who want to change history because it is not to his liking. I am very proud of my Commonwealth’s history, but not of the current times, as I’m sure many others are.”

I was also confronted by a senior Democratic county official at a meeting about a different topic and urged to desist in my proposal to give the highway a new name because the idea would alienate state politicians in Richmond who would think that Arlington County was crazy.

But the new study on the terrorism of lynching reminds us that attaching Jefferson Davis’s name to roadways wasn’t just some romantic gesture to honor an historical figure beloved by Southern whites who in 1920 still pined for the antebellum days when they could own black people and do to them whatever they wished.

The years around 1920 marked a violent revival of the carnival-like scenes in which whites treated the lynching of blacks as a moment for community hilarity and celebration, often posing with their children for photographs next to the mutilated corpses. Stamping Jefferson Davis’s name on a highway that passed near and through black neighborhoods was another way to send a chilling message to African-Americans.



In my 37 years living in Virginia, I have always been struck by the curious victimhood of many Southern whites. Because of the Civil War, which some still call “the War of Northern Aggression,” and the Civil Rights Movement, which finally ended segregation, they have been nursing grievances, seeing themselves as the real victims here.

Not the African-Americans who were held in the unspeakable conditions of bondage until slavery was finally ended in the 1860s and who then suffered the cruelties of white terrorism and the humiliation of segregation for another century. No, the whites who lorded over them were the real “victims” because the federal government finally intervened to stop these practices.

Yet, while some white Virginians remain “very proud” of that history, there has been a studied neglect of other more honorable aspects of Arlington’s history, including the role played by Columbia Pike as an African-American Freedom Trail where thousands of former slaves, freed by Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, traveled north to escape slavery.

Many were given refuge in Freedman’s Village, a semi-permanent refugee camp along Columbia Pike on land that now includes the Pentagon and the Air Force Memorial. Some of the men joined the U.S. Colored Troops training at nearby Camp Casey before returning to the South to fight for freedom, to end the scourge of slavery once and for all.

As blacks joined the Union Army, Confederate President Jefferson Davis ratified a policy that refused to treat black men as soldiers but rather as slaves in a state of insurrection, so they could be executed upon capture or sold into slavery.

In accordance with this Confederate policy, U.S. Colored Troops faced summary executions when captured in battle. For instance, when a Union garrison at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, was overrun by Confederate forces on April 12, 1864, black soldiers were shot down as they surrendered. Similar atrocities occurred at the Battle of Poison Springs, Arkansas, in April 1864, and the Battle of the Crater in Virginia. Scores of black prisoners were executed in Saltville, Virginia, on Oct. 2, 1864.

Yet, while Jefferson Davis’s name remains on roadways through Arlington — and as the Confederate president is effectively honored whenever people

have to use his name — there is still no commemoration of Freedman’s Village (though something is supposedly being planned) and no one apparently even knows the precise location of Camp Casey, arguably one of Arlington’s most significant and noble historical sites. (Camp Casey is believed to have been located close to where today’s Pentagon now is, an area that in the 1860s was called Alexandria County before being renamed Arlington County in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)

Apparently, recognizing the place where free African-Americans were trained and armed to defeat the Confederacy and end slavery might “rankle” some white Arlington residents.

The Associated Press and NBC News reported on June 6, 2016, that Hillary Clinton had reached the required number of delegates to secure the Democratic Party nomination and was therefore, for all intents and purposes, the presumptive nominee.

As calls intensified for Bernie Sanders to concede and the reality of Clinton’s candidacy set in, Parry pondered what this development meant for the Democratic Party’s traditional role as the more dovish of the two parties. He noted that for nearly a half century – since late in the Vietnam War – anti-war voters generally found a home in the Democratic Party, but with the choice of unrepentant hawk Clinton, the party had reverted to its pre-1968 days of being an aggressive war party.

## [Democrats Are Now the Aggressive War Party \(June 8, 2016\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

The Democratic Party has moved from being what you might call a reluctant war party to an aggressive war party with its selection of Hillary Clinton as its presumptive presidential nominee. With minimal debate, this historic change brings full circle the arc of the party’s anti-war attitudes that began in 1968 and have now ended in 2016.

Since the Vietnam War, the Democrats have been viewed as the more peaceful of the two major parties, with the Republicans often attacking Democratic candidates as “soft” regarding use of military power.

But former Secretary of State Clinton has made it clear that she is eager to use force to achieve “regime change” in countries that get in the way of U.S. desires. She abides by neoconservative strategies of violent

interventions especially in the Middle East and she strikes a belligerent posture as well toward nuclear-armed Russia and, to a lesser extent, China.

Amid the celebrations about picking the first woman as a major party's presumptive nominee, Democrats appear to have given little thought to the fact that they have abandoned a near half-century standing as the party more skeptical about the use of military force. Clinton is an unabashed hawk who has shown no inclination to rethink her pro-war attitudes.

As a U.S. senator from New York, Clinton voted for and avidly supported the Iraq War, only cooling her enthusiasm in 2006 when it became clear that the Democratic base had turned decisively against the war and her hawkish position endangered her chances for the 2008 presidential nomination, which she lost to Barack Obama, an Iraq War opponent.

However, to ease tensions with the Clinton wing of the party, Obama selected Clinton to be his Secretary of State, one of the first and most fateful decisions of his presidency. He also kept on George W. Bush's Defense Secretary Robert Gates and neocon members of the military high command, such as Gen. David Petraeus.

This "Team of Rivals" – named after Abraham Lincoln's initial Civil War cabinet – ensured a powerful bloc of pro-war sentiment, which pushed Obama toward more militaristic solutions than he otherwise favored, notably the wasteful counterinsurgency "surge" in Afghanistan in 2009 which did little beyond get another 1,000 U.S. soldiers killed and many more Afghans.

Clinton was a strong supporter of that "surge" – and Gates reported in his memoir that she acknowledged only opposing the Iraq War "surge" in 2007 for political reasons. Inside Obama's foreign policy councils, Clinton routinely took the most neoconservative positions, such as defending a 2009 coup in Honduras that ousted a progressive president.

Clinton also sabotaged early efforts to work out an agreement in which Iran surrendered much of its low-enriched uranium, including an initiative in 2010 organized at Obama's request by the leaders of Brazil and Turkey. Clinton sank that deal and escalated tensions with Iran along the lines favored by Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a Clinton favorite.

## **Pumping for War in Libya**

In 2011, Clinton successfully lobbied Obama to go to war against Libya to achieve another “regime change,” albeit cloaked in the more modest goal of establishing only a “no-fly zone” to “protect civilians.”

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi had claimed he was battling jihadists and terrorists who were building strongholds around Benghazi, but Clinton and her State Department underlings accused him of slaughtering civilians and (in one of the more colorful lies used to justify the war) distributing Viagra to his troops so they could rape more women.

Despite resistance from Russia and China, the United Nations Security Council fell for the deception about protecting civilians. Russia and China agreed to abstain from the vote, giving Clinton her “no-fly zone.” Once that was secured, however, the Obama administration and several European allies unveiled their real plan, to destroy the Libyan army and pave the way for the violent overthrow of Gaddafi.

Privately, Clinton’s senior aides viewed the Libyan “regime change” as a chance to establish what they called the “Clinton Doctrine” on using “smart power” with plans for Clinton to rush to the fore and claim credit once Gaddafi was ousted. But that scheme failed when President Obama grabbed the limelight after Gaddafi’s government collapsed.

But Clinton would not be denied her second opportunity to claim the glory when jihadist rebels captured Gaddafi on Oct. 20, 2011, sodomized him with a knife and then murdered him. Hearing of Gaddafi’s demise, Clinton went into a network interview and declared, “we came, we saw, he died” and clapped her hands in glee.

Clinton’s glee was short-lived, however. Libya soon descended into chaos with Islamic extremists gaining control of large swaths of the country. On Sept. 11, 2012, jihadists attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi killing Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American personnel. It turned out Gaddafi had been right about the nature of his enemies.

Undaunted by the mess in Libya, Clinton made similar plans for Syria where again she marched in lockstep with the neocons and their “liberal

interventionist” sidekicks in support of another violent “regime change,” ousting the Assad dynasty, a top neocon/Israeli goal since the 1990s.

Clinton pressed Obama to escalate weapons shipments and training for anti-government rebels who were deemed “moderate” but in reality collaborated closely with radical Islamic forces, including Al Nusra Front (al-Qaeda’s Syrian franchise) and some even more extreme jihadists (who coalesced into the Islamic State).

Again, Clinton’s war plans were cloaked in humanitarian language, such as the need to create a “safe zone” inside Syria to save civilians. But her plans would have required a major U.S. invasion of a sovereign country, the destruction of its air force and much of its military, and the creation of conditions for another “regime change.”

In the case of Syria, however, Obama resisted the pressure from Clinton and other hawks inside his own administration. The President did approve some covert assistance to the rebels and allowed Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Gulf states to do much more, but, to Clinton’s disappointment, he did not agree to an outright U.S.-led invasion.

### **Parting Ways**

Clinton finally left the Obama administration at the start of his second term in 2013, some say voluntarily and others say in line with Obama’s desire to finally move ahead with serious negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program and to apply more pressure on Israel to reach a long-delayed peace settlement with the Palestinians. Secretary of State John Kerry was willing to do some of the politically risky work that Clinton was not.

Many on the Left deride Obama as “Obomber” and mock his hypocritical acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. And there is no doubt that Obama has waged war his entire presidency, bombing at least seven countries by his own count. But the truth is that he has generally been among the most dovish members of his administration, advocating a “realistic” (or restrained) application of American power. By contrast, Clinton was among the most hawkish senior officials.

A major testing moment for Obama came in August 2013 after a sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria, that killed hundreds of Syrians and that the

State Department and the mainstream U.S. media immediately blamed on the forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

There was almost universal pressure inside Official Washington to militarily enforce Obama's "red line" against Assad using chemical weapons. Amid this intense momentum toward war, it was widely assumed that Obama would order a harsh retaliatory strike against the Syrian military. But U.S. intelligence and key figures in the U.S. military smelled a rat, a provocation carried out by Islamic extremists to draw the United States into the Syrian war on their side.

At the last minute and at great political cost to himself, Obama listened to the doubts of his intelligence advisers and called off the attack, referring the issue to the U.S. Congress and then accepting a Russian-brokered deal in which Assad surrendered all his chemical weapons though continuing to deny a role in the sarin attack.

Eventually, the sarin case against Assad would collapse. Only one rocket was found to have carried sarin and it had a very limited range placing its firing position likely within rebel-controlled territory. But Official Washington's conventional wisdom never budged. To this day, politicians and pundits denounce Obama for not enforcing his "red line."

There's little doubt, however, what Hillary Clinton would have done. She has been eager for a much more aggressive U.S. military role in Syria since the civil war began in 2011. Much as she used propaganda and deception to achieve "regime change" in Libya, she surely would have done the same in Syria, embracing the pretext of the sarin attack – "killing innocent children" – to destroy the Syrian military even if the rebels were the guilty parties.

### **Still Lusting for War**

Indeed, during the 2016 campaign – in those few moments that have touched on foreign policy – Clinton declared that as President she would order the U.S. military to invade Syria. "Yes, I do still support a no-fly zone," she said during the April 14 debate. She also wants a "safe zone" that would require seizing territory inside Syria.

But no one should be gullible enough to believe that Clinton's invasion of Syria would stop at a "safe zone." As with Libya, once the camel's nose

was inside, pretty soon the animal would be filling up the whole tent.

Perhaps even scarier is what a President Clinton would do regarding Iran and Ukraine, two countries where belligerent U.S. behavior could start much bigger wars.

For instance, would President Hillary Clinton push the Iranians so hard – in line with what Netanyahu favors – that they would renounce the nuclear deal and give Clinton an excuse to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran?

In Ukraine, would Clinton escalate U.S. military support for the post-coup anti-Russian Ukrainian government, encouraging its forces to annihilate the ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine and to “liberate” the people of Crimea from “Russian aggression” (though they voted by 96 percent to leave the failed Ukrainian state and rejoin Russia)?

Would President Clinton expect the Russians to stand down and accept these massacres? Would she take matters to the next level to demonstrate how tough she can be against Russian President Vladimir Putin whom she has compared to Hitler? Might she buy into the latest neocon dream of achieving “regime change” in Moscow? Would she be wise enough to recognize how dangerous such instability could be?

Of course, one would expect that all of Clinton’s actions would be clothed in the crocodile tears of “humanitarian” warfare, starting wars to “save the children” or to stop the evil enemy from “raping defenseless girls.” The truth of such emotional allegations would be left for the post-war historians to try to sort out. In the meantime, President Clinton would have her wars.

Having covered Washington for nearly four decades, I always marvel at how selective concerns for human rights can be. When “friendly” civilians are dying, we are told that we have a “responsibility to protect,” but when pro-U.S. forces are slaughtering civilians of an adversary country or movement, reports of those atrocities are dismissed as “enemy propaganda” or ignored altogether. Clinton is among the most cynical in this regard.

### **Trading Places**

But the larger picture for the Democrats is that they have just adopted an extraordinary historical reversal whether they understand it or not. They have replaced the Republicans as the party of aggressive war, though

clearly many Republicans still dance to the neocon drummer just as Clinton and “liberal interventionists” do. Still, Donald Trump, for all his faults, has adopted a relatively peaceful point of view, especially in the Mideast and with Russia.

While today many Democrats are congratulating themselves for becoming the first major party to make a woman the presumptive nominee, they may soon have to decide whether that distinction justifies putting an aggressive war hawk in the White House. In a way, the issue is an old one for Democrats, whether “identity politics” or anti-war policies are more important.

At least since 1968 and the chaotic Democratic convention in Chicago, the party has advanced, sometimes haltingly, those two agendas, pushing for broader rights for all and seeking to restrain the nation’s militaristic impulses.

In the 1970s, Democrats largely repudiated the Vietnam War while the Republicans waved the flag and equated anti-war positions with treason. By the 1980s and early 1990s, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were making war fun again – Grenada, Afghanistan, Panama and the Persian Gulf, all relatively low-cost conflicts with victorious conclusions.

By the 1990s, Bill Clinton (along with Hillary Clinton) saw militarism as just another issue to be triangulated. With the Soviet Union’s collapse, the Clinton-42 administration saw the opportunity for more low-cost tough-guy/gal-ism – continuing a harsh embargo and periodic air strikes against Iraq (causing the deaths of a UN-estimated half million children); blasting Serbia into submission over Kosovo; and expanding NATO to the east toward Russia’s borders.

But Bill Clinton did balk at the more extreme neocon ideas, such as the one from the Project for the New American Century for a militarily enforced “regime change” in Iraq. That had to wait for George W. Bush in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. As a New York senator, Hillary Clinton made sure she was onboard for war on Iraq just as she sided with Israel’s pummeling of Lebanon and the Palestinians in Gaza.

Hillary Clinton was taking triangulation to an even more acute angle as she sided with virtually every position of the Netanyahu government in Israel



and moved in tandem with the neocons as they cemented their control of Washington's foreign policy establishment. Her only brief flirtation with an anti-war position came in 2006 when her political advisers informed her that her continued support for Bush's Iraq War would doom her in the Democratic presidential race.

But she let her hawkish plumage show again as Obama's Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013 – and once she felt she had the 2016 Democratic race in hand she pivoted back to her hardline positions in full support of Israel and in a full-throated defense of her war on Libya, which she still won't view as a failure.

The smarter neocons are already lining up to endorse Clinton, especially given Donald Trump's hostile takeover of the Republican Party and his disdain for neocon strategies that he views as simply spreading chaos around the globe. As the *New York Times* has reported, Clinton is “the vessel into which many interventionists are pouring their hopes.”

Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the neocon Project for the New American Century, has endorsed Clinton, saying “I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy. If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue it's something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else.”

So, by selecting Clinton, the Democrats have made a full 360-degree swing back to the pre-1968 days of the Vietnam War. After nearly a half century of favoring a more peaceful foreign policy – and somewhat less weapons spending – than the Republicans, the Democrats are America's new aggressive war party.

A couple weeks before the momentous 2016 election, Robert Parry observed that in order to shield Hillary Clinton from criticism, Democrats were engaging in a new McCarthyism by suggesting that Donald Trump was in league with the Russians. Noting the parallels that he had seen a couple decades earlier in the build-up to the Persian Gulf War, Parry worried what this new “conventional wisdom” might hold in store.

## [The Democrats' Joe McCarthy Moment \(Oct. 19, 2016\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

My first book, *Fooling America*, examined Washington's excited "conventional wisdom" around the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 when nearly the entire political-punditry elite was thrilled about bombing the heck out of Iraq, inflicting heavy civilian casualties in Baghdad and slaughtering tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers as they fled from Kuwait.

Ironically, one of the few dissenters from this war lust was right-wing commentator Robert Novak, who actually did some quality reporting on how President George H.W. Bush rejected repeated peace overtures because he wanted a successful ground war as a way to instill a new joy of war among the American people.

Bush recognized that a brief, victorious ground war would – in his words – “kick the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” i.e. get Americans to forget their revulsion about foreign wars, a hangover from the bloody defeat in Vietnam.

So Novak, the anti-communist hardliner who often had baited other pundits for their “softness” toward “commies,” became on this occasion a naysayer who wanted to give peace a chance. But that meant Novak was baited on “The Capital Gang” chat show for his war doubts.

To my surprise, one of the most aggressive enforcers of the pro-war “groupthink” was *Wall Street Journal* Washington bureau chief Al Hunt, who had often been one of the more thoughtful, less warmongering voices on the program. Hunt dubbed Novak “Neville Novak,” suggesting that Novak's interest in avoiding war in the Middle East was on par with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Adolf Hitler before World War II.

Months later when I interviewed Hunt about his mocking of Novak's anti-war softness, Hunt justified his “Neville Novak” line as a fitting rejoinder for all the times Novak had baited opponents for their softness against communism. “After years of battling Novak from the left, to have gotten to his right, I enjoyed that,” Hunt said.

At the time, I found this tit-for-tat, hah-hah gotcha behavior among Washington's armchair warriors troubling because it ignored the terrible suffering of people in various countries at the receiving end of American military might, such as the Iraqi civilians including women and children

who were burned alive when a U.S. bomb penetrated a Baghdad bomb shelter, as well as the young Iraqi soldiers incinerated in their vehicles as they fled the battlefield.

In the 100-hour ground war, U.S. casualties were relatively light, 147 killed in combat and another 236 killed in accidents or from other causes. “Small losses as military statistics go,” Gen. Colin Powell wrote later, “but a tragedy for each family.” In Official Washington, however, the dead were a small price to pay for a “feel-good” war that let President Bush vanquish the psychological ghosts of the Vietnam War.

I also had the sickening sense that this “popular” war – celebrated with victory parades and lavish firework displays – was setting the stage for more horrors in the future. Already, neoconservative pundits, such as the *Washington Post*’s Charles Krauthammer, were demanding that U.S. forces must go all the way to Baghdad and “finish the job” by getting rid of Saddam Hussein. A dangerous hubris was taking hold in Washington.

As we have seen in the decades since, the euphoria over the Persian Gulf victory did feed into the imperial arrogance that contributed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. At that moment, when the neocons in George W. Bush’s administration were concocting excuses for finally marching to Baghdad, there were almost no voices among the big-shot commentators who dared repeat Robert Novak’s “mistake” of 1991.

### **Playing Joe McCarthy**

I mention all this now because we are seeing something similar with the Democrats as they lead the charge into a dangerous New Cold War with Russia. The Democrats, who bore the brunt of the red-baiting during the earlier Cold War, are now playing the roles of Senators Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon in smearing anyone who won’t join in the Russia-bashing as “stooges,” “traitors” and “useful idiots.”

When Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has one of his few lucid moments and suggests that the U.S. should cooperate with Russia rather than provoke more confrontations, he is denounced from many political quarters. But these attacks against Trump are most feverish from Democrats looking to give Hillary Clinton a boost politically and a diversionary excuse for her Wall Street speeches that she tried so hard to

keep hidden until they were released by WikiLeaks from hacked emails of her longtime adviser John Podesta.

The Obama administration's intelligence community has claimed, without presenting evidence, that Russian intelligence was behind the Democratic Party hacks as a way to influence the U.S. election, a somewhat ironic charge given the long history of the U.S. government (and its intelligence community) engaging in much more aggressive actions to block the election of disfavored politicians abroad and even to overthrow democratically elected leaders who got in Washington's way.

Rather than seeking to explain Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street bigwigs and other special interests, Podesta and other Democrats have simply piled on the Russia-bashing with suggestions that Trump is consorting with America's enemies. In the Oct. 19 debate, Clinton referred to Trump as Vladimir Putin's "puppet."

While the Democrats may consider this strategy very clever – a kind of karmic payback for the Republican red-baiting of Democrats during the Cold War – it carries even greater dangers than Al Hunt's putting down Robert Novak for trying to save lives in the Persian Gulf War.

By whipping up a new set of whipping boys – the "evil" Russians and their "ultra-evil" leader Vladimir Putin – the Democrats are setting in motion passions that could spin out of control and cause a President Hillary Clinton to push the two nuclear powers into a crisis that – with a simple misjudgment on the part of either nation – could end life on the planet.

The term "fake news" began regularly appearing in the media in late 2016, a theme that was seized upon by Hillary Clinton to explain her surprise loss to Donald Trump. Although originally, the term was used rather narrowly to describe a stream of demonstrably false stories – many of them emanating from a town in Macedonia – that essentially served as money-making clickbait for social media sites, the theme quickly captivated the mainstream U.S. media.

The *Washington Post* began to employ the term as a McCarthyite smear against news outlets that didn't toe the State Department's propaganda line, as Parry explained in this article.

[Washington Post's 'Fake News' Guilt \(Nov. 27, 2016\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

The mainstream U.S. media's hysteria over "fake news" has reached its logical (or illogical) zenith, a McCarthyistic blacklisting of honest journalism that simply shows professional skepticism toward Officialdom, including what's said by U.S. government officials and what's written in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*.

Apparently, to show skepticism now opens you to accusations of disseminating "Russian propaganda" or being a "useful idiot" or some similar ugly smear reminiscent of the old Cold War. Now that we have entered a New Cold War, I suppose it makes sense that we should expect a New McCarthyism.

After returning from a Thanksgiving trip to Philadelphia on Saturday, I received word that Consortiumnews.com, the 21-year-old investigative news site that has challenged misguided "groupthinks" whether from Republicans, Democrats or anyone else over those two-plus decades, was included among some 200 news outlets spreading what some anonymous website, PropOrNot, deems "Russian propaganda."

I would normally ignore such nonsense but it was elevated by the *Washington Post*, which treated these unnamed "independent researchers" as sophisticated experts who "tracked" the Russian propaganda operation and assembled the black list.

And I'm not joking when I say that these neo-McCarthyites go unnamed. The *Post's* article by Craig Timberg on Thursday described PropOrNot simply as "a nonpartisan collection of researchers with foreign policy, military and technology backgrounds."

The *Post* granted the group and its leadership anonymity to smear journalists who don't march in lockstep with official pronouncements from the State Department or some other impeccable fount of never-to-be-questioned truth. The *Post* even published a "blind" (or unattributed) quote from the head of this shadowy website as follows:

"The way that this propaganda apparatus supported [Donald] Trump was equivalent to some massive amount of a media buy," said the executive

director of PropOrNot, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid being targeted by Russia's legions of skilled hackers."

### **The Shoddy Washington Post**

With the *Post* granting these supposed "independent researchers" the protection of anonymity and allowing the website's executive director to expound on the group's slanderous assessments without giving his or her name, how is the public supposed to evaluate the smears and whether these researchers are indeed "independent"? How do we know they're not funded by the National Endowment for Democracy or some military-industrial-complex think tank?

Indeed, isn't what this *Post*-promoted website doing the essence of McCarthyistic "fake news" – making vague accusations and imposing guilt by association, suggesting that all the websites on its list are either treasonous or dupes?

Though the *Post* doesn't seem to care about fairness regarding the 200 or so websites subjected to this McCarthyism, the smear operation doesn't even present evidence that anyone actually is part of this grand Russian propaganda conspiracy. The PropOrNot site admits that the criteria for its "analysis" are "behaviorial," not evidentiary.

In other words, the assessment is based on whether this anonymous group doesn't like that some journalist is questioning the State Department's propaganda line or has come up with information that isn't convenient to the NATO narrative on a topic that also involves Russia, Ukraine, Syria or some other international hot spot.

Then, the journalists are slimed as either active Russian intelligence operatives or "they are at the very least acting as bona-fide 'useful idiots' of the Russian intelligence services, and are worthy of further scrutiny," according to PropOrNot.

### **A Cold War Slur**

As the *Post* recognized in its article, the phrase "useful idiot" or "useful fool" comes from the old Cold War – when journalists and citizens who didn't march in lock-step with Washington's propaganda were so stigmatized. That such a grotesque and pejorative phrase was used in this

supposedly “independent” study should have been a warning to any professional newspaper to toss the report in the trash can. Instead, the *Washington Post* embraced it as gospel.

What is further remarkable about this bizarre “study” is that it mixes together a wide variety of diverse political, ideological and journalistic groups, including some of the best independent journalism sites on the internet, such as *Counterpunch*, *Truthdig*, *Naked Capitalism*, *Zero Hedge*, *Truth-out*, *WikiLeaks* and – I would humbly suggest – *Consortium News*.

Also, neither truth nor fact-based journalism appears to be involved in this “analysis.” No one from PropOrNot nor from the *Washington Post* contacted me about any alleged inaccuracies or “propaganda” in *Consortium News*’ stories.

Obviously, there have been times when we have challenged “facts” as claimed by the U.S. government and the *Post*, including their 2002-03 assertions about Iraq’s fictional WMD. (Back then, we were denounced by George W. Bush’s fans as “Saddam apologists.”)

We also have cited cases of disagreements inside the U.S. intelligence community about other “groupthinks” that were being pushed by the State Department and the mainstream U.S. news media, such as the CIA’s internal doubts about who was responsible for the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria.

*Consortium News* also has cited disclosures buried deep inside articles by the *Post* and *New York Times* regarding the important role of neo-Nazis and other ultra-nationalist militias in the putsch that ousted Ukraine’s elected President Viktor Yanukovich on Feb. 22, 2014, and in the subsequent civil war.

I guess readers are supposed to ignore these occasional bursts of honesty from some reporter in the field who feels obliged to mention the swastikas and other Nazi symbols festooning the rooms and uniforms of these U.S.-backed “freedom fighters” — although the reporter and editors know well enough to stick these references near the end of stories where few people are likely to read. Our “propaganda guilt” is that we read to the end of these articles and highlight these important admissions.

Then, there are times when *Consortium News* has referred to these occasional admissions about neo-Nazis and compared them to positive mainstream references to these same neo-Nazis. For instance, the *Times* itself included at least one brief reference to this neo-Nazi reality, though buried it deep inside an article. On Aug. 10, 2014, a *Times*' article mentioned the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in the last three paragraphs of a lengthy story on another topic:

The fighting for Donetsk has taken on a lethal pattern: The regular army bombards separatist positions from afar, followed by chaotic, violent assaults by some of the half-dozen or so paramilitary groups surrounding Donetsk who are willing to plunge into urban combat.

Officials in Kyiv say the militias and the army coordinate their actions, but the militias, which count about 7,000 fighters, are angry and, at times, uncontrollable. One known as Azov, which took over the village of Marinka, flies a neo-Nazi symbol resembling a Swastika as its flag.

Yet, later the *Times* published a story about the Ukrainian government's defense of the port of Mariupol against ethnic Russian rebels and the Azov battalion was treated as the last bastion of civilization battling against the barbarians at the gate. Remarkably, the article left out all references to the Azov battalion's Nazi swastikas.

It is that exposure of the mainstream U.S. media's distortions of the reality in Ukraine that has apparently earned *Consortium News* a spot on this strange list of willful disseminators of "Russian propaganda" or "useful idiots."

### **Washington Post 'Fake News'**

It also might be noted that *Consortium News* has repeatedly pointed out how the *Washington Post* falsely reported as flat fact that Iraq was hiding WMD yet the editors responsible for this acceptance of State Department propaganda, which got some 4,500 American soldiers killed along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, have never faced accountability.

Ironically, too, it should be noted that on Saturday, the *New York Times*, which also has been flogging the "fake news" theme, ran a relatively responsible article revealing how a leading "fake news" website was not connected to Russia at all but rather was an entrepreneurial effort by an unemployed Georgian student who was using a website in Tbilisi to make some money by promoting pro-Trump stories, whether true or not.



The owner of the website, 22-year-old Beqa Latsabidse, said he had initially tried to push stories favorable to Hillary Clinton but that proved unprofitable so he switched to publishing anti-Clinton and pro-Trump articles whether true or not.

The front-page *Times* article revealed what has been happening – entrepreneurs who want to make money have been peddling pro-Trump “news” because that’s what gets the clicks and thus the advertising dollars. That behavior does not implicate *Consortium News* or any other independent website that happens to challenge State Department propaganda.

To merge these two groups – profit-driven sites that don’t care what the truth is and honest journalism sites that show professional skepticism toward government propaganda whatever its source – is a kind of classic example of “fake news” although in this case the mysterious website PropOrNot and the *Washington Post* are the ones peddling the disinformation.

Two days after WikiLeaks published 20,000 internal DNC emails in summer 2016 revealing institutional bias against candidate Bernie Sanders in the Democratic Party primaries, Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager, Robby Mook, said on national television that he believed the Russians were responsible, and this instantly became widely accepted as fact. Soon it became taboo to even discuss the very newsworthy contents of the emails, including how the DNC had undermined the Sanders campaign, as this could somehow be construed as “doing the bidding of the Russians.”

Skeptics, however, pointed out that despite a growing consensus that Russia had engineered the leak in order to help the Trump campaign, in fact there had been no evidence presented to bolster these claims. Therefore, many eagerly anticipated the release of the assessment prepared by the Director of National Intelligence which was being released on Jan. 6, 2017.

Though released with great fanfare and trumpeted by the anti-Trump “Resistance” as proof of Russian guilt, its publication was a bit underwhelming to many skeptics, including Robert Parry. As he wrote the following day, despite mainstream media acceptance, the U.S. intelligence community’s assessment on alleged Russian “hacking” still lacked hard public evidence. He also pointed out that there was little reason to trust these highly politicized spy agencies considering their less-than-stellar track record.

[US Report Still Lacks Proof on Russia ‘Hack’ \(Jan. 7, 2017\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Repeating an accusation over and over again is not evidence that the accused is guilty, no matter how much “confidence” the accuser asserts about the conclusion. Nor is it evidence just to suggest that someone has a motive for doing something. Many conspiracy theories are built on the notion of “cui bono” – who benefits – without following up the supposed motive with facts.

But that is essentially what the U.S. intelligence community has done regarding the dangerous accusation that Russian President Vladimir Putin orchestrated a covert information campaign to influence the outcome of the Nov. 8 U.S. presidential election in favor of Republican Donald Trump.

Just a day after Director of National Intelligence James Clapper vowed to go to the greatest possible lengths to supply the public with the evidence behind the accusations, his office released a 25-page report that contained no direct evidence that Russia delivered hacked emails from the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta to WikiLeaks.

The DNI report amounted to a compendium of reasons to suspect that Russia was the source of the information – built largely on the argument that Russia had a motive for doing so because of its disdain for Democratic nominee Clinton and the potential for friendlier relations with Republican nominee Trump.

But the case, as presented, is one-sided and lacks any actual proof. Further, the continued use of the word “assesses” – as in the U.S. intelligence community “assesses” that Russia is guilty – suggests that the underlying classified information also may be less than conclusive because, in intelligence-world-speak, “assesses” often means “guesses.”

The DNI report admits as much, saying, “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

But the report’s assessment is more than just a reasonable judgment based on a body of incomplete information. It is tendentious in that it only lays out the case for believing in Russia’s guilt, not reasons for doubting that guilt.

## **A Risky Bet**

For instance, while it is true that many Russian officials, including President Putin, considered Clinton to be a threat who would worsen the already frayed relationship between the two nuclear superpowers, the report ignores the downside for Russia trying to interfere with the U.S. election campaign and then failing to stop Clinton, which looked like the most likely outcome until Election Night.

If Russia had accessed the DNC and Podesta emails and slipped them to WikiLeaks for publication, Putin would have to think that the National Security Agency, with its exceptional ability to track electronic communications around the world, might well have detected the maneuver and would have informed Clinton.

So, on top of Clinton's well-known hawkishness, Putin would have risked handing the expected incoming president a personal reason to take revenge on him and his country. Historically, Russia has been very circumspect in such situations, usually holding its intelligence collections for internal purposes only, not sharing them with the public.

While it is conceivable that Putin decided to take this extraordinary risk in this case – despite the widely held view that Clinton was a shoo-in to defeat Trump – an objective report would have examined this counter argument for him not doing so.

But the DNI report was not driven by a desire to be evenhanded; it is, in effect, a prosecutor's brief, albeit one that lacks any real evidence that the accused is guilty.

Further undercutting the credibility of the DNI report is that it includes a seven-page appendix, dating from 2012, that is an argumentative attack on RT, the Russian government-backed television network, which is accused of portraying “the US electoral process as undemocratic.”

The proof for that accusation includes RT's articles on “voting machine vulnerabilities” although virtually every major U.S. news organizations has run similar stories.

The reports adds that further undermining Americans' faith in the U.S. democratic process, “RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party

candidate debates.” Apparently, the DNI’s point is that showing Americans that there are choices beyond the two big parties is somehow seditious.

“The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham,’” the report said. Yet, polls have shown that large numbers of Americans would prefer more choices than the usual two candidates and, indeed, most Western democracies have multiple parties, so, the implicit RT criticism of the U.S. political process is certainly not out of the ordinary.

### **Behind the Curtain**

Though it’s impossible for an average U.S. citizen to know precisely what the U.S. intelligence community may have in its secret files, some former NSA officials who are familiar with the agency’s eavesdropping capabilities say Washington’s lack of certainty suggests that the NSA does not possess such evidence.

That’s the view of William Binney, who retired as NSA’s technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and who created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.

Binney, in an article co-written with former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, said, “With respect to the alleged interference by Russia and WikiLeaks in the U.S. election, it is a major mystery why U.S. intelligence feels it must rely on ‘circumstantial evidence,’ when it has NSA’s vacuum cleaner sucking up hard evidence galore. What we know of NSA’s capabilities shows that the email disclosures were from leaking, not hacking.”

There is also the fact that both WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and one of his associates, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, have denied that the purloined emails came from the Russian government. Going further, Murray has suggested that there were two separate sources, the DNC material coming from a disgruntled Democrat and the Podesta emails coming from possibly a U.S. intelligence source, since the Podesta Group represents Saudi Arabia and other foreign governments.

In response, Clapper and other U.S. government officials have sought to disparage Assange’s credibility, including Clapper’s Senate testimony on

Thursday gratuitously alluding to sexual assault allegations against Assange in Sweden.

However, Clapper's own credibility is suspect in a more relevant way. In 2013, he gave false testimony to Congress regarding the extent of the NSA's collection of data on Americans. Clapper's deception was revealed only when former NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked details of the NSA program to the press, causing Clapper to apologize for his "clearly erroneous" testimony.

### **A History of Politicization**

The U.S. intelligence community's handling of the Russian "hack" story also must be viewed in the historical context of the CIA's "politicization" over the past several decades.

U.S. intelligence analysts, such as senior Russia expert Melvin A. Goodman, have described in detail both in books and in congressional testimony how the old tradition of objective CIA analysis was broken down in the 1980s.

At the time, the Reagan administration wanted to justify a massive arms buildup, so CIA Director William Casey and his pliant deputy, Robert Gates, oversaw the creation of inflammatory assessments on Soviet intentions and Moscow's alleged role in international terrorism, including the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II.

Besides representing "politicized" intelligence at its worst, these analyses became the bureaucratic battleground on which old-line analysts who still insisted on presenting the facts to the president whether he liked them or not were routed and replaced by a new generation of yes men.

The relevant point is that the U.S. intelligence community has never been repaired, in part because the yes men gave presidents of both parties what they wanted. Rather than challenging a president's policies, this new generation mostly fashioned their reports to support those policies.

The bipartisan nature of this corruption is best illustrated by the role played by CIA Director George Tenet, who was appointed by President Bill Clinton but stayed on and helped President George W. Bush arrange his

“slam dunk” case for convincing the American people that Iraq possessed caches of WMD, thus justifying Bush’s 2003 invasion.

There was the one notable case of intelligence analysts standing up to Bush in a 2007 assessment that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons program, but that was more an anomaly – resulting from the acute embarrassment over the Iraq WMD fiasco – than a change in pattern.

Presidents of both parties have learned that it makes their lives easier if the U.S. intelligence community is generating “intelligence” that supports what they want to do, rather than letting the facts get in the way.

The current case of the alleged Russian “hack” should be viewed in this context: President Obama considers Trump’s election a threat to his policies, both foreign and domestic. So, it’s only logical that Obama would want to weaken and discredit Trump before he takes office.

That doesn’t mean that the Russians are innocent, but it does justify a healthy dose of skepticism to the assessments by Obama’s senior intelligence officials.

Despite the paucity of evidence regarding the Russiagate allegations, momentum was building in early 2017 for an independent investigation, which Parry opposed because he doubted that an impartial examination of the facts was possible in Washington’s politically charged climate. In the following article, he provides more context into why so little should have been expected from an official investigation into this scandal, in particular noting the Democrats’ hypocrisy over “Russian interference” since it was the Clinton campaign that utilized Russian sources to spread dirt about Trump.

## [The Sleazy Origins of Russiagate \(March 29, 2017\)](#)

Originally published at *Consortium News*

An irony of the escalating hysteria about the Trump camp’s contacts with Russians is that one presidential campaign in 2016 did exploit political dirt that supposedly came from the Kremlin and other Russian sources. Friends of that political campaign paid for this anonymous hearsay material, shared it with American journalists and urged them to publish it to gain an electoral advantage. But this campaign was not Donald Trump’s; it was Hillary Clinton’s.

And, awareness of this activity doesn't require you to spin conspiracy theories about what may or may not have been said during some seemingly innocuous conversation. In this case, you have open admissions about how these Russian/Kremlin claims were used.

Indeed, you have the words of Rep. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democratic member of the House Intelligence Committee, in his opening statement at last week's public hearing on so-called "Russiagate." Schiff's seamless 15-minute narrative of the Trump campaign's alleged collaboration with Russia followed the script prepared by former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele who was hired as an opposition researcher last June to dig up derogatory information on Donald Trump.

Steele, who had worked for Britain's MI-6 in Russia, said he tapped into ex-colleagues and unnamed sources inside Russia, including leadership figures in the Kremlin, to piece together a series of sensational reports that became the basis of the current congressional and FBI investigations into Trump's alleged ties to Moscow.

Since he was not able to go to Russia himself, Steele based his reports mostly on multiple hearsay from anonymous Russians who claim to have heard some information from their government contacts before passing it on to Steele's associates who then gave it to Steele who compiled this mix of rumors and alleged inside dope into "raw" intelligence reports.

### **Lewd Allegations**

Besides the anonymous sourcing and the sources' financial incentives to dig up dirt, Steele's reports had numerous other problems, including the inability of a variety of investigators to confirm key elements, such as the salacious claim that several years ago Russian intelligence operatives secretly videotaped Trump having prostitutes urinate on him while he lay in the same bed in Moscow's Ritz-Carlton used by President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

That tantalizing tidbit was included in Steele's opening report to his new clients, dated June 20, 2016. Apparently, it proved irresistible in whetting the appetite of Clinton's mysterious benefactors who were financing Steele's dirt digging and who have kept their identities (and the amounts paid) hidden. Also in that first report were the basic outlines of what has

become the scandal that is now threatening the survival of Trump's embattled presidency.

But Steele's June report also reflected the telephone-tag aspects of these allegations:

Speaking to a trusted compatriot in June 2016 sources A and B, a senior Russian Foreign Ministry figure and a former top level Russian intelligence officer still active inside the Kremlin respectively, the Russian authorities had been cultivating and supporting US Republican presidential candidate, Donald TRUMP for at least 5 years.

Source B asserted that the TRUMP operation was both supported and directed by Russian President Vladimir PUTIN. Its aim was to sow discord and disunity both within the US itself, but more especially within the Transatlantic alliance which was viewed as inimical to Russia's interests. ... In terms of specifics, Source A confided that the Kremlin had been feeding TRUMP and his team valuable intelligence on his opponents, including Democratic presidential candidate Hillary CLINTON, for several years.

Besides the anonymous and hearsay quality of the allegations, there are obvious logical problems, especially the point that five years ago, you could have gotten astronomical odds about Trump's chances to win the U.S. presidency.

There also may have been a more mundane reason why Trump's hotel deal fell through. A source familiar with those negotiations told me that Trump had hoped to get a half interest in the \$2 billion project but that Russian-Israeli investor Mikhail Fridman, a founder of Russia's Alfa Bank, balked because Trump was unwilling to commit a significant investment beyond the branding value of the Trump name.

Yet, one would assume that if the supposedly all-powerful Putin wanted to give a \$1 billion or so payoff to his golden boy, Donald Trump, whom Putin just knew would become President in five years, the deal would have happened.

### **Whetting the Appetite**

Despite the dubious quality of Steele's second- and third-hand information, the June report appears to have won the breathless attention of Team Clinton. And once the bait was taken, Steele continued to produce his conspiracy-laden reports, totaling at least 17 through Dec. 13, 2016.

The reports not only captivated the Clinton political operatives but influenced the assessments of Obama's appointees in the U.S. intelligence



community. In the last weeks of the Obama administration, I was told that the outgoing intelligence chiefs had found no evidence to verify Steele's claims but nevertheless believed them to be true.

Still, a careful analysis of Steele's reports would have discovered not only apparent factual inaccuracies, such as putting Trump lawyer Michael Cohen at a meeting with a Russian official in Prague (when Cohen says he's never been to Prague), but also the sort of broad conspiracy-mongering that the mainstream U.S. news media usually loves to ridicule.

For instance, Steele's reports pin a range of U.S. political attitudes on Russian manipulation rather than the notion that Americans can reach reasonable conclusions on their own. In one report dated Sept. 14, 2016, Steele claimed that an unnamed senior official in President Vladimir Putin's Presidential Administration (or PA) explained how Putin used the alleged Russian influence operation to generate opposition to Obama's Pacific trade deals.

Steele wrote that Putin's intention was "pushing candidate CLINTON away from President OBAMA's policies. The best example of this was that both candidates [Clinton and Trump] now openly opposed the draft trade agreements, TPP and TTIP, which were assessed by Moscow as detrimental to Russian interests."

In other words, the Russians supposedly intervened in the U.S. presidential campaign to turn the leading candidates against Obama's trade deals. But how credible is that? Are we to believe that American politicians – running the gamut from Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren through former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to President Donald Trump – have all been tricked by the Kremlin to oppose those controversial trade deals, which are also broadly unpopular with the American people who are sick and tired of trade agreements that cost them jobs?

Steele's investigative dossier suggests that we can't really think for ourselves. We are all Putin's puppets.

### **Greater Skepticism?**

Normally, such a ludicrous claim – along with the haziness of the sourcing – would demand greater skepticism about the rest of Steele's feverish

charges, but a curious aspect of the investigations into Russia's alleged "meddling" in Election 2016 is that neither Steele nor the "oppo research" company, Fusion GPS, that hired him – reportedly with funding from Clinton allies – has been summoned to testify.

Usually, official investigations begin with testimony from the people who are making the allegations, so their credibility and motives can be tested in an adversarial setting. Plus, some baseline information should be established: Who, for instance, paid for the contract? How much was the total and how much went to Steele? How much did Steele then pay his Russian contacts and did they, in turn, pay the alleged Russian insiders for information? Or are we supposed to believe that these "insiders" risked being identified as spies out of a commitment to the truth?

None of these answers would necessarily discredit the information, but they could provide important context as to whether this "oppo" team had a financial motive to sex-up the reports to keep Clinton's friends coming back for more. Arguably the funders of this "oppo" research should be called to testify as well regarding whether they would have kept ponying up more money if Steele's reports had concluded that there were no meaningful contacts between Trump's people and the Russians. Were they seeking the truth or just dirt to help Hillary Clinton win?

Since the 2016 election, Steele has ducked public inquiries and Glenn Simpson, the former *Wall Street Journal* journalist who heads Fusion GPS, has refused to divulge who hired his firm or answer other relevant questions. That means we still don't know which Clinton friends paid for the dirt and how much money was given to subcontractors like Steele and his Russian associates. (One source told me it may have totaled around \$1 million.)

According to various press reports, Fusion GPS first worked for a Republican opponent of Trump's, but then switched over to the Clinton side after Trump won the Republican race. With Steele generating his reports every few days or every few weeks, people close to Clinton's campaign saw the Russia allegations as a potential game-changer. They reached out to reporters to persuade them to publish Steele's allegations even if they could not be verified.

Before the election, a longtime Clinton operative briefed me on aspects of Steele's investigation, including the "golden shower" allegations, and urged me to at least publish the accusations as a rumor citing the fact that some major news organizations were looking into the charges, an offer that I declined.

In a different setting – when Gov. Bill Clinton was seeking the presidency and Republican "oppo" researchers were pushing various wild and salacious allegations about him – the Clinton team dismissed such claims and the motivations of the people behind them as "cash for trash."

### **Following the Storyline**

Yet, Schiff's opening statement at the hearing on March 20 relied heavily on Steele's narrative and the supposed credibility of the ex-British spy and his anonymous Russian sources, even to the point of naming Americans who presumably joined in a scheme to collaborate with the Russians to help rig the U.S. election, an act that some commenters have compared to treason.

The California Democrat said, "Russian sources tell [Steele] that [Carter] Page [a Trump foreign policy adviser who made a public trip to Russia in early July 2016] also had a secret meeting with Igor Sechin, CEO of Russian gas giant Rosneft. ... According to Steele's Russian sources, Page is offered brokerage fees by Sechin on a deal involving a 19 percent share of the company."

These "Russian sources" also tell Steele, according to Schiff, that "the Trump campaign is offered documents damaging to Hillary Clinton, which the Russians would publish through an outlet that gives them deniability, like WikiLeaks. The hacked documents would be in exchange for a Trump Administration policy that de-emphasizes Russia's invasion of Ukraine and instead focuses on criticizing NATO countries for not paying their fair share."

Schiff continued: "Is it a coincidence that the Russian gas company Rosneft sold a 19 percent share after former British Intelligence Officer Steele was told by Russian sources that Carter Page was offered fees on a deal of just that size? Is it a coincidence that Steele's Russian sources also affirmed that

Russia had stolen documents hurtful to Secretary Clinton that it would utilize in exchange for pro-Russian policies that would later come to pass?”

However, is it also not possible that Steele and his profit-making colleagues made their reports conform to details that already were known or that they had reason to believe would occur, in other words, to match up their claims with independently known facts to give them greater credibility? That is a classic way for conmen to establish “credibility” with marks who are either gullible or simply want to believe.

Also, clever prosecutors in presenting a “circumstantial case” – as Schiff was doing on March 20 – can make innocent coincidences look suspicious. For instance, though Trump’s resistance to escalating tensions with Russia was well known through the primary campaign, Schiff made a big deal out of the fact that Trump’s people opposed a plank in the Republican platform that called for shipping lethal military supplies to Ukraine for the government’s war against ethnic Russian rebels in the east. Schiff presents that as the quo for the quid of the Russians supplying purloined emails from the Democratic National Committee to WikiLeaks (although WikiLeaks denies getting the emails from the Russians).

In his opening statement, Schiff said:

In the middle of July, Paul Manafort, the Trump campaign manager and someone who was long on the payroll of pro-Russian Ukrainian interests, attends the Republican Party convention. Carter Page, back from [a business meeting in] Moscow, also attends the convention. ...

Ambassador [Sergey] Kislyak also meets with Trump campaign national security chair and now Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Sessions would later deny meeting with Russian officials during his Senate confirmation hearing. Just prior to the convention, the Republican Party platform is changed, removing a section that supports the provision of ‘lethal defensive weapons’ to Ukraine, an action that would be contrary to Russian interests.

Manafort categorically denies involvement by the Trump campaign in altering the platform. But the Republican Party delegate who offered the language in support of providing defensive weapons to Ukraine states that it was removed at the insistence of the Trump campaign. Later, J.D. Gordon admits opposing the inclusion of the provision at the time it was being debated and prior to its being removed.

## **Problems with the Conspiracy**

So, not only is Schiff relying on Steele to provide key links in the conspiracy chain but Schiff ignores the surrounding reality that Trump had long opposed the idea of escalating the confrontation with Russia in

Ukraine – as, by the way, did President Obama who resisted pressure to send lethal military hardware to Ukraine.

Plus, Schiff ignores other logical points, including that party platforms are essentially meaningless and that the savvy Putin would not likely take the huge risk of offending the odds-on winner of the presidential race, Hillary Clinton, for something as pointless as a word change in the GOP platform.

There is also the point that if Trump were a true “Manchurian candidate,” he would have taken the more politically popular position of bashing Russia during the campaign and only reverse course after he got into the White House. That’s how the scheme is supposed to work. (And, of course, all embassies including American ones have spies assigned to them, so there is nothing unusual about Ambassador Kislyak presiding at an embassy with spies.)

In other words, there are huge holes in both the evidence and the logic of Schiff’s conspiracy theory. But you wouldn’t know that from watching and reading the fawning commentary about Schiff’s presentation in the mainstream U.S. news media, which has been almost universally hostile to Trump (which is not to say that there aren’t sound reasons to consider the narcissistic, poorly prepared Trump to be unfit to serve as President of the United States).

The journalistic problem is that everyone deserves to get a fair shot from reporters who are supposed to be objective and fair regardless of a person’s popularity or notoriety or what the reporter may personally feel. That standard should apply to everyone, whether you’re a foreign leader despised by the U.S. government or a politician detested for your obnoxious behavior.

There is no professional justification for journalists joining in a TV-and-print lynch mob. We also have seen too often where such wrongheaded attitudes lead, such as to the groupthink that Iraq’s hated dictator Saddam Hussein was hiding WMDs, or in an earlier time to the McCarthyism that destroyed the lives of Americans who were smeared as unpatriotic because of their dissident political views.

So, yes, even Donald Trump deserves not to be railroaded by a mainstream media that wants desperately – along with other powerful forces in Official

Washington – to see him run out of town on a rail and will use any pretext to do so, even if it means escalating the risks of a nuclear war with Russia.

And, if mainstream media commentators truly want a thorough and independent investigation, they should be demanding that it start by summoning the people who first made the allegations.

One of Russiagate's byproducts that quickly emerged in 2017 was the detrimental effect that it had on free speech and open debate. As tensions with Moscow heated up and the narrative took hold that Trump's electoral victory was largely the result of Russian meddling – utilizing a shadowy army of Twitter bots and “useful idiots” in the alternative media – the space for dissent continued to shrink and it became increasingly difficult to question proclamations from U.S. intelligence agencies or the narratives pushed by the mainstream press.

In this article, Robert Parry noted that the Russiagate scandal provided cover for an Establishment attack on internet freedom and independent news, while traditional defenders of a free press and civil liberties largely joined the assault or stayed silent.

## [Russiagate Breeds ‘Establishment McCarthyism’](#) [\(Oct. 26, 2017\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

In the past, America has witnessed “McCarthyism” from the Right. But what we are witnessing now amid the Russiagate frenzy is what might be called “Establishment McCarthyism,” traditional media/political powers demonizing and silencing dissent that questions mainstream narratives.

This extraordinary assault on civil liberties is cloaked in fright-filled stories about “Russian propaganda” and wildly exaggerated tales of the Kremlin’s “hordes of Twitter bots,” but its underlying goal is to enforce Washington’s “groupthinks” by creating a permanent system that shuts down or marginalizes dissident opinions and labels contrary information – no matter how reasonable and well-researched – as “disputed” or “rated false” by mainstream “fact-checking” organizations like PolitiFact.

It doesn't seem to matter that the paragons of this new structure – such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN and, indeed, PolitiFact – have a checkered record of getting facts straight.

For instance, PolitiFact still rates as “true” Hillary Clinton’s false claim that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” agreed that Russia was behind the

release of Democratic emails last year. Even the *Times* and The Associated Press belatedly ran corrections after President Obama's intelligence chiefs admitted that the assessment came from what Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called "hand-picked" analysts from only three agencies: CIA, FBI and NSA.

And, the larger truth was that these "hand-picked" analysts were sequestered away from other analysts even from their own agencies and produced "stove-piped intelligence," i.e., analysis that escapes the back-and-forth that should occur inside the intelligence community.

Even then, what these analysts published last Jan. 6 was an "assessment," which they specifically warned was "not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact." In other words, they didn't have any conclusive proof of Russian "hacking."

Yet, the *Times* and other leading newspaper routinely treat these findings as flat fact or the unassailable "consensus" of the "intelligence community." Contrary information, including WikiLeaks' denials of a Russian role in supplying the emails, and contrary judgments from former senior U.S. intelligence officials, are ignored.

However, rather than address the Jan. 6 report's admitted uncertainties about Russian "hacking" and the troubling implications of its attacks on RT, the *Times* and other U.S. mainstream publications treat the report as some kind of holy scripture that can't be questioned or challenged.

### **Silencing RT**

For instance, on Oct. 24, the *Times* published a front-page story entitled "YouTube Gave Russians Outlet Portal Into U.S." that essentially cried out for the purging of RT from YouTube. The article began by holding YouTube's vice president Robert Kynici up to ridicule and opprobrium for his praising "RT for bonding with viewers by providing 'authentic' content instead of 'agendas or propaganda.'"

The article by Daisuke Wakabayashi and Nicholas Confessore swallowed whole the Jan. 6 report's conclusion that RT is "the Kremlin's 'principal international propaganda outlet' and a key player in Russia's information

warfare operations around the world.” In other words, the *Times* portrayed Kynici as essentially a “useful idiot.”

Yet, the article doesn’t actually dissect any RT article that could be labeled false or propagandistic. It simply alludes generally to news items that contained information critical of Hillary Clinton as if any negative reporting on the Democratic presidential contender – no matter how accurate or how similar to stories appearing in the U.S. press – was somehow proof of “information warfare.”

As Daniel Lazare wrote at *Consortium News* on Oct. 25, “The web version [of the *Times* article] links to an RT interview with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange that ran shortly before the 2016 election. The topic is a September 2014 email obtained by WikiLeaks in which Clinton acknowledges that ‘the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia ... are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region.’”

In other words, the *Times* cited a documented and newsworthy RT story as its evidence that RT was a propaganda shop threatening American democracy and deserving ostracism if not removal from YouTube.

### **A Dangerous Pattern**

Not to say that I share every news judgment of RT – or for that matter the *New York Times* – but there is a grave issue of press freedom when the *Times* essentially calls for the shutting down of access to a news organization that may highlight or report on stories that the *Times* and other mainstream outlets downplay or ignore.

And this was not a stand-alone story. Previously, the *Times* has run favorable articles about plans to deploy aggressive algorithms to hunt down and then remove or marginalize information that the *Times* and other mainstream outlets deem false.

The *Washington Post* has also joined in the push for suppressing independent media, running a front-page article in November 2016 about an anonymous group PropOrNot that had created a blacklist of 200 websites, including Consortiumnews.com, that were deemed guilty of dispensing “Russian propaganda.” The objectionable material identified by PropOrNot



basically amounted to showing any skepticism toward the State Department's narratives on the crises in Syria or Ukraine.

So, if any media outlet dares to question the U.S. government's version of events – once that storyline has been embraced by the big media – the dissidents risk being awarded the media equivalent of a yellow star and having their readership dramatically reduced by getting downgraded on search engines and punished on social media.

Meanwhile, Congress has authorized \$160 million to combat alleged Russian “propaganda and disinformation,” a gilded invitation for “scholars” and “experts” to gear up “studies” that will continue to prove what is supposed to be proved – “Russia bad” – with credulous mainstream reporters eagerly gobbling up the latest “evidence” of Russian perfidy.

There is also a more coercive element to what's going on. RT is facing demands from the Justice Department that it register as a “foreign agent” or face prosecution. Clearly, the point is to chill the journalism done by RT's American reporters, hosts and staff who now fear being stigmatized as something akin to traitors.

You might wonder: where are the defenders of press freedom and civil liberties? Doesn't anyone in the mainstream media or national politics recognize the danger to a democracy coming from enforced groupthink? Is American democracy so fragile that letting Americans hear “another side of the story” must be prevented?

### **A Dangerous ‘Cure’**

I agree that there is a limited problem with jerks who knowingly make up fake stories or who disseminate crazy conspiracy theories – and no one finds such behavior more offensive than I do. But does no one recall the lies about Iraq's WMD and other U.S. government falsehoods and deceptions over the years?

Often, it is the few dissenters who alert the American people to the truth, even as the *Times*, *Post*, CNN and other big outlets are serving as the real propaganda agents, accepting what the “important people” say and showing little or no professional skepticism.

And, given the risk of thermo-nuclear war with Russia, why aren't liberals and progressives demanding at least a critical examination of what's coming from the U.S. intelligence agencies and the mainstream press?

The answer seems to be that many liberals and progressives are so blinded by their fury over Donald Trump's election that they don't care what lines are crossed to destroy or neutralize him. Plus, for some liberal entities, there's lots of money to be made.

For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union has made its "resistance" to the Trump administration an important part of its fundraising. So, the ACLU is doing nothing to defend the rights of news organizations and journalists under attack.

When I asked the ACLU about the Justice Department's move against RT and other encroachments on press freedom, I was told by ACLU spokesman Thomas Dresslar: "Thanks for reaching out to us. Unfortunately, I've been informed that we do not have anyone able to speak to you about this."

Meanwhile, the *Times* and other traditional "defenders of a free press" are now part of the attack machine against a free press. While much of this attitude comes from the big media's high-profile leadership of the anti-Trump Resistance and anger at any resisters to the Resistance, mainstream news outlets have chafed for years over the internet undermining their privileged role as the gatekeepers of what Americans get to see and hear.

For a long time, the big media has wanted an excuse to rein in the internet and break the small news outlets that have challenged the power – and the profitability – of the *Times*, *Post*, CNN, etc. Russiagate and Trump have become the cover for that restoration of mainstream authority.

So, as we have moved into this dangerous New Cold War, we are living in what could be called "Establishment McCarthyism," a hysterical but methodical strategy for silencing dissent and making sure that future mainstream groupthinks don't get challenged.

Following a stroke he suffered on Christmas Eve 2017, which it would turn out was caused by undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that would lead to his death a month later, Parry wrote his final article on Dec. 31, 2017. The New Year's Eve piece, which was written with great difficulty due to his stroke-induced diminished state, was essentially a manifesto on the demise of journalism and his personal experience covering Washington politics from the Carter administration to the Trump administration.

## [A Final Word on the State of American Journalism](#) [\(Dec. 31, 2017\)](#)

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Originally published at *Consortium News*

Since I arrived in Washington in 1977 as a correspondent for The Associated Press, the nastiness of American democracy and journalism has gone from bad to worse.

In some ways, the Republicans escalated the vicious propaganda warfare following Watergate, refusing to accept that Richard Nixon was guilty of some extraordinary malfeasance (including the 1968 sabotage of President Johnson's Vietnam peace talks to gain an edge in the election and then the later political dirty tricks and cover-ups that came to include Watergate).

Rather than accept the reality of Nixon's guilt, many Republicans simply built up their capability to wage information warfare, including the creation of ideological news organizations to protect the party and its leaders from "another Watergate."

So, when Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, the Republicans used their news media and their control of the special prosecutor apparatus (through Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Appeals Court Judge David Sentelle) to unleash a wave of investigations to challenge Clinton's legitimacy, eventually uncovering his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The idea had developed that the way to defeat your political opponent was not just to make a better argument or rouse popular support but to dredge up some "crime" that could be pinned on him or her.

The GOP success in damaging Bill Clinton made possible George W. Bush's disputed "victory" in 2000 in which Bush took the presidency despite losing the popular vote and almost certainly losing the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under state law were counted. Increasingly, America – even at the apex of its uni-power status – was taking on the look of a banana republic except with much higher stakes for the world.

Though I don't like the word "weaponized," it began to apply to how "information" was used in America. The point of *Consortium News*, which

I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and give everyone a fair shake. But we were just a tiny pebble in the ocean.

The trend of using journalism as just another front in no-holds-barred political warfare continued – with Democrats and liberals adapting to the successful techniques pioneered mostly by Republicans and by well-heeled conservatives.

Barack Obama's election in 2008 was another turning point as Republicans again challenged his legitimacy with bogus claims about his "Kenyan birth," a racist slur popularized by "reality" TV star Donald Trump. Facts and logic no longer mattered. It was a case of using whatever you had to diminish and destroy your opponent.

We saw similar patterns with the U.S. government's propaganda agencies developing themes to demonize foreign adversaries and then to smear Americans who questioned the facts or challenged the exaggerations as "apologists."

This approach was embraced not only by Republicans (think of President George W. Bush distorting the reality in Iraq in 2003 to justify the invasion of that country under false pretenses) but also by Democrats who pushed dubious or downright false depictions of the conflict in Syria (including blaming the Syrian government for chemical weapons attacks despite strong evidence that the events were staged by al-Qaeda and other militants who had become the tip of the spear in the neocon/liberal interventionist goal of removing the Assad dynasty and installing a new regime more acceptable to the West and to Israel).

More and more I would encounter policymakers, activists and, yes, journalists who cared less about a careful evaluation of the facts and logic and more about achieving a pre-ordained geopolitical result – and this loss of objective standards reached deeply into the most prestigious halls of American media.

This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion – became the *modus vivendi* of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending the journalistic

principles of skepticism and evenhandedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually sucked in the progressive world as well. Everything became “information warfare.”

### **The New Outcasts**

That is why many of us who exposed major government wrongdoing in the past have ended up late in our careers as outcasts and pariahs.

Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who helped expose major crimes of state from the My Lai massacre to the CIA’s abuses against American citizens, including illegal spying and LSD testing on unsuspecting subjects, has literally had to take his investigative journalism abroad because he uncovered inconvenient evidence that implicated Western-backed jihadists in staging chemical weapons attacks in Syria so the atrocities would be blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The anti-Assad groupthink is so intense in the West that even strong evidence of staged events, such as the first patients arriving at hospitals before government planes could have delivered the sarin, was brushed aside or ignored. The Western media and the bulk of international agencies and NGOs were committed to gin up another case for “regime change” and any skeptics were decried as “Assad apologists” or “conspiracy theorists,” the actual facts be damned.

So Hersh and weapons experts such as MIT’s Theodore Postol were shoved into the gutter in favor of hip new NATO-friendly groups like Bellingcat, whose conclusions always fit neatly with the propaganda needs of the Western powers.

The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propaganda process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together.

The U.S. media’s approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda. Does any sentient human being read the *New York Times*’ or the *Washington Post*’s coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts? For instance, the full story of

the infamous Magnitsky case cannot be told in the West, nor can the objective reality of the Ukraine coup in 2014. The American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the “other side of the story.” Indeed to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a “Putin apologist” or “Kremlin stooge.”

Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many “liberals” who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to accept the assertions on faith.

### **The Trump Crisis**

Which brings us to the crisis that is Donald Trump. Trump’s victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton has solidified the new paradigm of “liberals” embracing every negative claim about Russia just because elements of the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency produced a report last Jan. 6 that blamed Russia for “hacking” Democratic emails and releasing them via WikiLeaks. It didn’t seem to matter that these “hand-picked” analysts (as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called them) evinced no evidence and even admitted that they weren’t asserting any of this as fact.

The hatred of Trump and Putin was so intense that old-fashioned rules of journalism and fairness were brushed aside.

On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump “Resistance.” The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster. Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.

Other people, including senior editors across the mainstream media, began to treat the unproven Russiagate allegations as flat fact. No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government’s institutions.

Anti-Trump “progressives” were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Hatred of Trump had become like some invasion of the body snatchers – or perhaps many of my journalistic colleagues had never believed in the principles of journalism that I had embraced throughout my adult life.

To me, journalism wasn’t just a cover for political activism; it was a commitment to the American people and the world to tell important news stories as fully and fairly as I could; not to slant the “facts” to “get” some “bad” political leader or “guide” the public in some desired direction.

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

Whether they would admit it or not, they believe in a “guided democracy” in which “approved” opinions are elevated – regardless of their absence of factual basis – and “unapproved” evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality. Everything becomes “information warfare” – whether on Fox News, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, MSNBC, the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome.

As I said earlier, much of this approach was pioneered by Republicans in their misguided desire to protect Richard Nixon, but it has now become all pervasive and has deeply corrupted Democrats, progressives and mainstream journalism. Ironically, the ugly personal characteristics of Donald Trump – his own contempt for facts and his crass personal behavior – have stripped the mask off the broader face of Official America.

What is perhaps most alarming about the past year of Donald Trump is that the mask is now gone and, in many ways, all sides of Official Washington

are revealed collectively as reflections of Donald Trump – disinterested in reality, exploiting “information” for tactical purposes, eager to manipulate or con the public. While I’m sure many anti-Trumpers will be deeply offended by my comparison of esteemed Establishment figures with the grotesque Trump, there is a deeply troubling commonality between Trump’s convenient use of “facts” and what has pervaded the Russiagate investigation.

My Christmas Eve stroke now makes it a struggle for me to read and to write.

Everything takes much longer than it once did – and I don’t think that I can continue with the hectic pace that I have pursued for many years.

But – as the New Year dawns – if I could change one thing about America and Western journalism, it would be that we all repudiate “information warfare” in favor of an old-fashioned respect for facts and fairness — and do whatever we can to achieve a truly informed electorate.



## AFTERWORD: IN THE SPIRIT OF ROBERT PARRY

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As 2017 drew to a close, my wife, daughters, sister-in-law and I were eagerly preparing for a family trip to Australia, a planned month-long excursion that was two years in the making. Travelling just after Christmas, we would start on the west coast of the continent and then make our way eastward, stopping in the Northern Territory to explore the Red Center. One of the highlights that we were all anticipating was the tail end of the journey, when my dad, Robert Parry, and stepmother, Diane Duston, were planning to join us for the final leg on Australia's east coast.

Unfortunately, that rendezvous would never happen. On Boxing Day, I got a call from my dad informing me of the troubling news that he had suffered a mild stroke two days earlier. He assured me that it was nothing to worry about, but on the advice of his doctor, he and Diane would not be joining us Down Under. Although we were all disappointed, my family and I proceeded with our plans.

About half-way through our Australian adventure, my brother Sam called to let me know that Dad had suffered a second stroke, this one more serious than the first. Despite Dad's initial speculation that the Christmas Eve stroke may have been brought on by the stress of covering the insanity of Washington politics, the doctors were now saying that the strokes were actually the result of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that he had been unknowingly living with for the previous 4-5 years. Considering the seriousness of his health issues, I cut my vacation short and hopped on a plane to Washington – leaving the rest of my family behind on Australia's east coast.

When I first saw my dad in the hospital, he was in good spirits, although clearly, he was physically incapacitated and had only very limited use of speech. His ability to communicate was reduced to simple phrases and if he tried to express complex thoughts it would come out as a sort of jumbled "word salad," the meaning of which was often anyone's guess. But when I

shared pictures with him of my girls enjoying their time in Australia, he made his feelings clear by saying “I love so much” or “I love love love.”

In addition to visiting Dad in the hospital, I also took on the responsibility of editing the website that he had devoted so much of his life to over the previous two decades, a familiar task for me as I had worked closely with him on this project in years past. When I wasn’t in the hospital, I was coordinating with his assistant Chelsea Gilmour in keeping the website up and running, corresponding with writers and publishing their articles.

I also updated readers with a brief status report on Dad’s health issues, posting a bulletin to let the *Consortium News* community know that he was hospitalized and working on recovery. This article generated hundreds of comments from readers offering kind words of support. I read many of these comments to Dad to let him know how concerned his readers were about his wellbeing and to remind him how many people had been impacted by his life’s work.

Although initially rather upbeat, after several days of being hospitalized, Dad’s mood began to change and he grew increasingly irritable. Perhaps it was the frustration of being confined to a bed and not being able to handle simple physical tasks or maybe it was the mental stress of his predicament setting in, or perhaps he was dwelling too much on politics, but whatever it was, it became clear day by day that his morale was deteriorating. He started refusing food and speaking in a more despondent way and it was becoming difficult to lift his spirits.

One day I gave him an update on the website, telling him that I had posted a couple articles that morning in the hopes that this would cheer him up. But instead of the “Oh, that’s nice” that I was looking for, he just blurted out, “Oh, no one cares!” He began to emphatically repeat that over and over: “No one cares. No one cares. No one cares.”

Although it is difficult to say what precisely was going through his mind at that moment since his communication abilities were so limited, it seemed to me that he may have been expressing a sense of frustration that despite decades of work trying to explain the realities of Washington, nobody actually gave a damn. While admittedly, I do occasionally share that sense

of pessimism, it didn't seem to be the time or place to commiserate and indulge such negative thoughts, so I tried to cheer him up instead.

I told him, simply, "I care, Dad. *I care.*" This immediately calmed him down. The anger disappeared from his face, his demeanor went from agitated to placid, and he grew quiet and reflective.

Soon after that, Dad suffered his third stroke – a devastating one. He went into a coma and died a few days later, on January 27, 2018, surrounded by loved ones. He was 68.

### **Jury's Out**

In the years since my dad passed away, I have often thought about that moment when I reassured him that there was at least one person in the world who cared. While I'm not the only one who could make this claim, of course, it seems to me that by making it personal in this way, it had a stronger effect on consoling him and allowing him to die in peace than it would have if I had tried to counter his despair with a generality like "that's not true" or "lots of people care."

After all, I imagined he was thinking, isn't that what it's all about? Connecting with one reader at a time, informing one person at a time, breaking down one false narrative at a time, building a stronger democracy one citizen at a time.

His observation also led me to reflect on whether or not this pessimistic view was accurate, and in honestly assessing the statement, I would have to say that the jury is still out. A case could be made either way.

On one hand, when it comes to America's "lost history" and the dismal state of affairs of the American Republic, it is painfully obvious that in some ways, Dad was right. The harsh reality is that most people don't care – or if they do, they don't know where to turn for their information and are so confused about the underlying historical realities they simply reject it all as "fake news" and retreat into nihilism and ignorance, devote their attention to identity politics and conspiracy theories, or place their hope in a dangerous demagogue like Donald J. Trump.

The fact that Dad's many projects over the years – the newsletter, the magazine, the books he independently published, the website – never really

created the sea change in American journalism needed to rectify democracy is, for a pessimist, more than enough proof needed to demonstrate that it was all for naught.

On the other hand, it was clear that his journalism had made an impact in many ways, that his articles over the decades were crucial in producing a fuller picture of modern American history, that he had inspired and influenced generations of journalists, that his model of user-supported content would prove viable, and that he had developed a devoted following of readers who recognized the value of his work. The fact that people were so appreciative of the information and analysis that Dad could so uniquely convey through his writing that they would open their checkbooks several times a year for *Consortium News*' fund drives is proof positive that, in fact, people do care.

It is this push and pull between cynicism and defeatism on one hand, and optimism and hope on the other hand, that defined so much of my dad's life. Pushed out of mainstream media, distressed by the dishonesty that had pervaded American journalism, and having trouble publishing important stories in existing alternative media, instead of despairing, he tried a do-it-yourself approach and in 1995, launched *Consortium News* – or *The Consortium* as it was called at the time – to establish a home for serious journalism that eschewed ideology and challenged the conventional wisdom.

Despite some initially encouraging success and a steadily growing subscriber base, he grew frustrated by his inability to convince progressive foundations and deep-pocketed liberals of the need to invest in media. Struggling to keep publishing the paper versions of *The Consortium*, *I.F. Magazine* and the short-lived *American Dispatches* magazine, he decided to go fully digital in 2000.

The ups and downs my dad experienced in his efforts to build an independent media infrastructure led at times to deep sense of discouragement, which, of course, can be a familiar feeling to anyone who has made efforts to improve the world, whether through journalism, activism, volunteer work, or just being an engaged citizen and voter. There is a constant battle between a sense of duty to keep plugging away and

succumbing to the temptation to throw in the towel. Sometimes, the forces of darkness appear to be insurmountable and the orthodoxies they've constructed just too overwhelming to effectively challenge. At other times, simply through the exercise of investigating and exposing the truth, the carefully constructed façade of lies seems to come crashing down like a house of cards.

### **Rewriting History**

But, then of course, even if one does break through the fog with a hard-hitting exposé, nothing really changes. Instead of the actual criminals being held accountable, those who expose their crimes are more often than not the ones who go to prison or have their careers destroyed. Meanwhile, the ones who committed the crimes or were complicit in enabling them tend to “fail upward,” and get rewarded with higher political office and lucrative media careers, or in the case of George W. Bush, retire comfortably and pass the time painting pictures and yukking it up with Ellen DeGeneres on daytime TV.

The rehabilitation of Bush's legacy was one of the most bizarre and troubling aspects of the Trump era, and one that would have appalled my dad. As the author of two books on the Bush family dynasty and the disastrous 43<sup>rd</sup> presidency – *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep* – Dad was more well-versed than most on the damage done to the nation and the world by “Dubya” and his father. Seeing liberals embrace him simply because he was critical of President Trump – with more than half of Democrats declaring that they approved of the Bush presidency by 2018<sup>62</sup> – may have confirmed in my dad's mind that the perception management that he had long warned about had ultimately triumphed over reality.

By 2020, the liberal rewriting of the Bush presidency's history was virtually complete, exemplified by former President Barack Obama declaring that as opposed to Trump, Bush “had a basic regard for the rule of law and the importance of our institutions of democracy.” Obama stated that when Bush was president, “we cared about human rights” and were committed to “core principles around the rule of law and the universal dignity of people.”<sup>63</sup> This, despite the fact that when Bush left office, he left behind a shameful

legacy of weakened democratic institutions and upended human rights norms.

The many rule-of-law violations committed by Bush – all of which were extensively documented at *Consortium News* – began with the stolen election of 2000, proceeded with post-9/11 trampling of civil liberties and the establishment of a penal colony in Guantanamo Bay in violation of the Geneva Conventions, the implementation of a warrantless surveillance program of Americans in violation of the Constitution, an illegal torture program, and of course, lest we forget, the 2003 invasion of Iraq in violation of the UN Charter.

But after a few years of Trump, none of this apparently mattered. All that it took to be welcomed into the warm arms of the liberal establishment was to mouth some criticisms of the Orange Menace and declare allegiance to the so-called “Resistance.” In short, reality didn’t matter – what mattered was loyalty to the pro-establishment tribe.

But at the same time, even while Bush enjoyed a makeover of his tattered image, other historical figures were beginning to experience long-overdue reckonings. As someone who had long advocated for ending the veneration of pro-slavery Founders such as Thomas Jefferson and removing the names of Confederate traitors from public property, Dad would have been pleased to see the sweeping changes that took place following the racial justice uprisings in 2020. Not only was Confederate President Jefferson Davis’s name stripped from Route 1 in Northern Virginia, but even the capital of the Confederacy – Richmond – could see the writing on the wall and decided that it was time to remove Civil War figures from Monument Avenue, including the towering statue of Robert E. Lee which came down in 2021.

Equally encouraging was the long-overdue removal of the racially insensitive name of the Washington football team. As a transplanted New Englander who lived in the nation’s capital since the late 1970s, Dad was always perturbed by the cavalier racism of the name “Redskins,” and would have been relieved that it was finally put to rest in 2020.

So, in some ways, when considering developments such as Bush’s rehabilitation, Dad was right to lament that “no one cares,” but at the same time, having witnessed historic changes in the way that America deals with

its racist history, perhaps he would have to concede that the glass is half full after all. There is always reason to continue plugging away, working for truth, and hoping for the best.

### **Silver Linings?**

Since my dad's passing, besides pondering questions of apathy and ignorance versus the pursuit of truth and justice, I have also reflected quite a bit on how he would have reacted to political developments over the past several years in America.

It is impossible to say what he may have thought about each and every daily news story – and I particularly wouldn't presume to know what he would have had to say about the Covid crisis or the disputed 2020 election and the related January 6 Capitol siege – but one thing I am confident of is that he generally would have been dismayed by the lack of skepticism over Russiagate, the intensified neo-McCarthyite attacks on independent voices who didn't toe the line on the New Cold War, and the U.S. government's ruthless persecution of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange.

And then, of course, there was the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While I'm sure that Dad would have been aghast at the violence unleashed against the Ukrainian people, I have a feeling he would have also seen the war as the predictable and tragic result of the West ignoring Moscow's longstanding complaints about NATO's encroachment on Russia's borders and concerns about ultranationalists and right-wing extremists in the Ukrainian armed forces. As one of the foremost voices raising alarms about the unintended consequences of the 2014 violent ouster of the elected president, Dad had urged for years a sensible approach and resolution of the conflict in line with the OSCE-brokered Minsk Agreements – pleas that unfortunately fell on deaf ears.

The sad fact is, many of the troubling trends that he identified and grew increasingly despondent over towards the end of his life only intensified since January 2018. While the Trump administration obviously deserved its share of criticism for nepotism, insolence, dishonesty and many wrongheaded policies, the media's groupthink and myopic focus on the alleged "Russian influence" in the administration may have confirmed his gloomy assessment that his efforts over the decades to push back against the

conventional wisdom had been futile. It also seemed that even the few silver linings that he might have hoped for, such as the possibility of Trump reining in the neoconservative influence in Washington, taking a more conciliatory approach in dealing with adversaries and ending America's "forever wars," turned out to be largely illusory.

Egged on by hawks in Congress, the media and his own administration, Trump for the most part continued the reckless march into the New Cold War, characterized not only by deteriorating U.S.-Russian relations, but also growing hostility with China, Venezuela and Iran. Trump assassinated Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani by a drone strike at Baghdad International Airport, began arms transfers to Ukraine, carried out airstrikes on Syria, threatened to attack North Korea with "fire and fury," tried to pull off a coup in Venezuela, and tore up international agreements such as the Iran nuclear deal, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty, and the Paris agreement on climate change.

But although these were some of the most reckless actions of the Trump administration, they received far less scrutiny from the media than such controversies as his early morning tweet storms or crass jokes, and were less criticized by the pundit class than Trump's clumsy but seemingly well-meaning attempts at diplomacy, such as his controversial meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Meanwhile, day in and day out, the media hyped up one Russiagate scoop after another, often assuring the country that "the walls were closing in" on the administration and that Trump's days were numbered. Along the way, numerous corrections and retractions were made due to sloppy reporting, with the *Washington Post* for example being forced to remove large portions of articles covering the Steele dossier, which had purported to offer evidence of a conspiracy between Trump and Russia but was ultimately discredited as mostly baseless conjecture paid for by 2016 Hillary Clinton campaign.

As the *New York Times* eventually conceded years later, the Steele dossier "turned out to be Democratic-funded opposition research,"<sup>64</sup> although this was well known from the very beginning to anyone paying attention. In fact, as far back as 2017, my dad had raised questions about the dossier,



noting that his sources had told him that Christopher Steele may have received around \$1 million for compiling his salacious reports, and was therefore financially incentivized to dig up dirt on Trump to help Hillary Clinton win, whether true or not.

This politicized information then formed the basis for the FBI's investigation into whether Russia was blackmailing Trump and spawned a multi-year media obsession with juicy allegations that were largely unfounded. Or, in the dry, straightforward language of the *Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election*, released in March 2019 by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, "the investigation did not establish that the [Trump] Campaign coordinated or conspired with the Russian government in its election-interference activities."

My dad saw through the hokum from the beginning of this controversy and never accepted the basic premises of Russiagate or conceded that an official investigation of it was even warranted. Two years before Mueller released his report, on March 6, 2017, Dad appeared on *Democracy Now* and was asked by Amy Goodman who he thought would be best to lead a possible inquiry into Russiagate, to which he replied that he had lost faith in government investigations over the years and didn't think anyone was truly qualified to perform such a task.

"I really don't think there is in Washington any wise man or any wise woman or some institution that you can count on," Dad said. "It doesn't exist anymore in Washington. Maybe it did in some earlier time, but not anymore."<sup>65</sup>

Noting that many investigations are highly politicized, he regretted that they are often geared towards hyping up or downplaying allegations, and stressed that their findings should not be taken at face value, but instead examined very closely by fair-minded journalists. This, unfortunately, did not happen to a sufficient degree when it came to Russiagate – perhaps because there are so few fair-minded journalists left in Washington.

While the investigation of alleged Trump-Russia collusion never resulted in the impeachment that the Resistance had hoped for, liberals finally got their wish when a "whistleblower" revealed the contents of a phone call that

Trump made with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on July 25, 2019, following Zelenskiy's election. Trump had urged the new Ukrainian president to investigate the ethically dubious business dealings of the Biden family in his country, and allegedly pressured the Ukrainian government to do so by withholding military aid.

Trump's efforts were construed by the Democrats as an attempt to enlist a foreign government to interfere in the 2020 presidential election, despite the fact Joe Biden was not the presumptive Democratic nominee at the time, and irrespective of the reality that there were indeed some troubling questions to be answered about Hunter Biden's activities while Joe Biden was Vice President of the United States and served as the Obama administration's point person on Ukraine.

Dad had written about these questionable business activities way back in 2014, ascribing a possible "natural gas motive" to the removal of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych that year. Writing at *Consortium News*, Dad noted that "it was Vice President Joe Biden who demanded that President Yanukovych pull back his police on Feb. 21, a move that opened the way for the neo-Nazi militias and the U.S.-backed coup." Only three months later, Dad pointed out, "Ukraine's largest private gas firm, Burisma Holdings, appointed Biden's son, Hunter Biden, to its board of directors."

Hunter raked in millions of dollars while his father was in charge of U.S. government policy on Ukraine, which is a fairly obvious conflict of interest and one that is worthy of scrutiny. Seeing how it would ultimately unfold – with the ethical concerns brushed aside, Trump impeached and Biden securing the Democratic nomination – surely would have been difficult for my dad to process.

### **Small Potatoes**

Considering how truly crazy things got during the Trump years, I couldn't help but consider at times how challenging it would have been for Dad to continue writing about politics during this era. As much as we've missed his reporting – not to mention his presence as a loving father, grandfather, husband, brother, uncle, cousin, and dear friend to so many – it was hard at times not to feel that his untimely passing may have been an act of mercy.

As someone who extensively covered serious crimes of state such as Iran-Contra, CIA domestic propaganda operations, assassination and torture programs, the October Surprise mystery, Contra-cocaine, George W. Bush's WMD lies, electoral dirty tricks, and routine lying and abuse of power by people in authority – only to see all these transgressions swept under the rug by official Washington and no one ever held accountable – the fact that President Trump would ultimately be impeached over something as trivial as a tactless phone call to the newly elected president of Ukraine may have been too much for my dad to handle.

How could Dad have coped with the fact that many of the same Democrats who declined to initiate impeachment hearings over the Iran-Contra Affair or the lies that led to a disastrous war in Iraq would in 2019 launch an impeachment over such relatively small potatoes? If he had continued to raise doubts about these lines of attack against Trump and questioned the Democrats' approach to politics, would he have been completely ostracized and estranged from those he once considered friends?

Indeed, as Dad lamented in his final article, written just one year into the Trump presidency, he was already being harshly criticized by many long-time associates for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump Resistance, with his insistence on applying basic journalistic standards to coverage of the 45<sup>th</sup> president somehow seen as a betrayal.

He eloquently expressed the growing chasm between his brand of old-fashioned journalism and what many never-Trumpers expected of him:

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

## **Guided Democracy**

If there is one overriding theme in my dad's life's work, it is this. He deeply believed in the power of information to promote a healthy democracy. It may sound trite – or, in some ways, shockingly obvious – but his revolutionary idea about journalism was that it ought to strive towards improving people's understanding not only of current events but of the

underlying processes that shape these realities. Armed with this information, citizens could become more astute voters who would choose better candidates who would become better leaders and implement better policies. In other words, democracy would function as the Founders intended when they enshrined freedom of the press in the First Amendment to the Constitution.

But instead, the media has devolved into something so far removed from these principles that it is difficult to comprehend. Instead of providing necessary context and promoting healthy skepticism of the government, the media has treated official Washington with undeserving credulity, elevated the pronouncements of government spokespeople as if they are infallible, kept citizens misinformed, exaggerated external dangers, legitimized politicians who advance the interests of the military-industrial complex, and marginalized those who objected. This, as Dad saw it, was the core problem in U.S. politics.

His goal of building up an infrastructure for independent journalism was to create a home for honest narratives that would counter the mass media's misrepresentation of history that convinced large segments of the population to buy into a "synthetic reality," as he called it. This was and still is the whole point of *Consortium News* – to use traditional journalistic standards to overcome the short-circuiting of democracy that was taking place by providing citizens with information so that they had the confidence to break out of political paralysis and reclaim their democratic process.

But as Dad regretted in his final article, what had emerged instead was a "guided democracy" in which "approved" opinions were elevated, whether based in reality or not, and "unapproved" evidence was suppressed. "Everything becomes 'information warfare'," my dad wrote. "Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome."

This is the case not only inside the "right-wing media machine" that Dad had devoted so much effort exposing back in the 90s, but also in "progressive" media, and certainly in legacy media such as CNN, MSNBC, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. These outlets' promotion of

politicized misinformation has led to a historic breakdown of confidence between the people and the press, with, by 2020, a whopping 60 percent of Americans saying they don't trust the media.<sup>66</sup>

## **Information War**

As the mainstream media continued to lose credibility, rather than reconsider its approach to journalism, the establishment launched a concerted effort to neutralize the competition. The unrelenting demonization of alternative media – which began in earnest with the blacklisting of *Consortium News* and 200 other outlets by the shadowy PropOrNot outfit and intensified with Hillary Clinton's complaints that an "epidemic of malicious fake news and false propaganda" had cost her the election – led during the Trump and Biden years to unprecedented action being taken to discredit and silence independent voices.

Led by "fact checkers" with Orwellian-sounding names like the Trusted News Initiative and NewsGuard, a campaign was soon underway to suppress independent platforms that were deemed out of step. Websites were increasingly throttled by search engines and shadowbanned by the algorithms of social media companies, culminating in a massive purge of alternative media just before the 2018 midterms, when some 800 anti-establishment accounts and pages were removed from Facebook. Many more were deplatformed following the outbreak of Covid pandemic in 2020 for questioning the government's approach to containing the virus through lockdowns and vaccine mandates.

Russian state-funded RT America, which had frequently hosted my dad to discuss his stories, continued to come under pressure following its registration as "foreign agents" in November 2017. Then, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the establishment finally got its wish of eliminating the platform altogether. In early March 2022, RT announced that it would be "ceasing production" at all of its U.S. locations "as a result of unforeseen business interruption events."

While many liberals may have cheered the silencing of RT, widely considered a fountain of "Russian disinformation," the censorship of the outlet – which aired programs hosted by respected journalists such as former *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges and Afshin Rattansi,

formerly with the BBC – was a stark reminder that the threat of being deplatformed is ever present for alternative media outlets that questioned establishment narratives.

This threat soon would target *Consortium News* directly. In April 2022, *Consortium News* Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria was contacted by NewsGuard and informed that it was “under review” by the news ranking service, which has ties to the CIA, NSA and NATO. Being designated with a “red” rating score means that a website is flagged as untrustworthy and blocked on computers with the NewsGuard extension, which as the company boasts, is used by more than 800 public libraries.

Undeterred, *Consortium News* has continued the principled and independent approach to journalism that my dad championed. Lauria and the team of regular *Consortium News* contributors have made sure the website remained the indispensable source of information and analysis that Dad built. The site continued to grow in readership and influence since my dad’s passing, with, by 2022, an average of 40,000 readers a day.

Despite growing pressure from the media gatekeepers, independent outlets have flourished, providing platforms for serious content and honest analysis that challenged “groupthinks” and offered alternatives to the “approved opinions” that one could find in the op-ed pages of the big newspapers. A new generation of journalists picked up the torch and pursued many of the stories that Dad would have likely been writing about – such as Aaron Maté’s important work at *The Grayzone* exposing the official lies surrounding the Syrian gas attacks.<sup>[67](#)</sup>

Still, Dad’s voice as one of the preeminent investigative reporters of the past half-century – someone who possessed a vast, almost encyclopedic knowledge of American history and a unique perspective on contemporary politics – has been sorely missed. He would have been able to cover the Trump era – and now, the Biden era – in a way that no one else could.

### **‘Reality’s Important’**

As an indication of his enduring impact on American journalism, tributes poured in after he passed away in early 2018. “Bob was a supreme skeptic, but he never descended to cynicism,” Lauria said. “His legacy, which I am

committed to carry on, was of a principled, non-partisan approach to journalism.”

“He was a pioneer in bringing maverick journalism to the internet,” Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting founder Jeff Cohen wrote, “a refugee from mainstream media who, like Izzy Stone, went on to build an uncensored and uncensorable outlet.” Oliver Stone wrote that his death “leaves a giant hole in American journalism,” placing him alongside I.F. Stone, Drew Pearson, George Seldes and Gary Webb as one of the all-time greats. A tribute by Jim Naureckas of FAIR noted that “journalism lost one of its most valuable investigators when Robert Parry died.”

“Robert Parry’s death is a profound loss to our country as a political and intellectual community,” wrote Jim Kavanagh at *Counterpunch*. John Pilger expressed appreciation for Dad’s steadfast commitment to evidence-based journalism and pushing back against assertions and fact-free claims promoted by the mainstream media, whether related to Russiagate or the Syrian civil war. “What Bob Parry did most effectively was to produce the evidence,” Pilger said. Katrina vanden Heuvel, *The Nation* magazine editor and publisher, tweeted: “RIP Robert Parry – your independent journalism is needed more than ever.”

*The Intercept*’s Jon Schwarz wrote that one of Dad’s strongest points as a journalist was that he was nonideological. “He just had basic, Boy Scout-like principles,” Schwarz wrote, “such as ‘reality is important’ and ‘the government shouldn’t lie all the time about everything.’”<sup>68</sup>

In his tribute, Schwarz broke down what he felt were the most important lessons that could be learned from Dad’s style of journalism. One is to “read everything,” including the full body of government reports because vital information was often buried that contradicts the executive summaries. Important nuggets of truth can also be found in politicians’ dreary memoirs, Schwarz pointed out, because “in retirement, powerful people occasionally blurt out stunning new information.”

Other important takeaways that Schwarz identified from Dad’s journalistic work were to “always include the history,” noting that “history is continually being rewritten on the fly by the people in charge, to a truly unnerving degree,” and not to be afraid of approaching the same subjects

over and over from different angles. This is particularly important when it comes to themes such as perception management and identifying recurring patterns in how the powerful manipulate the public to win support for military action.

## **El Mozote**

While the lessons that Schwarz took away from following my dad's work over the years are certainly useful, perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from his journalism is that no one should shy away from being moved by the injustices in the world or to lose sight of the human lives ravaged by the decisions made by those in power.

In a speech my dad gave in 1993, when I was junior in high school, he talked about how if I or my brothers were ever sent off to war, it should be done "for a real reason – not because somebody made something up." But while his immediate concern was perhaps with his own kids, it is just as important, he said, to remember the kids impacted by war anywhere.

Speaking in particular about the children massacred in the village of El Mozote in 1981 – the girls as young as 10 who were raped and the toddlers whose throats were slit by U.S.-trained Salvadoran soldiers – he said that "the idea that our government would be complicit not just in the killing, but in this very cynical effort to lie about it, and hide it, and pretend it didn't happen, and attack those who found out that it did happen, is something that, we, as a democracy, can't allow to happen."

It was this refusal to be complicit in lies or to participate in the cover-up of government crimes, along with his penchant for going against the grain, that allowed him to become the beloved journalist that he was. His skills as a writer and investigator were surely impressive, as was his vast knowledge of history, his uncanny ability to develop sources and willingness to read every government document he could get his hands on, but what really set him apart and enabled him to become a giant of journalism was his courage to care so deeply.

In the spirit of Robert Parry, let us demonstrate that we also care.

Nat Parry

Copenhagen, Denmark, June 2022



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With a huge repository of articles to choose from at *Consortium News*, compiling Robert Parry's post-1995 anthology was simple enough, but for all of his writings published prior to launching the website, I owe thanks to a number of people who assisted the process and granted permission to republish these articles. The Associated Press and *Newsweek* graciously authorized the use of his articles, which was very much appreciated. Other outlets, such as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting's *Extra!* magazine, *Mother Jones*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, C-SPAN, and *The New Republic*, were also very cooperative, and I thank them for their attentiveness to my requests.

I thank Norman Solomon and Peter Kornbluh for allowing me to use the articles that they collaborated on with my dad. Brian Barger, unfortunately, passed away in 2021, but I also thank him posthumously, as well as his widow, Tia Duer. Diane Duston and Jeff Parry were very helpful in poring through Dad's old files and collecting a number of important pieces from the late 80s and early 90s, and Dad's college buddy Stephen Orlov offered invaluable assistance in gathering old clippings from the *Colby Echo*. (Unfortunately, space only permitted the use of one of those articles, but thanks anyway for sharing all those great blasts from the past, Stephen.)

The website *Newspapers.com* was an indispensable resource, particularly in collecting articles from the pre-internet days of the 70s, 80s and early 90s, so my gratitude goes out to the tech wizzes and archivists who have made those old newspaper clippings available to the public. Thanks also to Joe Lauria and his team for keeping *Consortium News* up and running since my dad passed away, and for continuing the mission that he launched more than a quarter-century ago. I also thank Matt Spaniol for reviewing this text and offering his feedback. Last but not least, I thank the team at iUniverse for their assistance in seeing this project through.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1949, and raised in Northborough, Massachusetts, Robert Parry attended Colby College in Maine, where he edited the college newspaper and earned a bachelor's degree in English. His first job in journalism was at the *Middlesex Daily News*, based in Framingham, Massachusetts, and he was hired by The Associated Press in 1974.

After breaking many of the Iran-Contra Affair stories while working at The Associated Press and *Newsweek* in the 1980s, Parry went on to become a pioneer in online journalism when he launched *Consortium News* in 1995. Convinced that the core problem in the U.S. political system was “the use of mass media to inject Americans with a synthetic reality,” Parry created the website, he later explained, “to apply traditional journalistic standards to build honest narratives that can challenge false narratives.”

His efforts to build an independent media infrastructure also included a biweekly newsletter and bimonthly magazine published in the late 90s, as well as a small book publishing house called the Media Consortium, and a non-profit organization, the Consortium for Independent Journalism. In 2015, he established, together with the board of CIJ, the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award.

Parry's books include *Fooling America: How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom* (1992), *Trick or Treason: The October Surprise Mystery* (1993), *The October Surprise X-Files: The Hidden Origins of the Reagan-Bush Era* (1996), *Lost History: Contras,*

*Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* (1999), *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* (2004), *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush* (2007), and *America's Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes to Obama* (2012).

In addition to thousands of articles published over a period of nearly five decades – many of which are collected here for the first time since they originally appeared – Parry's body of work also includes several documentaries he made for PBS's "Frontline" on the October Surprise allegations of a secret plot by Ronald Reagan's campaign team to influence the outcome of the 1980 presidential election through an act of treason.

Parry has reported from Grenada, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Iran, Israel and Haiti. He worked for Bloomberg News from 2000-2004 and taught at the New York University Graduate School of Journalism. He received the George Polk Award for National Reporting in 1984, The Associated Press Managing Editors Association Award in 1985 for Top AP Reportorial Performance, the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence in 2015, and the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism in 2017. He was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 1985.

When he passed away unexpectedly in early 2018, he was survived by his wife Diane Duston and four children – Sam, Nat, Liz and Jeff – as well as six grandchildren – Josie, Drew, Abby, Ellie, Eva and Lea.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2006), 68.
- <sup>2</sup> "A Boom Time for U.S. Sanctions," *The Atlantic*, May 3, 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> "A Brief History of Consortiumnews.com," *Consortium News*, Dec. 21, 2004. <https://www.consortiumnews.com/2004/122104.html>
- <sup>4</sup> *La Nacion*, Nov. 26, 1996
- <sup>5</sup> *Washington Post*, Sept. 15, 1995
- <sup>6</sup> *Washington Post*, July 30, 1996
- <sup>7</sup> *Washington Times*, Aug. 13, 1986
- <sup>8</sup> *Washington Times*, Jan. 21, 1987
- <sup>9</sup> *Washington Times*, Aug. 4, 1992
- <sup>10</sup> *Washington Times*, June 24, 1996
- <sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1997
- <sup>12</sup> *Washington Post*, Sept. 2, 1997
- <sup>13</sup> *Washington Post*, Sept. 3, 1997
- <sup>14</sup> *Washington Post*, Sept. 4, 1997
- <sup>15</sup> *Washington Post*, May 16, 1997
- <sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, April 15, 1991
- <sup>17</sup> *Washington Post*, Jan. 24, 1996
- <sup>18</sup> *Washington Post*, Sept. 12, 1997
- <sup>19</sup> *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1999
- <sup>20</sup> *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1999
- <sup>21</sup> *Washington Post*, Dec. 1, 1999
- <sup>22</sup> CNBC's "Hardball," Dec. 1, 1999

- [23](#) *Washington Post*, Dec. 2, 1999
- [24](#) ABC's "This Week," Dec. 5, 1999
- [25](#) Associated Press, Dec. 14, 1999
- [26](#) *Boston Globe*, Dec. 26, 1999
- [27](#) Associated Press, Dec. 14, 1999
- [28](#) *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Dec. 12, 1999
- [29](#) *National Journal*, Dec. 18, 1999
- [30](#) *Providence Journal*, Dec. 23, 1999
- [31](#) *Washington Times*, Jan. 7, 2000
- [32](#) Associated Press, March 11, 1999
- [33](#) *The Daily Howler*, Jan. 13, 2000
- [34](#) *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 2000
- [35](#) *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2000
- [36](#) *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 27, 2000
- [37](#) *New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2001
- [38](#) *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 16, 2001
- [39](#) *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 16, 2001
- [40](#) *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 19, 2001
- [41](#) For a detailed account, see *The New Yorker's* Jan. 14, 2002, article on former FBI counter-terrorist specialist John O'Neill, who died at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11.
- [42](#) *Washington Post*, Jan. 10, 2002
- [43](#) *Boston Herald*, Dec. 11, 2001
- [44](#) *The New Yorker*, Jan. 14, 2002
- [45](#) *New York Times*, March 14, 2002
- [46](#) *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 18, 2002
- [47](#) *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2002

- <sup>48</sup> For details, see “An Unnecessary War,” *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2003.
- <sup>49</sup> *Newsweek*, Sept. 23, 2002
- <sup>50</sup> *The New Yorker*, Nov. 2, 1992
- <sup>51</sup> *Foreign Policy*, Jan.-Feb. 2003
- <sup>52</sup> *Time* story posted March 23, 2003
- <sup>53</sup> *Washington Post*, March 18, 2003
- <sup>54</sup> *USA Today*, April 2, 2003
- <sup>55</sup> *Washington Post*, April 5, 2003
- <sup>56</sup> *Washington Post*, March 18, 2003
- <sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, April 8, 2004
- <sup>58</sup> *Washington Post*, Aug. 12, 2004
- <sup>59</sup> *Washington Post*, Oct. 28, 1996
- <sup>60</sup> *Washington Post*, Jan. 29, 2007
- <sup>61</sup> The Associated Press, March 17, 1983
- <sup>62</sup> “George W. Bush’s favorable rating has pulled a complete 180”, CNN.com, Jan. 23, 2018
- <sup>63</sup> “Barack Obama Says George W. Bush ‘Had a Basic Regard For the Rule of Law’”, Mediaite.com, June 24, 2020
- <sup>64</sup> *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 2021
- <sup>65</sup> “Are Trump’s Ties to Russia a Dangerous Security Issue or Critics’ Fodder for New Red Scare?”, Democracy Now, March 6, 2017
- <sup>66</sup> “Americans Remain Distrustful of Mass Media”, Gallup, Sept. 30, 2020
- <sup>67</sup> See, for example, “Corrupting science: In Syria probe, OPCW erased experts’ inconvenient findings”, *The Grayzone*, Nov. 22, 2021.
- <sup>68</sup> “How And Why We Should All Be Like the Late Journalistic Giant Robert Parry,” *The Intercept*, Feb. 4 2018

# Endnotes

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[1](#)<sup>\*</sup> The Whitewater controversy stemmed from a real estate deal that Bill and Hillary Clinton and their associates, Jim McDougal and Susan McDougal, conducted in the Whitewater Development Corporation. Three separate inquiries failed to find sufficient evidence linking the Clintons with the criminal conduct of others connected to the land deal.

[2](#)<sup>†</sup> The full eight-part series is available at Consortiumnews.com.

[3](#)<sup>††</sup> The full series is available at Consortiumnews.com

[4](#)<sup>§</sup> In fact, following a Dec. 4 ruling by the Leon County Circuit Court in Bush's favor, Gore appealed to the Florida Supreme Court, which on Dec. 8 overturned the Circuit Court and ordered a manual recount of 9,000 disputed votes in Miami-Dade County and any other disputed ballots in other Florida counties. This decision would then be overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court on Dec. 12.

[5](#)<sup>††</sup> The full series is available at Consortiumnews.com.

[6](#)<sup>††</sup> According to *The 9/11 Commission Report*, the intended target of the plane that went down in Shanksville was either the Capitol or the White House.

[7](#)<sup>††††</sup> In 2014, while imprisoned for passing classified information to WikiLeaks, Bradley Manning adopted the name Chelsea Manning.

[8](#)<sup>§§</sup> For a more detailed examination of what Johnson called this "sordid story," see Consortiumnews.com's "LBJ's 'X' File on Nixon's 'Treason'" or Parry's 2012 book *America's Stolen Narrative*.

[9](#)<sup>\*\*\* \*\*</sup> The notation may have used the wrong adjective, possibly intending "discreet," meaning circumspect and suggesting a secretive role, not "discrete," meaning separate and distinct.