

Israel's Mysterious Raid into Syria

Israel attacked a target in Syria, allegedly out of concern that some anti-aircraft missiles might be shifted to Hezbollah in Lebanon. But the mysterious raid raises troubling questions about the possible region-wide spread of the Syrian civil war, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Israeli warplanes inflicted some kind of damage on the outskirts of Damascus on Wednesday, but there were different versions as to exactly what. The Syrian government says it was a scientific research facility that was attacked. American sources say the target was a convoy carrying anti-aircraft weapons into Lebanon for use by the militia of Hezbollah. Israel isn't saying anything.

Speculation about the actual target and about Israeli purposes doesn't have to end there. This is the Middle East, after all, where no analysis about someone's motives is complete without going further than this in the way of conspiratorial and convoluted explanations. As [an editorial in Lebanon's *Daily Star*](#) points out, shipments of something like the anti-aircraft weapons into Lebanon are hardly new. Thus the "immediate question" is, "Why now?"

Surely, one might think, the Israelis must have considered the effects their strike would have on the course of the current civil war in Syria. By moving closer to realizing the oft-expressed fears about this war spreading across international borders, maybe Israel was hoping to spur Western governments into a more active intervention in Syria on behalf of the rebels.

Or perhaps the motive was the opposite; Israel may have more to fear from a new Syrian regime dominated by some of those same rebel elements than it does from the devil-they-know Bashar Assad. An Israeli airstrike in Syrian territory may have been just the sort of thing to give at least a temporary boost to Assad, as suggested by how the Syrian regime played up the attack, whether or not its version of the target was accurate.

The less convoluted explanations are more plausible. The strike is part of a well-established pattern of Israel using its military might to beat down anything and anybody that could possibly challenge it, and of paying little regard in the process to larger consequences, to its neighbors, its friends, and even its own long-term interests. It is part of the pattern of seeking absolute security for Israel even if it means absolute insecurity for others. Beating down others in ways that facilitate more Israeli beating down in the future is part of the pattern.

That lends credibility to the version of this week's airstrike that has as the target advanced anti-aircraft weapons bound for Lebanon. The more such weapons are kept out of Lebanon, the more easily Israel can continue to violate Lebanese airspace with impunity.

Even though Israelis may not consider larger consequences, such consequences nonetheless happen. The *Daily Star* points to a couple of them:

"One of these losers is the Syrian people, who are decidedly unenthusiastic about seeing Israel enter into the uprising against the regime of President Bashar Assad in any way, shape or form. The other losers would be neighboring states such as Lebanon, if it is swept up into the violence because of the possible, and not yet proven, role of Hezbollah in the affair."

And for the United States, there also is the consequence, given the nature of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, it incurs from any Israeli action, of being closely associated with that action. Or as the Lebanese editorialists ask, "If the Israelis are actually responsible for Wednesday's incident, is it likely that they took the step with the knowledge of their chief ally, the United States?"

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Obama Shies from Iran Agreement

Official Washington can't get over its addiction to tough-guy-ism, especially as it relates to confrontations in the Middle East. Now, President Obama's timidity about taking on that challenge is undermining hopes for a negotiated settlement with Iran, say Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

As Washington and its great power partners [prepare for more nuclear negotiations with Iran](#), the Obama administration and policy elites across the political spectrum talk as if America is basically in control of the situation. Sanctions, we are told, are inflicting ever-rising hardship on Iran's economy. Either Tehran will surrender to U.S. demands that it stop enriching uranium or, at some point, the American military will destroy Iranian nuclear installations.

This is a dangerous delusion, grounded in persistent American illusions about Middle Eastern reality. Because of failed wars-*cum*-occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan; a war on terror that has turned Muslim societies ever more firmly against U.S. policy; and *de facto* support for open-ended Israeli occupation of Arab populations, America's position in the region is in free fall.

Increasingly mobilized publics will not tolerate continuation of such policies. If, in this climate, the United States launches another war to disarm yet another Middle Eastern country of weapons of mass destruction it does not have, the blowback against American interests will be disastrous. Nonetheless, that is where our current strategy negotiating on terms that could not possibly interest Iran while escalating covert operations, cyber-attacks, and economic warfare against it leads.

For its own interests, Washington must take a fundamentally different approach. President Barack Obama needs to realign U.S. relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran as thoroughly as President Richard Nixon realigned relations with the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s. Simply "talking" to Iran will not accomplish this.

Every American administration since the Iranian Revolution has talked to Tehran, usually to ask its help on particular U.S. concerns. The Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations sought Iran's help to free American hostages in Lebanon. The Clinton administration coordinated with Tehran to arm beleaguered Bosnian Muslims when U.S. law prevented Washington from doing so. After 9/11, Iran cooperated with the George W. Bush administration against al Qaeda and the Taliban a dialogue in which Hillary Mann Leverett participated for nearly two years.

In all these episodes, Washington got most of what it specifically asked for. But, each time, Washington pocketed Tehran's cooperation, terminated dialogue, and used the purported "failure" of diplomacy to raise tensions, impose more sanctions, and come ever closer to confrontation.

As a presidential candidate in 2008, then-Sen. Obama pledged as part of a broader commitment to end the "mindset" that produced the 2003 Iraq invasion to engage Iran. As he embarks on his second term, President Obama is in danger of discrediting engagement by saying that he tried but failed to reach out to Tehran when in fact he has never seriously tried.

Since 2009, the Obama administration has participated in multilateral nuclear talks with Iran and used Iran's unwillingness to surrender to U.S. demands as a reason to impose the most draconian sanctions on a country since sanctions on Iraq during 1991-2003 killed more than one million Iraqis, and to come ever

closer to regime change as the ultimate goal of America's Iran policy.

While U.S. officials excoriate Tehran for either "playing for time" or being too internally conflicted to negotiate seriously, it is Washington that has not been diplomatically serious. Iran has consistently been prepared to accept more intrusive monitoring of and perhaps negotiated limits on its nuclear activities, if Western powers would in turn recognize its right to enrich uranium under international safeguards.

But Obama like his predecessor refuses to acknowledge Iran's right to enrich. For this would require acknowledging the Islamic Republic as a legitimate political order representing legitimate national interests and as a rising regional power unwilling to subordinate its foreign policy to Washington (as, for example, Egypt did under Sadat and Mubarak). No American president since the Iranian Revolution not even Barack Obama has been willing to deal with the Islamic Republic in this way.

Yet we return from our latest visit to Iran convinced this is the only way diplomacy can succeed. No one who has walked the streets of Tehran, seen that Iran's economy is not imploding, and talked with a range of Iranians could think that sanctions as severe as they are and might become will compel either Iran's collapse or its surrender. The only thing that will work is accepting the Islamic Republic and acknowledging its interests and rights including safeguarded enrichment.

Accepting a rising regional power as a legitimate entity pursuing its interests in a fundamentally rational and defensive way is how Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger enabled the historic opening to China in the early 1970s. Their achievement was not to "talk" to Beijing; Washington had been doing that for years, through ambassadorial-level discussions.

Their achievement was to accept and persuade Americans to accept the People's Republic and its leaders as (in Nixon's words) "pursuing their own interests as *they* perceive these interests, just as we follow our own interests as we see them," and to work with them on that basis.

Nixon's initiative saved America's position in Asia after the draining disaster of Vietnam and restored Washington's global leadership. If Obama accepted the Islamic Republic in the same way, an equally thorough realignment of U.S.-Iranian relations would be possible.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the three Iranian presidents elected over the course of Khamenei's 22-year tenure as Supreme Leader have all said that they are open to better relations with America but only on the basis of mutual respect,

equality, and American acceptance of the Islamic Republic.

Today, engaging Iran on this basis is Obama's single biggest foreign policy challenge. It's also the only way for him to rescue America's position in the Middle East and avert strategic catastrophe in his second term.

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NFL's Super Bowl and Gay Rights

The National Football League, known for its macho swagger, has no openly gay players, although a small number have come out of the closet after retiring. But tolerance of sexual orientation has entered the Super Bowl hype as two players for the opposing teams have taken contrasting positions, Mike Biggz writes.

By Mike Biggz

The NFL's Super Bowl may seem like an unlikely venue for a debate over gay rights, but comments from players of the opposing teams, the Baltimore Ravens and the San Francisco 49ers, have put a spotlight on the question of football's tolerance regarding sexual orientation.

Baltimore's linebacker Brendon Ayanbadejo has spoken out forcefully in favor of marriage equality and gay rights, while San Francisco's cornerback Chris Culliver recently objected to having gay players on his team or in the NFL.

"I don't do the gay guys man," Culliver told shock jock Artie Lange, [according to Yahoo! Sports](#). "I don't do that. No, we don't got no gay people on the team, they gotta get up out of here if they do. Can't be with that sweet stuff. Nahcan't bein the locker room man. Nah."

Yet, while Culliver was outspoken about his opposition to gays in NFL locker rooms, Ayanbadejo muted his public support for gay rights in pre-Super Bowl

comments to the news media.

“Actually, I talked about that so I don’t want to keep touching on that subject,” Ayanbadejo said, indicating that he preferred focusing on preparations for the game. “Obviously, we’re at the Super Bowl and it’s the pinnacle of sports in the United States so I just really want to focus.”

Later, responding to another question about his support for gay rights, Ayanbadejo was more expansive. “Equality is a relevant issue,” he said. “Whether you decide to speak out about it or not, it’s going to affect everybody one way or another. Hopefully I’ll be able to win a Super Bowl and do the entire media circuit so I can talk about these things.”

After the Ravens won the AFC championship, Ayanbadejo sent e-mails to some influential supporters of gay rights, asking “Is there anything I can do for marriage equality or anti-bullying over the next couple of weeks to harness this Super Bowl media”?

Ayanbadejo, a heterosexual father of two, first waded into the issue of same-sex unions by writing a supportive opinion piece for Huffington Post. He also has spoken out against bullying.

His comments in support of a same-sex marriage bill in the Maryland legislature prompted state delegate Emmett C. Burns Jr. to complain to Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti. However, the bill passed anyway and Ayanbadejo has refused to be silenced on the topic, despite his reticence at “media day.”

I wrote an article about Ayanbadejo a few months back and hoped he would take advantage of the intense media interest in the Super Bowl to highlight his pro-gay and anti-bullying positions. At this point, I’m not sure exactly what Ayanbadejo will do. He could wear a sticker on his helmet or a patch on his uniform, although NFL rules discourage such messaging unless it has prior approval.

Ayanbadejo has indicated he would meet with New Orleans lawmakers, who got in touch with him after hearing his position on gay rights. Win or lose at the Super Bowl, he also plans to go on the Ellen DeGeneres show to discuss these issues further.

And even though I don’t want his team to win the Super Bowl (sorry, I’m rooting for my home-team 49ers), I am proud of this man for standing up for the cause of gay rights and seeing the importance of this struggle.

As for the 49ers despite the comments of cornerback Culliver the team has joined in the campaign for tolerance, as the first NFL to do an “It Gets Better” public

service announcement. Though Super Bowl ads are famously expensive, this intensely watched sporting event would make for a perfect opportunity to broadcast another PSA.

Super Bowl commercials are often more talked about than the game itself. And considering that in the last few years, I've seen some hyper-masculine, offensive and homophobic-laced spots where men are criticized for not being manly enough, a pro-gay/anti-bullying PSA would be valuable.

I hope in the future more NFL teams and players will join this crusade and that we'll soon see the first openly gay NFL player in the league.

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The Iraq War 'Surge' Myth Returns

From the Archive: Sen. John McCain and other Republicans cited Chuck Hagel's opposition to the Iraq War "surge" as their chief attack line to block his nomination to be Defense Secretary, but Hagel refused to accept their distortion of history, defying a cherished myth of Official Washington, which Robert Parry described two weeks ago.

By Robert Parry (Originally published Jan. 17, 2013, revised with slight updating)

At confirmation hearings for Defense Secretary-designate Chuck Hagel, Official Washington is reprising one of its favorite myths, the story of the "successful surge" in Iraq. Politicians and pundits have made clear that the Senate Armed Services Committee should hector Hagel over his opposition to President George W. Bush's 2007 "surge" of 30,000 troops into that failed war.

These "surge" lovers, who insist that Hagel be taken to task for his supposedly bad judgment over the "surge," include MSNBC's favorite neocon, Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, and conservative columnist George F. Will, who said Hagel should be asked, "If the surge had not happened, what would have happened in Iraq?"

Though surely tempted to finesse this historical question, former Sen. Hagel, R-Nebraska, chose not to bow to this deeply entrenched Washington myth when he appeared before the committee on Jan. 31. He refused to give a simple yes-or-no

answer to Sen. John McCain's question of whether Hagel had been wrong to oppose the "surge." Hagel insisted that the question demanded a more complex answer.

And, indeed, a fully honest answer to Will's question – and to the similar one posed by McCain, R-Arizona – would be that the "surge" sacrificed some 1,000 additional U.S. military dead (and killed countless innocent Iraqis) while contributing very little to the war's outcome.

Any serious analysis of what happened in Iraq in 2007-08 would trace the decline in Iraqi sectarian violence mostly to strategies that predated the "surge" and were implemented by the U.S. commanding generals in 2006, George Casey and John Abizaid, who wanted as small a U.S. "footprint" as possible to tamp down Iraqi nationalism.

Among their initiatives, Casey and Abizaid ran a highly classified operation to eliminate key al-Qaeda leaders, most notably the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006. Casey and Abizaid also exploited growing Sunni animosities toward al-Qaeda extremists by paying off Sunni militants to join the so-called "Awakening" in Anbar Province.

And, as the Sunni-Shiite sectarian killings reached horrendous levels in 2006, the U.S. military assisted in the *de facto* ethnic cleansing of mixed neighborhoods by helping Sunnis and Shiites move into separate enclaves protected by concrete barriers thus making the targeting of ethnic enemies more difficult. In other words, the flames of violence were likely to have abated whether Bush ordered the "surge" or not.

Radical Shiite leader Moktada al-Sadr also helped by issuing a unilateral cease-fire, reportedly at the urging of his patrons in Iran who were interested in cooling down regional tensions and speeding up the U.S. withdrawal. By 2008, another factor in the declining violence was the growing awareness among Iraqis that the U.S. military's occupation indeed was coming to an end. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was demanding a firm timetable for American withdrawal from Bush, who finally capitulated.

Woodward's Analysis

Even author Bob Woodward, who had published best-sellers that praised Bush's early war judgments, concluded that the "surge" was only one factor and possibly not even a major one in the declining violence.

In his book, *The War Within*, Woodward wrote, "In Washington, conventional wisdom translated these events into a simple view: The surge had worked. But the full story was more complicated. At least three other factors were as important as, or even more important than, the surge."

Woodward, whose book drew heavily from Pentagon insiders, listed the Sunni rejection of al-Qaeda extremists in Anbar Province and the surprise decision of al-Sadr to order a cease-fire as two important factors. A third factor, which Woodward argued may have been the most significant, was the use of new highly classified U.S. intelligence tactics that allowed for rapid targeting and killing of insurgent leaders.

Beyond the dubious impact of the “surge” on the gradual reduction in violence, Bush’s escalation failed to achieve its other stated goals, particularly creating political space so the Sunni-Shiite divisions over issues like oil profits could be resolved. Despite the sacrifice of additional American and Iraqi blood, those compromises did not materialize.

And, if you’re wondering what the “surge” and its loosened rules of engagement meant for Iraqis, you should watch the WikiLeaks’ [“Collateral Murder”](#) video, which depicts a scene during the “surge” when U.S. firepower mowed down a group of Iraqi men, including two Reuters journalists, as they walked down a street in Baghdad. The U.S. attack helicopters then killed a father and wounded his two children when the man stopped his van in an effort to take survivors to the hospital.

However, in Washington, the still-influential neocons saw an opportunity in 2008 when the numbers of Iraq War casualties declined. The neocons credited themselves and the “successful surge” with the improvement as they polished up their tarnished reputations, badly stained by the blood of the long and disastrous conflict.

As the neocons pushed the “successful surge” myth, they were aided by the mainstream news media, which also had promoted the ill-fated war and was looking for a way to bolster its standing with the public. Typical of this new conventional wisdom, Newsweek published a cover story on the “surge” under the title, “victory, at last.” To say otherwise brought you harsh criticism for not giving credit to “the troops.”

The Myth’s Consequences

Thus, the myth grew that Bush’s “surge” had brought Iraqi violence under control and the United States to the brink of “victory.” Gen. David Petraeus, who took command of Iraq after Bush yanked Casey and Abizaid, was elevated into hero status as a military genius. Also, Defense Secretary Robert Gates received the encomium of “wise man” for implementing the “surge” after Bush fired Donald Rumsfeld in November 2006 for standing behind his field generals and suggesting a faster U.S. troop drawdown in Iraq.

With the new conventional wisdom firmly established in 2008, media stars pounded Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama for his heresy regarding the “surge.” In major televised interviews, CBS News’ Katie Couric and ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos demanded that Obama admit he was wrong to oppose the “surge” and that his Republican rival, Sen. John McCain, was right to support it.

For weeks, Obama held firm, insisting correctly that the issue was more complicated than his interviewers wanted to admit. He argued that there were many factors behind Iraq’s changed security environment. But ultimately he caved in while being interrogated on Sept. 4 by Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly.

“I think that the surge has succeeded in ways that nobody anticipated,” Obama confessed to O’Reilly. “It’s succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”

Much as Hagel was pressured to do, Obama judged that continued resistance to this Washington “group think” was futile. But candidate Obama’s surrender on the “successful surge” myth had long-term consequences.

For one, it gave Gen. Petraeus and Defense Secretary Gates inflated reputations inside Official Washington and greater leverage in 2009 to force President Obama into accepting a similar “surge” in Afghanistan, what some analysts now regard as Obama’s biggest national security blunder. [For details, see Robert Parry’s *America’s Stolen Narrative*.]

The Iraq War’s “surge” also did nothing to change the trajectory of an eventual American defeat there. Perhaps the only real accomplishment of the “surge” was to let President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney enjoy a decent interval between their departure from government in early 2009 and the unceremonious U.S. departure from Iraq in late 2011.

In the final accounting of the neocon adventure of conquering Iraq, nearly 4,500 American soldiers had died; some 30,000 were wounded; and an estimated \$1 trillion was squandered. What was ultimately left behind was not only a devastated Iraqi population but an authoritarian Shiite government (in place of Saddam Hussein’s authoritarian Sunni government) and an Iraq that had become a regional ally of Iran (rather than a bulwark against Iran).

The hard truth is that this bloody folly was not “salvaged” by the “surge” despite what the likes of Michael O’Hanlon, George F. Will and John McCain claim. The “surge” simply extended the killing for a few more years and bought Bush and Cheney their “decent interval.”

But none of this reality has persuaded Official Washington to rethink its “successful surge” orthodoxy and there is now pressure on Chuck Hagel to

genuflect before this conventional wisdom to win his Senate confirmation.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

When Truth Tried to Stop War

Exclusive: The year 2013 is the one-decade anniversary of the U.S. political/media system's failure to stop a criminal President from launching a war of aggression on Iraq. It was a shameful time when only a few brave individuals, like the U.K.'s Katharine Gun, did the right thing, ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

Ten years ago, Katharine Gun, then a 28-year-old British intelligence officer, saw an e-mailed memo from the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) that confirmed for her in black and white the already widespread suspicion that the U.S. and U.K. were about to launch war against Iraq on false pretenses.

Doing what she could to head off what she considered, correctly, an illegal war of aggression, she printed a copy of the memo and arranged for a friend to give it to the *London Observer*. "I have always ever followed my conscience," she said, explaining what drove her to take such a large risk.

Those early months of 2003 were among the worst of times and not just because the U.S. and U.K. leaders were perverting the post-World War II structure that those same nations designed to stop aggressive wars, but because the vast majority of U.S. and U.K. institutions including the major news organizations and the nations' legislatures were failing miserably to provide any meaningful check or balance.

The common excuse from politicians, bureaucrats, editors and other opinion leaders was that there was no way the momentum toward war could be stopped, so why take on the career damage that would result from getting in the way. And if Ms. Gun were made of lesser stuff, she might have hidden behind a similar self-serving excuse or found solace in other comforting rationalizations, like the government must know what it's doing, or what do I, a Mandarin-to-English

translator, know about Iraq.

But Katharine Gun could smell a rat, as well as the sulfur of war, and she would not put her career and comfort ahead of the slaughter and devastation that war inevitably brings to innocent people. In that, she distinguished herself, just as many others in positions of authority disgraced themselves.

Missing WMD

In fall 2002, Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein shocked the world by agreeing to a very intrusive U.N. inspection regime with inspectors crawling all over suspect sites in Iraq, though not finding one "weapon of mass destruction." Since Iraq's inventory of WMD was the main *casus belli*, things were getting downright embarrassing. Even a few in the domesticated "mainstream" media in the U.S. and U.K. were feeling some discomfort in merely feeding off the official statements of President George W. Bush and co-conspirator Prime Minister Tony Blair.

At that key moment, the U.S. and U.K. leaders intensified their effort to get the U.N. Security Council to approve the kind of resolution that would enable them to attack Iraq with at least a thin veneer of legality. We know from the Downing Street memos, which were leaked two years later, that U.K. Attorney General Peter Goldsmith had told Blair in July 2002 that, absent a new Security Council resolution, war on Iraq would be illegal.

So, in early 2003, the focus was riveted on the U.N. Security Council where Bush and Blair were having trouble rallying the three other recalcitrant permanent members France, China and Russia to support war on Iraq. Already facing that resistance, Bush and Blair were not about to brook interference by the non-permanent members. Thus, word went out to the U.S./U.K. intelligence services to ensure that none of those upstart nations did anything to complicate U.S./U.K. plans for war.

Accordingly, the NSA intensified electronic collection on those countries' representatives (as well as on officials of the three obstinate permanent members). The Bush administration wanted to learn immediately of anything that could help win the Security Council's approval of a resolution to make the attack "legal."

On Jan. 31, 2003, NSA's Frank Koza, head of "Regional Targets" (RT) sent a "HIGH-Importance," Top Secret e-mail to Britain's NSA counterpart, GCHQ, where Katharine Gun worked. The e-mail asked that British eavesdroppers emulate NSA's "surge" in electronic collection against Security Council members "for insights ... [on] plans to vote on any Iraq-related resolutions ... the whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results

favorable to US goals or to head off surprises. ... [T]hat means a ... surge effort to revive/create efforts against UNSC members Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Bulgaria and Guinea, as well as extra focus on Pakistan UN matters."

Koza's "surge" instruction left no doubt in Gun's mind that Bush and Blair were hell-bent to have their war legal or illegal and that she had been correct in dismissing recent assurances by GCHQ management that she and her co-workers would not be asked to cooperate in facilitating unprovoked war.

As Gun explained later to Marcia and Thomas Mitchell, authors of *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War*, she calculated that if people could see how desperate Bush and Blair were to have an appearance of legitimacy for war, "Their eyes would be opened; they would see that the intention was not to disarm Saddam but in fact to go to war."

She made a copy of the Koza memo, walked out with it in her purse, and eventually gave it to a friend with contacts in the media. The *London Observer* got hold of it, was able to establish that it was authentic, and on March 2, 2003, two and a half weeks before the attack on Iraq front-paged the text of the memo with an accompanying article.

The report shook the government of Tony Blair and caused consternation on several continents. In the U.S., however, it was not a big story. For the *New York Times*, whose editors were either cheering on false articles about Iraq's WMD or going into a self-protective career crouch, it was no story at all.

The U.S. intelligence agencies stonewalled any media inquiries and the journalists quickly moved on to the main event, embedding themselves inside the U.S. military as war correspondents. The story from Gun's document indicating a major spying initiative to coerce sovereign countries to support an unprovoked war simply didn't fit with the narrative of "good guy" America taking on "bad guy" Iraq.

Despite the spying, Bush and Blair failed to win approval from the Security Council to invade Iraq, forcing Bush and Blair to lead a "coalition of the willing" and counting on the cowardice and complicity of the U.S./U.K. mainstream news media to ignore the inconvenient truth about the illegality of the invasion.

Confession and Charge

Gun soon confessed to what she had done. She later explained to the Mitchells: "I'm pretty rubbish at telling lies ... and I try to be an honest person. ... I have to say that I've only ever followed my conscience. And it, my conscience, is such a nuisance."

On Nov. 13, 2003, she was charged with violating the UK's Official Secrets Act. She planned to plead "not guilty," stressing that she acted to prevent imminent loss of life in an illegal war.

Gun's pro bono lawyers insisted that the Blair government produce the opinions of U.K. Attorney General Peter Goldsmith on the legality of the war but the government refused. It was already widely known, well before the leak of the Downing Street memos, that Goldsmith initially advised that an attack on Iraq would be illegal without a second U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing it, and that, only after intense consultation with several lawyers from the White House, Goldsmith showed the required flexibility and changed his mind.

Blair was not about to release such damning documents. Even the usually docile UN Secretary General Kofi Annan finally got around to acknowledging the obvious and agreeing that the attack on Iraq was illegal, albeit Annan found his voice only well after the butchery was underway.

So, when Gun's case came to court on Feb. 25, 2004, her lawyers did not need to argue that trying to stop an illegal act (a war of aggression) trumped Gun's obligations under the Official Secrets Act. The Blair government clearly did not want to let Lord Goldsmith's dirty laundry hang out on the line. Within half an hour, the prosecution dropped the case and Katharine Gun walked.

The Sam Adams Award

For her courage and commitment to principle, Katharine Gun was the second recipient of the Sam Adams Award for Integrity in Intelligence. The citation read at the presentation on April 14, 2004, noted that:

"Heeding the dictates of conscience and true patriotism, Ms. Gun put her career and her very liberty at risk trying to prevent the launching of an illegal war. That she is here with us today and not in a prison cell bespeaks a tacit but clear admission by her government that the US/UK attack on Iraq in March 2003 was in defiance of international law.

"Ms. Gun's beacon of light pierced a thick cloud of deception. She set a courageous example for those intelligence analysts of the 'Coalition of the Willing' who have first-hand knowledge of how intelligence was corrupted to 'justify' war, but who have not yet been able to find their voice."

Commenting on Katharine Gun's courage and integrity, Pentagon Papers whistleblower Dan Ellsberg had this to say:

"No one has had this story to tell before, because no one else including myself has ever done what Katharine Gun did: tell secret truths at personal risk,

before an imminent war, in time, possibly, to avert it. Hers was the most important and courageous leak I've ever seen, more timely and potentially more effective than the Pentagon Papers."

Fast forward to Jan. 23, 2013, in the Debate Chamber of the Oxford Union where the tenth annual Sam Adams award presentation was held before a packed house of Oxford students. Ms. Gun, her husband, and their four-year-old daughter shed their coveted privacy long enough to allow Katharine to be one of two former Sam Adams Award winners to present this year's award.

The other was Coleen Rowley, former FBI special agent and counsel at the Minneapolis bureau, who blew the whistle on FBI and other shortcomings before 9/11 and was named one of the three Persons of the Year by *Time Magazine* in 2002. The Sam Adams award is named for the late CIA analyst Sam Adams who challenged false assessments of Vietcong and North Vietnamese troop strength during the height of that conflict.

The 10th annual Sam Adams Award for Integrity in Intelligence was given to Thomas Fingar, the consummate intelligence professional who led the U.S. National Intelligence Council from 2005 to 2008 (and is now a professor in Stanford's overseas program at Oxford).

Fingar supervised the drafting of the eye-opening National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of 2007 on Iran, which differed markedly from previous estimates in assessing that Iran had stopped working on a nuclear weapon at the end of 2003 and had not resumed such work and key finding revalidated every year since by the Director of National Intelligence in formal testimony to Congress.

With the help of that honest assessment, U.S. military leaders and other honest officials were able to beat back pressure from Vice President Dick Cheney and the neoconservatives for an attack on Iran during 2008 the last year of the Bush administration. (See Bush's own memoir, *Decision Points*, page 419.)

Heading Off Wars of Choice

The poignancy of the moment was not lost on the audience at the Oxford Union. After Katharine Gun read the citation (text below) for the award to Tom Fingar, she turned toward Fingar, and suggested that if honest professionals like him had been supervising U.S. and U.K. intelligence analysis in 2002-2003, the warping of intelligence to support plans for war would have been prevented. And Gun could have avoided the painful choice that her conscience required.

It was quite a spectacle: One "spy" who tried her best (but failed) to stop the Iraq war was giving the Sam Adams award to another, more senior intelligence official who, simply by adhering tightly to the professional ethos of following

the evidence wherever it leads, played a huge role in stopping war on Iran.

Also “giving evidence” (in British parlance) on Jan. 23 at the Sam Adams Award evening at the Oxford Union were three other former awardees besides Gun and Rowley former U.K. ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray, former NSA executive Thomas Drake and, video-linked from asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, Julian Assange of WikiLeaks.

Other Sam Adams associates also spoke briefly, including former U.K. MI5 officer Annie Machon and two of the three U.S. diplomats who resigned on principle before the attack on Iraq Ann Wright and Brady Kiesling. Oxford Union President Maria Rioumine joined me in introductory remarks; still other associates made the trek across the Atlantic, at considerable personal expense, just to be there to honor Thomas Fingar.

Iran: Always Iran

There is yet another poignant back story here. In 2006, as Thomas Fingar was settling into his position as chief analyst for the entire U.S. intelligence community, the threats from the West and Israel directed at Iran were proliferating in an alarming way, and the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear program was just in the planning stage.

Amid the calls for military action against Iran, Katharine Gun came out of seclusion and wrote an op-ed titled “Iran: Time to Leak.” Her article appeared on March 20, 2006, the third anniversary of the U.S./U.K. invasion of Iraq.

Apparently unaware of the paradigm shift toward honesty in drafting U.S. intelligence estimates, Ms. Gun drew on her own experience and tried to motivate analysts to blow the whistle when necessary, as she had done three years before:

“Truth telling and whistle blowing [continue to be] crucial after a war as ill advised as Iraq, at least it allows us to piece together the facts, but it’s too late to save lives. Where are the memos and emails about Iran now?

“I urge those in a position to do so to disclose information which relates to this planned aggression; legal advice, meetings between the White House and other intelligence agencies, assessments of Iran’s threat level (or better yet, evidence that assessments have been altered), troop deployments and army notifications. Don’t let ‘the intelligence and the facts be fixed around the policy’ this time. ...

“As the political momentum builds toward a military ‘solution,’ it would be wrong to wait until the bombs have fallen on Iran and families destroyed before finally informing the public.”

Only when the Fingar-supervised NIE, *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, emerged in November 2007 could Katharine Gun (and the rest of us) understand that integrity had been restored to the estimative analysis process. It would be extremely difficult to attack Iran with that NIE on the books. No need to leak this time.

Not to say pressures to attack Iran have disappeared. Ironically, it was Julian Assange, the Sam Adams award winner in 2010, who alerted the Oxford Union audience (via videolink from the Ecuadorian embassy) of a DreamWorks movie, "Fifth Estate," now in production. WikiLeaks somehow got hold of the script, which paints a much more ominous picture of Iran's nuclear intentions and capabilities and takes the customary U.S. mass-media potshots at WikiLeaks and Assange.

Not to over-use "ironic," the timely leak of that transcript to WikiLeaks will give those of us who remain committed to combating falsehood and pro-war propaganda advance time to expose the film for what it is and dissect its none-too-subtle objectives. No rest for the weary, as the expression goes.

Meanwhile, with the example set by Thomas Fingar, and the systems he has put in place to ensure intelligence assessments are not "fixed around the policy" as the 2002 Downing Street Memo famously depicted the fabrication of the case for war with Iraq there is reason to hope that yet another "war of choice" can be thwarted.

Following is the citation read by Katharine Gun to accompany the award to Thomas Fingar:

"Know all ye by these presents that Thomas Fingar is hereby awarded the Corner-Brightener Candlestick, presented by Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence.

"In 2005, when Tom Fingar assumed responsibility for supervising the preparation of National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), the discipline of intelligence analysis had been corrupted on both sides of the Atlantic. We know from the Downing Street Minutes of July 23, 2002 that 'the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy' prior to the US/UK attack on Iraq.

"Integrity and professionalism were the only cure. Dr. Fingar oversaw the landmark 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran, which concluded with 'high confidence' that Iran had halted its nuclear weapon design and weaponization work in 2003. That NIE was issued with the unanimous approval of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies. Its key judgments have been revalidated every year since by the Director of National Intelligence.

"The Estimate's findings were a marked departure from earlier assessments of Iran's nuclear program. That it was instrumental in thwarting an attack on Iran is seen in President George W. Bush's own memoir in which he complains that the 'eye-popping' findings of the 2007 NIE stayed his hand: 'How could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?'"

"Presented this 23rd day of January 2013 at Oxford University by admirers of the example set by our former colleague, Sam Adams."

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