

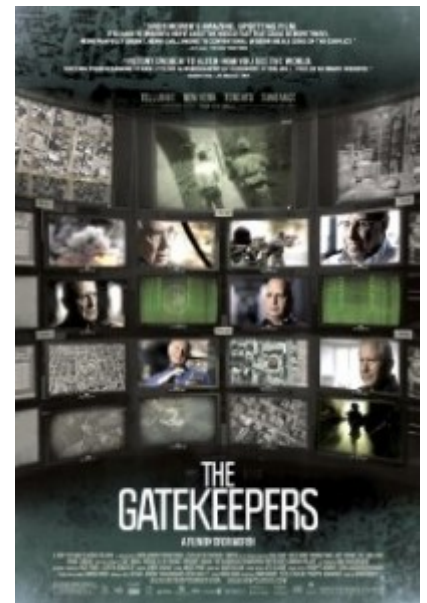
The Secrets of 'The Gatekeepers'

"The Gatekeepers," a new documentary, records the views of the Israeli security officials most responsible for suppressing Palestinian resistance and their growing doubts about the strategy of endless repression. But even this criticism glosses over the depth of the problem, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is a new documentary movie about Israel called "[The Gatekeepers](#)," directed by Dror Moreh and featuring interviews with all the former leaders of the Shin Bet, the country's internal security organization.

The Shin Bet is assigned the job of preventing Palestinian retaliatory attacks on Israel and, as described by Moreh, the film "is the story of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories as told by the people at the crossroads of some of the most crucial moments in the security history of the country." Along the way it touches on such particular topics as targeted assassinations, the use of torture, and "collateral damage."



"The Gatekeepers" has garnered a lot of acclaim, playing at film festivals in Jerusalem, Amsterdam, New York, Toronto, Venice and elsewhere. It has won the Los Angeles Film Critics Association's Best Documentary Award. It has been nominated for an Oscar.

In order to promote "The Gatekeepers," Moreh has been doing interviews and recently appeared on [CNN with Christiana Amanpour](#). He made a number of salient points, as did the Shin Bet leaders in the clips featured during the interview.

Moreh says, "if there is someone who understands the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's these guys," the Shin Bet leaders. Actually, this not necessarily true. One might more accurately claim that these men, who led Israel's most secretive government institution, were and are so deeply buried inside their country's security dilemma that they see it in a distorted fashion (with only occasional glimmers of clarity).

For instance, Avraham Shalom, head of the Shin Bet from 1981-1986, tells us that "Israel lost touch with how to coexist with the Palestinians as far back as the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967 when the country started doubling down on terrorism."

But is this really the case? One might more accurately assert that Israel had no touch to lose. Most of its Jewish population and leadership have never had an interest in coexistence with Palestinians in any egalitarian and humane sense of the term. The interviewed security chiefs focus on the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza because they are the ones who offered the most resistance to conquest. But what of the 20 percent of the population of Israel who are also Palestinian and who actually lived under martial law until 1966? You may call the discriminatory regime under which these people live "coexistence," but it is the coexistence of superior over the inferior secured largely by intimidation.

Moreh insists that it is the "Jewish extremists inside Israel" who have been the "major impediment" to resolving issues between Israel and the Palestinians. The film looks at the cabal of religious fanatics who, in 1980, planned to blow up the Muslim shrine of the Dome of the Rock on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, as well as the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. Yet, as dangerous as Israel's right-wing extremists and settler fanatics are, focusing exclusively on them obscures the full history of the occupation.

By 1977, when Menachem Begin and Israel's right-wing fanatics fully took power, the process of occupation and ethnic cleansing was well under way. It had been conducted against both the Arab Israelis from 1948 onward, and against the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza after 1967. In both cases, it was initiated by the so-called Israeli Left: the Labor Party led by such people as David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin himself. Amongst the Israeli leadership, there were no clean hands.

Finally, Dror Moreh repeatedly pushes another message: "a central theme of the documentary is the idea that Israel has incredible tactics, but it lacks long-term strategy if [security] operations do not support a move toward a peace settlement, then they are meaningless."

Again, this assessment reflects Moreh being so deeply situated inside of the

problem that he cannot perceive it clearly. Moreh assumes that achieving peace with the Palestinians is the only “long-term strategy” Israel could possibly have and, in its absence, Israel pursues no strategy at all.

However, an objective assessment of Israeli history tells us that there has been another strategy in place. The Zionist leaders have, in fact, always had a long-term strategy to avoid any meaningful peace settlement, so as to allow: 1. occupation of all “Eretz Israel,” 2. the ethnic cleansing or cantonization of the native population, and 3. settlement of the cleansed territory with Jews.

It is because of this same naivete that Moreh confesses himself “shocked” when Avraham Shalom compares the occupation of the Palestinian territories to “Germany’s occupation of Europe.” It is to Shalom’s credit that he made the statement on camera, and to Morah’s credit that he kept the statement in the final version of the film. But then Moreh spoils this act of bravery when he tells Amanpour: “Only Jews can say these kind of words. And only they can have the justification to speak as they spoke in the film.”

Well, I can think of one other group of people who has every right to make the same comparison Shalom makes the Palestinians.

Retired Official’s Confession Syndrome

For all its shortcomings, the film is a step forward in the ongoing effort to deny the idealized Zionist storyline a monopoly in the West. Indeed, that “The Gatekeepers” was made at all, and was received so positively at major film venues, is a sign that this skewed Israeli storyline is finally breaking down. Certainly, this deconstruction still has a long way to go, but the process is picking up speed.

On the other hand, there is something troubling about the belated nature of the insights given in these interviews. They are examples of what I like to call the “retired official’s confession syndrome.” Quite often those who, in retirement, make these sorts of confessions were well aware of the muddled or murderous situation while in office. But, apparently, they lacked the courage to publicize it at the time. It would have meant risking their careers, their popularity, and perhaps relations with their friends and family.

One is reminded of the fate of Professor Ilan Pappé, who has stood up and lived his principles, and eventually lost his position at Haifa University and was, in the end, forced into exile. For most, however, including these leaders of the Shin Bet, their understanding was clouded and their actions skewed by a time-honored, but deeply flawed, notion of “duty” to carry on like good soldiers.

To date, Israel’s leaders and Zionist supporters have shown an amazing capacity

to ignore all criticism. The newly re-elected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has let it be known that he has no intention of watching "The Gatekeepers." It is also questionable how many of those who voted for him, or other right-wing politicians, will bother to seek the documentary out.

Israel's government has recently made the decision to ignore the country's obligations under the United Nations Human Rights Charter, a decision signaled by its representatives refusal to show up for the country's "universal periodic review" before the Human Rights Council. Nor is there any sign that any new right-wing led government coalition will stop the ethnic cleansing and illegal colonial repopulation of East Jerusalem.

The only reasonable conclusion one can come to is that it will take increasing outside pressure on Israel, in the form of boycotts, divestment and sanctions, to convince a sufficient number of that country's Jewish population that they must change their ways. To not change is to acquiesce in Israel's evolving status as a pariah state.

The irony of it all is that that status will have little to do with most of Israel being Jewish (that is, it will not be a function of anti-Semitism). Yet, it will have everything to do with the fact that, in this day and age, not even the Jews, who have been subjected to some of history's worst acts of racism, have the right to maintain a racist state.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism.

How the Iraq War Was Sold

Exclusive: As George Bush and his national security team marched the U.S. off to war in Iraq, they were aided by key news outlets, especially the neocon-dominated Washington Post. Now a decade later, the Post still won't take a hard, honest look at what was done, writes ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

The *Washington Post* continues to allow former members of the Bush administration, including President George W. Bush, to distort the case for going to war against Iraq in 2003 and to blame the intelligence from the Central

Intelligence Agency for the decision to use force.

In the "Outlook" section on Feb. 3 ("Still Fighting over a flawed case for war"), the *Post* cites memoirs from six key decision-makers, who are unwilling to acknowledge that the Iraq War was a deadly undertaking paved by lies and deceit.

It was never a case of whether the White House distorted the intelligence it received on Iraq or whether the Central Intelligence Agency provided bad intelligence to the White House. In fact, both the White House and the CIA had a hand in the distortion of intelligence and both contributed to making the phony case for war to the Congress and the American people.

The article revolves around former Secretary of State Colin Powell's anger with CIA officials who failed to inform him that his speech to the United Nations in February 2003 included unsupported claims and with himself for failing to "sniff out" the weaknesses of the CIA intelligence case for war. [Powell's *It Worked for Me: In Life and Leadership*]

Powell fails to mention that the director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research did his best to stop the Secretary of State from relying on CIA intelligence for his UN speech, let alone spending four days and nights at CIA headquarters in drafting the speech, and alerted him to the phony National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002 that was used to craft Powell's speech.

Similarly, Powell paid no attention to the numerous authoritative CIA sources that denied the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraqi inventories, and ignored the warning of the former director of IAEA, Hans Blix, who charged "Never before has a nation had 100 percent confidence about its intelligence with 0 percent information."

Former CIA director George Tenet acknowledges that "flawed information" made its way into Powell's speech because the CIA had spent too much time "getting the garbage out of a White House draft" for the Secretary's UN speech. [Tenet's *At the Center of the Storm: the CIA During America's Time of Crisis*]

In fact, the White House draft was prepared by Lewis "Scooter" Libby and Steve Hadley, and Secretary of State Powell instantly pronounced, "I'm not reading this. This is bullshit." No time was lost at the CIA dealing with Libby's fatuous draft.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney is critical of Powell for rejecting the White House draft prepared by Libby and Hadley, particularly for discarding the information on Saddam Hussein's ties to terrorism, which included "charges that would stand the test of time." [Cheney's *In My Time: A Personal and Political*

Memoir]

In fact, the primary source for intelligence linking Iraq to training in chemical and biological weapons to al Qaeda was a fabricator, which was known to the Defense Intelligence Agency a full year before Powell gave his speech. Another source was rendered by the United States and tortured by the Egyptians; he recanted his claims in February 2004, seven years before Cheney produced his memoir.

The "Outlook" account does not include former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's order to military commanders several hours after the 9/11 attacks to "judge whether [intelligence] good enough [to] hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] @ same time—not only UBL [Osama bin Laden]." [Rumsfeld's *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*]

A military aide conceded that it was "hard to get a good case," but the Pentagon would "sweep it all up. Things related and not." (This is reminiscent of CIA Director Tenet's exclamation to President Bush that it would be a "slam dunk" to provide intelligence to the American people to make the case for war.)

The *Post* merely cites Rumsfeld as stating "I did not lie. The far less dramatic truth is that we were wrong."

Similarly, President Bush in his *Decision Points* argues that Powell's speech "reflected the considered judgment of intelligence agencies at home and around the world," which totally distorts the intelligence picture.

Along those same lines, former national secretary adviser Condoleezza Rice contends that the CIA believed that Saddam Hussein reconstituted his biological and chemical weapons capability and even Iraq's nuclear capability, although the intelligence community repeatedly told the Bush administration that the Iraqis were several years away from developing a nuclear weapon. [Rice's *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*]

The sole source on intelligence on the mobile biological labs was an agent code-named "Curveball," who was in fact trading disinformation to the Germans in order to obtain citizenship. The Germans warned the CIA against using Curveball's information, but they were ignored.

When David Kay, the chief of the Iraq Survey Group, told Tenet that Curveball was a liar and that Iraq had no mobile labs or other illicit weapons, Kay was assigned to a windowless office without a working telephone.

All of these memoirs by senior Bush administration officials blame faulty intelligence for the decision to go to war, but the speeches of these principals, including the President and the Vice President, confirm that they

were willing to go beyond evidence to justify a state of “permanent war” against terrorism.

The speeches, which were given careful review inside the White House as well as in the intelligence community, provide excellent evidence of the Bush administration taking phony intelligence to the Congress, the American people, and the international community.

The *Washington Post* could have used the memoirs to depict a President presiding over a national security process marked by incoherent decision-making and policy drift, a dysfunctional national security process riven by tensions between the Pentagon and the State Department, and a politicized Central Intelligence Agency.

Instead, the *Post* used the memoirs to present the “fighting” over the case for war as a food fight between the President and his key decision-makers. Nearly a decade after the start of the unconscionable Iraq War, the American people are entitled to know more about the deceit of its key leaders and the national security decision-making process.

Melvin A. Goodman, a former CIA analyst, is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University. His most recent book is *National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism* (City Lights Publisher, February 2013).
