

Still Evading the Truth of Iraq War

Neocons who played key roles in the Iraq War like Douglas Feith and Stephen Hadley are using the tenth anniversary to continue lying about why the invasion was ordered in the first place. Thus, they are still avoiding an examination of how the U.S. lurched into the disaster, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Documentaries, commentaries and forums marking the ten-year anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq War have been so numerous that they already have become tiresome, even though the actual anniversary of the invasion is not until next Tuesday. The repetition would nonetheless be worthwhile if it helped to inculcate and to reinforce lessons that might reduce the chance that a debacle comparable to the Iraq War will itself be repeated.

Maybe some such positive reinforcement will occur, but a problem is that the anniversary retrospectives also give renewed exposure to those who promoted the war and have a large stake in still promoting the idea that they were not responsible for foisting on the nation an expedition that was so hugely damaging to American interests.

I participated in one anniversary event earlier this week: a loosely structured on-the-record discussion, organized by the Rand Corporation and the publishers of *Foreign Policy*, involving about 20 people who had something to do with the Iraq War, whether it was starting it, fighting it, or writing about it.

The session had the admirable stated purpose of extracting lessons for the future rather than merely repeating old debates from the past. But a clear pattern throughout the event was that ten years have not diluted the house line of those most directly involved in promoting the war, including among others then-deputy national security adviser Stephen Hadley and Douglas Feith, who as an undersecretary of defense was one of the most rabid of the war promoters.

Not only did they give no hint of acknowledgment that this war of choice (and Hadley refused to accept even that characterization) was one of the worst and most inexcusable blunders in the history of U.S. foreign policy. They also stuck to the line that if there was any mistake in the origin of the war it was solely a matter of "bad intelligence" and that the only "lessons" to be learned were to distrust intelligence more or ask tougher questions about it.

Intelligence did not drive or guide the decision to invade Iraq, not by a long shot, despite the aggressive use by the Bush administration of cherry-picked

fragments of intelligence reporting in its public sales campaign for the war. Multiple realities confirm this observation. I have addressed them in detail elsewhere, but it would be useful to mention briefly the main ones.

The neoconservative champions of the war were publicly pushing for the use of military force to overthrow Saddam Hussein even in the 1990s, when they were out of power. Once they were in power in the Bush administration, the intelligence community was not saying to them anything about Iraqi weapons programs that was remotely close to an expression of alarm about such programs, much less a reason to go to war.

In its public assessments and (as investigative journalists such as Bob Woodward have reported) in closed ones as well, George Tenet and the community barely even mentioned the subject as being worthy of the policy-makers' attention. Consistent with such assessments, Secretary of State Colin Powell was saying publicly in the first year of the Bush administration that Saddam Hussein was well contained and that whatever he might be trying to do with unconventional weapons, he wasn't having much success.

It was only after the 9/11 terrorist attack drastically changed the mood of the American public and thereby created for the first time the domestic political base for the neocons to realize their regime-changing dream that the administration turned Iraqi weapons programs into a war-justifying rationale.

In rare unguarded comments, some promoters of the war let slip that this is how they were using the issue. Feith and Paul Wolfowitz each later admitted that the weapons of mass destruction issue was a convenient public selling point, not the reason the war was being launched in the first place.

Policy-makers in the administration showed no interest at all in the intelligence community's judgments about Iraq, regarding weapons programs or anything else, despite the assiduousness with which they exploited the fragments of reporting that could be woven into their public sales campaign. The administration did not ask for the infamously flawed intelligence estimate about Iraqi unconventional weapons programs, Democrats in Congress did.

Even that estimate did not support the war-making case. Among other things it contained the judgment that if Saddam did have any of those feared weapons of mass destruction he was unlikely to use them against U.S. interests or to give them to terrorists, except in the extreme case in which his country was invaded and his regime about to be overthrown.

If this judgment had a policy implication it was *not* to launch the war. The judgment directly contradicted, but did nothing to slow down, the

administration's steady stream of scary rhetoric about how in the absence of a war Saddam could give weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups.

Even if everything in the intelligence assessments about Iraqi weapons were true, this would not have constituted a case for launching an offensive war any more than it would have with China, North Korea, Pakistan, the Soviet Union or any other country which has developed nuclear weapons. This is indicated by the fact that even many people, both in the United States and abroad, who accepted the belief about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction nonetheless opposed the war.

Intelligence assessments on other aspects of Iraq constituted even less of a case for the war. In fact, some of the most important intelligence judgments were so contrary to the administration's pro-war case that the war promoters, far from being guided by those judgments, put considerable effort into trying to *discredit* them. (That's what the effort in the Vice President's office that led to the criminal case against Lewis Libby was all about.)

This was especially true of the intelligence community's judgments about terrorist connections, which contradicted the administration's phantasmagorical assertions about an "alliance" between Saddam's regime and al-Qaeda. It was also true of the community's judgments, which turned out to be much more relevant to the painful experience that the Iraq War became than were any judgments about weapons of mass destruction, about the political, security and economic mess in Iraq that was likely to follow overthrow of the regime.

The story of the United States getting into the Iraq War was, of course, not just one of what led the war's promoters to seek a war but also of how they were able to get enough other Americans to go along for the ride. But despite how much many of those other Americans, including ones in Congress who voted in favor of the war, said they hinged their position on judgments about Iraqi weapons, intelligence did not drive or guide that part of the process either.

Only a very few members of Congress bothered even to look at the infamous intelligence estimate on the subject. One of the few who did, Bob Graham, then chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, later said his reading showed to him that the intelligence judgments were not at all the same as what the administration was saying in its sales campaign. That inconsistency was one of the reasons he voted against the war resolution.

One can also do a thought experiment by imagining how events might or might not have been different if the intelligence work on this subject had been absolutely perfect. (That is well beyond the reach of even the most magnificent intelligence service, but it can serve as an imaginary reference point.)

“Perfect” in this case could be equated with what was in the exhaustive post-invasion report later compiled based on exploiting all the on-the-ground evidence that had been unavailable to analysts before the war. That product, known as the Duelfer report after the officer who was in charge of most of its preparation, concluded that Saddam intended to reactivate his nuclear and other unconventional weapons programs once he got out from under the already-weakening international sanctions.

If prewar intelligence assessments had said the same things as the Duelfer report, the administration would have had to change a few lines in its rhetoric and maybe would have lost a few member’s votes in Congress, but otherwise the sales campaign, which was much more about Saddam’s intentions and what he “could” do than about extant weapons systems, would have been unchanged. The administration still would have gotten its war. Even Dick Cheney later cited the actual Duelfer report as support for the administration’s pro-war case.

And yet, despite the voluminous record that bad intelligence was not why the United States went to war in Iraq, the myth that it was persists partly because the war promoters also keep promoting the myth.

The event in which I participated this week demonstrates this hazard of the ten-year anniversary happenings. An early write-up of the event correctly notes that there were “sharp exchanges” on this and other questions, but on this question only quotes the side of the exchange that came from Hadley and Feith.

If one wants to learn valid lessons from what happened ten years ago, the process back then was so pathological that many specific lessons about what to avoid in the future could be extracted. Many of those lessons could be subsumed into one observation: extraordinary as it may seem, there was *no* policy process at all, no options paper, no meeting in the White House Situation Room or anything else, that addressed whether going to war against Iraq was a good idea.

So it was not only the intelligence community but also other sources of information and insight, inside and outside government, that were shut out from having any impact on the decision to launch the war. Hadley denied this observation, too, muttering something about needing to keep things close-hold so as not to jeopardize the “diplomatic process.”

That just raises another myth, that the administration was trying to solve a problem through diplomacy before resorting to force, that also is belied by a substantial record, leading up to the final days in which the United States kicked international arms inspectors out of Iraq and in effect said “never mind that we didn’t get another UN resolution, we’re going to war anyway.”

What pretended to be interest in diplomacy was a charade intended mainly to placate Colin Powell and the British.

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Bureaucracy v. Bradley Manning

Awash in evidence of U.S.-inflicted civilian killings in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army intelligence analyst Bradley Manning chose action over silence, releasing thousands of documents via WikiLeaks to the public. In doing so, he violated the code of faceless bureaucratic complicity, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

The institutions of modern society – including governments, large economic structures and military forces are organized in bureaucratic fashion, that is, a form of organization that operates by means of a wide range of closely supervised departments capable of performing specific tasks in efficient ways.

This division of labor, or specialization, is carried on according to well-defined rules and regulations. Therefore, the workers in a bureaucracy (i.e., the bureaucrats) perform their tasks within a compartmentalized environment that narrows their focus to the task at hand. Potentially mitigating circumstances that might call into question the task set for the worker, or the rules governing its implementation, are almost always ignored.

The command structure of bureaucracies is hierarchical, or what is called a “vertical pyramid power structure.” This is how Max Weber, the great sociologist, [described](#) this top-down arrangement and its consequences:

“The principles of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of superiority and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher offices. Rational calculation reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself into a somewhat bigger cog. [Such an institution's] specific nature develops the more perfectly the more bureaucracy is dehumanized.”

Out of this emerges a “bureaucratic mindset.” The bureaucrat is supposed to think of his or her assigned task and how best to accomplish it. That is what is meant by “staying with the program.” The bureaucrat is not supposed to think why the task has been assigned or what its implementation might broadly mean. Like the task itself, thinking too becomes detached from any context but that generated by the bureaucracy.

This attitude is reinforced by the fact that responsibility is also compartmentalized. As long as one pursues the task efficiently, according to prescribed procedure, one is acting responsibly. Through this approach, it becomes difficult to hold any particular bureaucrat responsible for the overall impact of a policy. The task of implementation is too fragmented.

The Military Bureaucracy

No institution is a better fit for the bureaucratic structure than the military. It is a model for Weber’s “firmly ordered system of superiority and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher offices.”

Work goes on within a compartmentalized environment structured by rank and myriad rules and regulations. Action is focused on fulfilling specific orders normally without reference to outside consequences.

As a result, within the military bureaucracy thinking must always be within the box, which means it is done within the institution’s set thought-collective. Indeed, given the military’s particular environment, one that strives to shape the thought as well as the action of its participants, thinking can take on near totalitarian constraints.

The following scenario reflects this reality: Imagine a room in which two privates sit discussing some mission-related issue. Between them there is an equality of rank and so the discussion can be relatively candid. In walks a sergeant, who joins the discussion. The sergeant’s opinion can immediately supersede those of the privates and end the discussion.

We can repeat the scenario using two sergeants joined by a lieutenant or two lieutenants joined by a captain, and so on up the line. It is rank that carries the power to decide mission-related issues and not necessarily knowledge or even experience.

And, once the decision is made, the senior officer’s version of reality cannot be challenged except by someone of superior rank. His or her orders must be obeyed even if a subordinate can reasonably predict disaster as a result. Thinking outside the box and then acting on the resulting unauthorized

thoughts, opinions and conclusions is the bureaucracy's equivalent of criminal behavior.

At first it seems surprising just how few people in the military challenge its thought-collective. Today there are about 2.5 million individuals in the U.S. military (including the reserves), and the number incarcerated in military prisons with a sentence of one year or longer is (using 2007 numbers) 1,089. Relative to the incarceration rate in the U.S. civilian society this is remarkably small. The percentage of this number that represents the willful disobeying of orders (rather than the usual criminal acts such as assault or theft) is smaller still.

While at first this might seem surprising it is not on second thought. The military is not a democracy. It is the closest thing we have to a successful version of George Orwell's *1984*. The restrictive thought-collective is reinforced not only by a rigid hierarchical culture of obedience but also by carefully cultivated peer pressure. Someone who breaks out of this "box" and does so for reasons of conscience is a rare individual indeed.

The Case of Bradley Manning

Private Bradley Manning is just such an individual. I first wrote about Manning in August 2010, and here is how I described him and his situation:

Bradley Manning was an army intelligence analyst with U.S. forces in the Middle East who became deeply disturbed by what his job revealed to him. Essentially, it made him a front row witness to what he described as "incredible things, awful things." This primarily entailed the careless killing of innocent civilians. As an act of conscience he gave to the website WikiLeaks over 200,000 classified documents as well as a graphic video showing an attack on Iraqi civilians.

Manning confirmed his status as a prisoner of conscience in a statement he read at a pre-trial hearing on March 2. In the statement he described how (1) the high number of civilian deaths in Iraq, (2) the stubborn refusal of army authorities to admit to and deal with this issue, and (3) the lack of U.S. media coverage of all this "collateral damage" disturbed and "emotionally burdened" him. His response was to release the material noted above. He continued in his statement to say:

"I hoped that the public would be as alarmed as me about the conduct of the aerial weapons team crew members [this refers to a particularly egregious army helicopter attack on civilians recorded on video tape and leaked to

WikiLeaks]. I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan are targets that needed to be neutralized, but rather people who were struggling to live in a pressure cooker environment of what we call asymmetric warfare. After the release I was encouraged by the response in the media and general public.”

However, the U.S. military has shown no serious concern about what its soldiers have done, and continue to do, to civilians in the Middle East. This is because those soldiers have acted in ways compatible with the bureaucratic rules of the organization they serve.

Under these conditions the killing of civilians, no matter at what frequency or number, is deemed accidental as long as the soldier follows the military’s self-prescribed “rules of engagement.” Having done so, civilian casualties become “collateral damage.”

Therefore, no one is culpable. It is, of course, possible to force the military to change its behavior by making “collateral damage” so distasteful to the U.S. public that it becomes a political problem that civilian leaders must address. That is exactly what Bradley Manning was trying to do.

That is why the military has shown dramatic concern over what Bradley Manning has done. He has gone outside the box. He has broken free of and actually publicly challenged the military’s thought-collective.

Since the Viet Nam War the U.S. military has eschewed the draft and embedded the journalists, so as to minimize public awareness of battlefield realities. They are not now going to let one private with a conscience bring public revulsion down on their heads.

So, they have accused him of “aiding the enemy” and hope to send him to jail for the rest of his life. They hope this will be a lesson that prevents others from following in Manning’s footsteps.

It is the leaders of the military bureaucracy, and not the out-of-step private, who will probably succeed in this contest. That is because Manning’s hope that the data he released might “cause society to re-evaluate the need or even the desire to engage in counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency operations that ignore the complex dynamics of the people living in the affected environment every day” has, to date, failed. Why so?

There are some U.S. citizens who see Manning as a hero (I am one of them), and some who see him as a traitor. Manning’s target population was and still is all of the rest. Yet the sad truth is most of this remainder doesn’t care much about Manning’s fate and will, in the end, accept the government’s verdict on him.

This is how I reasoned out the situation back in 2010, and I think my conclusion is still sound: On the assumption that most people are locally focused and apolitical I conclude that this vast majority are unconcerned about the Manning case because it seems not to touch their lives. And, on the assumption that the government and its allied mass media control the information flow, I conclude that most of the minority who are aware and concerned share the official view that Manning is a traitor.

That leaves a minority of the minority who are aware of the significant implications for justice and human rights involved in this case, and who are aware of the broader contextual circumstances that led to Manning's actions and their implications for future U.S. international relations.

The prediction that this minority of a minority will total "millions," as some suggest, may be wishful thinking. But whatever the number of his sympathizers, it is far less than is needed to either obtain justice for Manning or save the United States from its own criminal policies.

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Argentina's Dapper State Terrorist

From the Archive: As Argentina's Dirty War killed some 30,000 people, including 150 Catholic priests, dictator Jorge Rafael Videla kept up good relations with Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, who admits the Church should have done more given the horrors, as described by Marta Gurvich in 1998.

By Marta Gurvich (Originally published Aug. 19, 1998)

Former Argentine president Jorge Rafael Videla, the dapper dictator who launched the so-called Dirty War in 1976, was arrested on June 9, 1998, for a particularly bizarre crime of state, one that rips at the heart of human relations.

Videla, known for his English-tailored suits and his ruthless counterinsurgency theories, stands accused of permitting – and concealing – a scheme to harvest infants from pregnant women who were kept alive in military prisons only long enough to give birth.

According to the charges, the babies were taken from the new mothers, sometimes by late-night Caesarean sections, and then distributed to military families or shipped to orphanages. After the babies were pulled away, the mothers were removed to another site for their executions.

Yet, after Videla's arrest in 1998, Argentina was engulfed in a legal debate over whether Videla could be judged a second time for these grotesque kidnappings. After democracy was restored in Argentina, Videla was among the generals convicted of human rights crimes, including "disappearances," tortures, murders and kidnappings.

In 1985, Videla was sentenced to life imprisonment at the military prison of Magdalena. But, on Dec. 29, 1990, amid rumblings of another possible military coup, President Carlos Menem pardoned Videla and other convicted generals. Many politicians considered the pardons a pragmatic decision of national reconciliation that sought to shut the door on the dark history of the so-called Dirty War when the military slaughtered as many as 30,000 Argentines.

Relatives of the victims, however, continued to uncover evidence that children taken from their mothers' wombs sometimes were being raised as the adopted children of their mothers' murderers. For 15 years, a group called Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo demanded the return of these kidnapped children, estimated to number as many as 500.

After years of detective work, the Grandmothers documented the identities of 256 missing babies. Of those, however, only 56 children were ever located and seven of them had died. Aided by breakthroughs in genetic testing, the Grandmothers succeeded in returning 31 children to their biological families. Thirteen were raised jointly by their adoptive and biological families and the remaining cases bogged down in court custody battles.

The Baby Harvest

But the baby kidnappings gained a new focus in 1997 with developments in the case of Silvia Quintela, a leftist doctor who attended to the sick in shanty towns around Buenos Aires. On Jan. 17, 1977, Quintela was abducted off a Buenos Aires street by military authorities because of her political leanings. At the time, Quintela and her agronomist husband Abel Madariaga were expecting their first child.

According to witnesses who later testified before a government truth commission, Quintela was held at a military base called Campo de Mayo, where she gave birth to a baby boy. As in similar cases, the infant then was separated from the mother. What happened to the boy is still not clear, but Quintela reportedly was

transferred to a nearby airfield.

There, victims were stripped naked, shackled in groups and dragged aboard military planes. The planes then flew out over the Rio de la Plata or the Atlantic Ocean, where soldiers pushed the victims out of the planes and into the water to drown.

After democracy was restored in 1983, Madariaga, who had fled into exile in Sweden, returned to Argentina and searched for his wife. He learned about her death and the birth of his son. Madariaga came to suspect that a military doctor, Norberto Atilio Bianco, had kidnapped the boy. Bianco had overseen Caesarean sections performed on captured women, according to witnesses. He then allegedly drove the new mothers to the airport.

In 1987, Madariaga demanded DNA testing of Bianco's two children, a boy named Pablo and a girl named Carolina, both of whom were suspected children of disappeared women. Madariaga thought Pablo might be his son. But Bianco and his wife, Susana Wehrli, fled Argentina to Paraguay, where they resettled with the two children. Argentine judge Roberto Marquevich sought the Biancos' extradition, but Paraguay balked for 10 years.

Finally, faced with demands from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Paraguay relented. Bianco and Wehrli were returned to face kidnapping charges. But the two children – now young adults with small children of their own – refused to return to Argentina or submit to DNA testing.

Though realizing they were adopted, Pablo and Carolina did not want to know about the fate of their real mothers and did not want to jeopardize the middle-class lives they had enjoyed in the Bianco household. [For more details about this case, see "[Baby-Snatching: Argentina's Dirty War Secret.](#)"]

As an offshoot of the Bianco case, Judge Marquevich ordered the arrest of Videla. The judge accused the former dictator of facilitating the snatching of Pablo and Carolina as well as four other children. Marquevich found that Videla was aware of the kidnappings and took part in a cover-up of the crimes. The aging general was placed under house arrest.

In a related case, another judge, Alfredo Bagnasco, began investigating whether the baby-snatching was part of an organized operation and thus a premeditated crime of state. According to a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Argentine military viewed the kidnappings as part of a larger counterinsurgency strategy.

"The anguish generated in the rest of the surviving family because of the absence of the disappeared would develop, after a few years, into a new

generation of subversive or potentially subversive elements, thereby not permitting an effective end to the Dirty War," the commission said in describing the army's reasoning for kidnapping the infants of murdered women.

The kidnapping strategy conformed with the "science" of the Argentine counterinsurgency operations. The Dirty War's clinical anti-communist practitioners refined torture techniques, sponsored cross-border assassinations and collaborated with organized-crime elements.

According to government investigations, the military's intelligence officers advanced Nazi-like methods of torture by testing the limits of how much pain a human being could endure before dying. The torture methods included experiments with electric shocks, drowning, asphyxiation and sexual perversions, such as forcing mice into a woman's vagina. Some of the implicated military officers had trained at the U.S.-run School of the Americas.

'Pink Panther'

Behind this Dirty War and its excesses stood the slight, well-dressed, gentlemanly figure of Gen. Videla. Called "bone" or the "pink panther" because of his slim build, Videla emerged as a leading theorist for international anti-communist strategies in the mid-1970s.

Videla's tactics were emulated throughout Latin America and were defended by prominent American right-wing politicians, including Ronald Reagan. [Regarding Reagan's personal embrace of "dirty war" tactics, see Consortiumnews.com's "[How Reagan Promoted Genocide.](#)"]

Videla rose to power amid Argentina's political and economic unrest in the early-to-mid 1970s. "As many people as necessary must die in Argentina so that the country will again be secure," he declared in 1975 in support of a "death squad" known as the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance. [See *A Lexicon of Terror* by Marguerite Feitlowitz.]

On March 24, 1976, Videla led the military coup which ousted the ineffective president, Isabel Peron. Though armed leftist groups had been shattered by the time of the coup, the generals still organized a counterinsurgency campaign to eradicate any remnants of what they judged political subversion.

Videla called this "the process of national reorganization," intended to reestablish order while inculcating a permanent animosity toward leftist thought. "The aim of the Process is the profound transformation of consciousness," Videla announced.

Along with selective terror, Videla employed sophisticated public relations

methods. He was fascinated with techniques for using language to manage popular perceptions of reality. The general hosted international conferences on P.R. and awarded a \$1 million contract to the giant U.S. firm of Burson Marsteller. Following the Burson Marsteller blueprint, the Videla government put special emphasis on cultivating American reporters from elite publications.

“Terrorism is not the only news from Argentina, nor is it the major news,” went the optimistic P.R. message.

Since the jailings and executions of dissidents were rarely acknowledged, Videla felt he could deny government involvement. He often suggested that the missing Argentines were not dead, but had slipped away to live comfortably in other countries.

“I emphatically deny that there are concentration camps in Argentina, or military establishments in which people are held longer than is absolutely necessary in this ... fight against subversion,” he told British journalists in 1977. [See *A Lexicon of Terror*.]

A Crusade

In a grander context, Videla and the other generals saw their mission as a crusade to defend Western Civilization against international communism. They worked closely with the Asian-based World Anti-Communist League and its Latin American affiliate, the Confederacion Anticomunista Latinoamericana [CAL].

Latin American militaries collaborated on projects such as the cross-border assassinations of political dissidents. Under one project, called Operation Condor, anti-government political leaders – centrist and leftist alike – were shot or bombed in Buenos Aires, Rome, Madrid, Santiago and Washington. Operation Condor often employed CIA-trained Cuban exiles as assassins.

In 1980, four years after the coup, the Argentine military exported its terror tactics into neighboring Bolivia. There, Argentine intelligence operatives helped Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie and major drug lords mount a brutal putsch, known as the Cocaine Coup.

The bloody operation turned Bolivia into the first modern drug state and expanded cocaine smuggling into the United States. [For more details, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Videla’s anything-goes anti-communism struck a responsive chord with the Reagan administration which came to power in 1981. President Reagan quickly reversed President Jimmy Carter’s condemnation of the Argentine junta’s record on human rights. Reagan’s U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick even hosted the urbane

Argentine generals at an elegant state dinner.

More substantively, Reagan authorized CIA collaboration with the Argentine intelligence service for training and arming the Nicaraguan Contras. The Contras were soon implicated in human rights atrocities and drug smuggling of their own. But the Contras benefitted from the Reagan administration's own "perception management" operation which portrayed them as "the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers." [For details, see Parry's *Lost History*.]

In 1982, however, the Argentine military went a step too far. Possibly deluded by its new coziness with Washington, the army invaded the British-controlled Falkland Islands. Given the even-closer Washington-London alliance, the Reagan administration sided with Margaret Thatcher's government, which crushed the Argentine invaders in a brief war.

The humiliated generals relinquished power in 1983. Then, after democratic elections, the new president Raul Alfonsin created a truth commission to collect evidence about the Dirty War crimes. The grisly details shocked Argentines and the world.

Ongoing Echo

Some Argentine analysts believe that repercussions from that violent era continued for decades, with organized crime rampant and corruption reaching into the highest levels of the government, especially during the administration of President Menem, who pardoned Videla and other practitioners of the Dirty War.

Menem's sister-in-law, Amira Yoma, reportedly was under investigation in Spain for money-laundering. A reporter investigating mob ties was burned alive. Relatives of a prosecutor examining gold smuggling were tortured by having their faces mutilated. Jewish targets have been bombed.

Michael Levine, a former star agent for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration who served in Argentina, was not surprised by this violent carryover into the 1990s. "The same militaries and police officers that committed human rights crimes during the coup are holding positions in the same forces," Levine said.

Elsewhere, foreign governments whose citizens were victims of the Dirty War also pressed individual cases against Videla and other former military leaders. These countries included Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Denmark and Honduras.

Yet, in Argentina, Menem's pardon protected Videla and the others from facing any significant punishment for their acts, at least for a time. Menem refused to extradite the former military leaders to other countries. He also dragged his heels on purging the armed forces of thousands of officers implicated in Dirty

War offenses.

So, the lingering case implicating Videla in harvesting babies from doomed women represented one of the last chances for Argentina to hold the dictator accountable – and to come to grips with the terrible crimes of its recent past.

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Editor's Update: In 1998, Videla was found guilty of kidnapping in the case of Silvia Quintela and other “disappeared.” He spent 38 days in prison before being transferred to house arrest due to health concerns. However, after the election of President Nestor Kirchner in 2003, another effort was made to hold the Dirty War leaders accountable.

On Dec. 22, 2010, Videla was sentenced to life in a civilian prison for the deaths of 31 prisoners, killed after his 1976 coup. Then, on July 5, 2012, Videla was sentenced to 50 years in prison for the systematic kidnapping of children during his tenure.

The precise role of Cardinal Bergoglio in the Dirty War remains something of a mystery. His defenders claim he privately appealed to Videla to spare the lives of two ex-Jesuit priests who had been abducted and tortured, while his critics claim that his dismissal of the two priests made them easy targets for the military. [See Christopher Dickey's [account](#) at The Daily Beast.]

In October 2012, Bergoglio issued a collective apology for the behavior of Argentina's Catholic Church during the Dirty War, but blamed both the military and leftists for the carnage, angering some Argentines because the overwhelming majority of human rights crimes were committed by the military against unarmed political dissidents.

During the Dirty War, much of the Catholic hierarchy actively supported the military junta and opposed public resistance to the security forces as they “disappeared” alleged leftists off the streets. Some Catholic leaders who did speak out against the repression were themselves targeted for death.

At the time, Bergoglio was one of the Church's rising stars who chose the politically (and physically) safe posture of maintaining silence, lodging no public protest, staying on good terms with the junta and now asserting that he undertook a few private efforts to save lives.

Yet, after the Dirty War, amid efforts to exact some accountability for the political slaughter, Bergoglio resisted cooperation with human right trials and, when he finally testified in 2010, his answers were evasive, human rights

attorney Myriam Bregman told the Associated Press.

Regarding the practice of harvesting babies from doomed women and then farming them out to military families, Bergoglio has insisted that he didn't know of the practice until well after the Dirty War was over.

However, Estela de la Cuadra family contradicted Bergoglio's claim of ignorance in citing a 1977 case in which Jesuits in Rome urged Bergoglio to intervene regarding the kidnapping of Estela's sister Elena, who was five months' pregnant. The police reported back that the woman was a communist and thus was killed but her baby girl was first delivered and then given to an "important" family.

"Bergoglio has a very cowardly attitude when it comes to something so terrible as the theft of babies," Estela de la Cuadra told the AP. "The question is how to save his name, save himself. But he can't keep these allegations from reaching the public. The people know how he is."
