

Israel's Hand in Guatemala's Genocide

From the Archive: As world leaders struggle to praise the late Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, infamous for abetting the 1982 massacre of Palestinian civilians at Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon, another grim chapter of Sharon's history was his role in the Guatemalan genocide, Robert Parry wrote in 2013.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on May 23, 2013)

At the height of Guatemala's mass slaughters in the 1980s, including genocide against the Ixil Indians, the Reagan administration worked with Israeli officials to provide helicopters that the Guatemalan army used to hunt down fleeing villagers, according to documentary and eyewitness evidence.

During testimony at the recent genocide trial of former Guatemalan dictator Efraim Rios Montt, one surprise was how often massacre survivors cited the Army's use of helicopters in the scorched-earth offensives.

Journalist Allan Nairn, who covered the war in Guatemala and attended the Rios Montt trial, said in [an interview](#), "one interesting thing that came out in the trial, as witness after witness testified, was a very substantial number of them talked about fleeing into the mountains and being bombed, attacked and machine gunned from U.S. planes and helicopters.

"At the time this was going on, I was aware this was happening in some cases, but from the testimony of the witnesses, it sounded like these attacks from U.S. planes and helicopters were more frequent than we realized at the time. That's an example of how we don't know the whole story yet how extensive the U.S. complicity was in these crimes."

Part of the mystery was where did Guatemala's UH-1H "Huey" helicopters come from, since the U.S. Congress continued to resist military sales to Guatemala because of its wretched human rights record. The answer appears to be that some helicopters were arranged secretly by President Ronald Reagan's National Security Council staff through Israeli intelligence networks.

Rios Montt began pressing the United States for 10 UH-1H helicopters in June 1983, as his military campaign was ramping up. Since Guatemala lacked the U.S. Foreign Military Sales credits or the cash to buy the helicopters, Reagan's national security team looked for unconventional ways to arrange the delivery of the equipment.

On Aug. 1, 1983, NSC aides Oliver North and Alfonso Sapia-Bosch [reported](#) to National Security Advisor William P. Clark that his deputy Robert "Bud"

McFarlane was planning to exploit his Israeli channels to secure the helicopters for Guatemala, according to a document that I discovered at Reagan's presidential library.

"With regard to the loan of ten helicopters, it is [our] understanding that Bud will take this up with the Israelis," wrote North and Sapia-Bosch. "There are expectations that they would be forthcoming. Another possibility is to have an exercise with the Guatemalans. We would then use US mechanics and Guatemalan parts to bring their helicopters up to snuff."

By then, McFarlane had a long and intimate relationship with Israeli intelligence involving various backdoor deals. [For more on McFarlane's Israeli channels, see Consortiumnews.com's ["How Neocons Messed Up the Mideast."](#)]

Israeli Channel

McFarlane's approach to Israel for the helicopters was successful, according to former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe, who described some of the history behind Israel's activities in Guatemala in his 1992 memoir, *Profits of War*.

Ben-Menashe traced the Israeli arms sales to Guatemala back to a private network established in the 1970s by Gen. Ariel Sharon during a gap when Sharon was out of the government. Sharon's key representative in Guatemala was a businessman named Pesach Ben-Or, and through that channel, Israel supplied military gear to Guatemala's security services in the 1980s, Ben-Menashe wrote.

(In the early 1980s, Sharon was Israel's Minister of Defense collaborating with the Reagan administration on secret shipments of weapons to Iran and claiming a green light for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which led to the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in 1982, carried out by Israel's Christian Lebanese allies under Sharon's protection.)

In an interview in May 2013, Ben-Menashe said the Israelis supplied a total of six helicopters to the Guatemalans along with computers and software to keep track of alleged subversives who could then be identified and executed. Ben-Menashe said he learned of the mass slaughters during his travels to Guatemala and reported back to his Israeli superiors about the atrocities involving the equipment that they had authorized. The response, he said, was concern but inaction.

"They weren't for killing these people, not at all," Ben-Menashe said. "But they thought their interest was to help the Reagan people. If the Reagan people wanted it [the equipment sent to Guatemala], they would do it. [They thought,] 'this is bad, but is it any of our business? Our American friends are asking for

our help, so we should help them.'”

After our phone interview had ended, Ben-Menashe called me back to stress that the Israelis were unaware of the genocidal nature of the Guatemalan military campaigns against the Ixil Indians, although the Israelis did recognize that they were assisting in mass murders of dark-skinned Guatemalans; the distinction being that the Israelis did not identify the slaughters as genocide against a specific racial or ethnic group.

“As we saw it, they [Guatemalan military authorities] were targeting all non-white villagers who were sitting on fertile lands that the white Guatemalans wanted,” he said, adding that when he reported this information to his superiors, “the Israelis rolled their eyes [in dismay] but said, ‘this is what our friends in the Reagan administration want.’” [For more on Ben-Menashe’s work for Israeli intelligence, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege* and *America’s Stolen Narrative*.]

Besides the helicopters for hunting down villagers who fled into the jungles, the computer equipment and the sophisticated software made the Guatemalan killing machine vastly more efficient in the towns and cities. A former U.S. Green Beret operating in Guatemala once told me that he witnessed Guatemalan security forces stopping buses and inputting identification numbers of the passengers into a computer to select those who would be dragged off to the side of the road and summarily shot.

Death Lists

From first-hand reporting in Guatemala, journalist Nairn also observed the security advantages gained from detailed death lists. Nairn said soldiers under Gen. Otto Perez Molina, the current president, “described how they would go into town armed with death lists provided them by G2 military intelligence, death lists of people who were suspected of being collaborators of the guerrillas or critics of the army.

“They told how they would strangle people with lassos, slit women open with machetes, shoot people in the head in front of the neighbors, use U.S. planes, helicopters and 50 gram bombs to attack people if they fled into the hills.”

Nairn said, “The U.S. had also arranged for Israel to step in and become the principal supplier of hardware to the Guatemalan army, in particular assault rifles, the Galil automatic rifle. This was because the administration was running into problems with Congress, which wouldn’t go along with a lot of their plans to aid the Guatemalan military, so they did an end run by using the government of Israel.”

Though the focus of the case against Rios Montt has been the genocide inflicted on Ixil villages in the northern highlands where some 626 villages were eradicated by the Guatemalan military those massacres were only part of the estimated 200,000 killings perpetrated by right-wing Guatemalan regimes since a CIA-sponsored coup ousted an elected government in 1954.

The bloodbath was at its worst in the 1980s during Ronald Reagan's presidency as he encouraged the anti-leftist slaughters that claimed the lives of some 100,000 Guatemalans. Reagan expanded his support for the Guatemalan security forces even though the CIA was keeping his administration informed of the systematic killings underway.

Another document that I discovered in the archives of the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California, revealed that Reagan and his national security team in 1981 agreed to supply military aid to Guatemala's dictators so they could pursue the goal of exterminating not only "Marxist guerrillas" but people associated with their "civilian support mechanisms." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ronald Reagan: Accessory to Genocide](#)."]]

As for Rios Montt, who ruled Guatemala for 17 especially bloody months in 1982-83, the now 87-year-old ex-general was convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity by a criminal court on May 10, 2013, and was sentenced to 80 years in prison.

But that conviction was overturned on a 3-2 vote by Guatemala's Constitutional Court which is still dominated by allies of the military and the oligarchy. As for the Reagan administration officials and the Israelis who aided and abetted Rios Montt and his fellow generals, there is no indication that any accountability will be exacted.

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](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

If Gov. Christie Had NSA's Metadata

Exclusive: New Jersey Gov. Christie's Bridge-gate scandal is a reminder that

unscrupulous politicians can abuse their powers in unexpected and extraordinary ways, which underscores the need to put tight legal constraints on the NSA's surveillance powers, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Even those who trust President Barack Obama not to exploit the National Security Agency's vast stockpiles of metadata to wreak havoc on some political rival or citizen should take pause at the evidence that New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's staff orchestrated a massive traffic jam as apparent retribution to Democratic officeholders who got in his way.

Until the evidence of this skullduggery traced back to Christie's personal staff last week, the Republican governor was considered a favorite to win the GOP presidential nomination and was given a decent chance to win the White House in 2016.

So, what if the evidence of his staff's role hadn't come to light and the American people had no idea how vindictive a President Christie or his staff might be? What if Mr. "I Am Not a Bully" had gotten control of the NSA's metadata detailing how virtually every American moves through life leaving behind electronic traces of their personal routines, habits and secrets?

There was a reason why John Adams and other Founders sought a government of laws, not of men. They understood that all sorts of people were likely to achieve power during the course of a nation's history and that while some would respect the rights of others some surely would abuse their powers.

Laws were needed to constrain how far a powerful person could go in such abuse by holding out the possibility of legal accountability. In a nation of laws, even the highest official could be brought down by engaging in some egregious misuse of power.

But the current danger is worse than the Founders could have ever imagined. The NSA's surveillance capabilities are so far-reaching and intimidating that they could be a gateway to a terrifying land of Big Brother if someone like Chris Christie got his hands on those levers.

What would it mean for the Republic if a President Christie (or someone like him) knew all the intimate secrets of almost everyone? That is why former NSA contractor Edward Snowden referred to the NSA's surveillance programs as "turnkey tyranny," i.e. technology that could create a tyranny at the turn of a key.

All it would take is for one President to give the nod to his or her

subordinates to direct those extraordinary powers against some troublesome politician, judge or citizen. Suddenly, that person's life would be laid bare before the NSA bureaucrats to be examined in detail.

As former NSA analysts have said, the crunching of the metadata from phone calls, e-mails and other electronic activities could reveal marital difficulties, health problems, job troubles, questionable associations and a great deal more.

It would then be relatively easy for an unscrupulous President to have his or her henchmen wield this information in the most destructive way delivered anonymously to a suspicious spouse or a frightened boss or a hostile newspaper editor or an ambitious prosecutor. The target would likely not even know what was going on. Any suspicion that the damaging disclosures had come from on high would be ridiculed as paranoid.

If such a question were raised at, say, a news conference, a President Christie might laugh it off by joking, "Sure, I was the guy sitting in a cubicle at the NSA with earphones on!" Much like he did when he joshed about being the workman moving the cones to shut off several access lanes to the George Washington Bridge last September.

Only some persistent local journalists and determined state legislators pierced through the official denials to secure the evidence from Christie's office, showing that his deputy chief of staff Bridget Ann Kelly had ordered Christie's appointees on the Port Authority to create a traffic nightmare for the people of Fort Lee, New Jersey, presumably as political retaliation against some official who had crossed Christie either by refusing to endorse his reelection or over a legislative dispute.

'Time for Some Traffic Problems'

Last summer, in the midst of Christie's reelection campaign, Kelly sent an e-mail to top Port Authority official David Wildstein that said: "Time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee." Wildstein responded: "Got it." Then, starting on Sept. 9, lanes from Fort Lee onto the George Washington Bridge were shut down, supposedly as part of a traffic study. A massive traffic snarl-up ensued trapping people for hours in their cars over four days until other Port Authority officials finally interceded and ordered the lanes reopened.

After the Kelly/Wildstein e-mails were made public last week, Christie insisted that he had been "blindsided" by his staff; that they had lied to him; and that he was therefore firing Kelly and distancing himself from other implicated officials. Wildstein had resigned earlier and refused last week to testify

before a New Jersey legislative panel on grounds that he might otherwise incriminate himself.

Though the behavior of Christie and his staff may be highly unusual suggesting a petty vindictiveness and a shocking insensitivity to innocent citizens Americans have seen other politicians of a similar make-up reach the Oval Office.

Christie's "Bridge-gate" has brought up unavoidable parallels to Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal and there are clearly some similarities. In 1972, Nixon also appeared headed toward an easy reelection victory when a team of burglars working for his campaign committee planted bugs inside the Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate building and then returned to plant some more on June 17, 1972, when they were caught by police. [For recent disclosures from the National Archives on Nixon's motivation, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

Nixon and his senior aides sought to contain the investigation through the November election, mocking the affair as a "third-rate burglary" and dismissing suggestions that the break-in implicated Nixon's staff (and surely not the President himself). It was only after Nixon's reelection that the work of Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and pressure from Democrats forced out the close connections between the burglars and Nixon's team.

In Christie's case, the lid was kept on the bridge closings through his reelection before it finally was pried off this month. In both cases, Nixon and Christie may have believed that their landslide reelections would have protected them from accountability, given how disruptive and divisive an impeachment battle can be.

For Nixon, however, it didn't turn out as he had hoped. Faced with impeachment in August 1974 more than two years after the break-in Nixon became the first U.S. President to resign. Christie's fate remains up in the air pending the outcome of ongoing investigations.

But the larger point is that arrogant politicians and their staffs sometimes come to see themselves as untouchables, beyond accountability. That is why John Adams and the Founders placed such a value on laws governing the behavior of officials, not trusting officials to always do the right thing.

Snowden's revelations about the breathtaking scope of the NSA's surveillance powers and the new disclosures about Christie's thuggish political operation remind us again of the Founders' timeless wisdom and the need to place strict legal limits on the NSA's spying.

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](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Mandela Movie Faces Long Oscar Odds

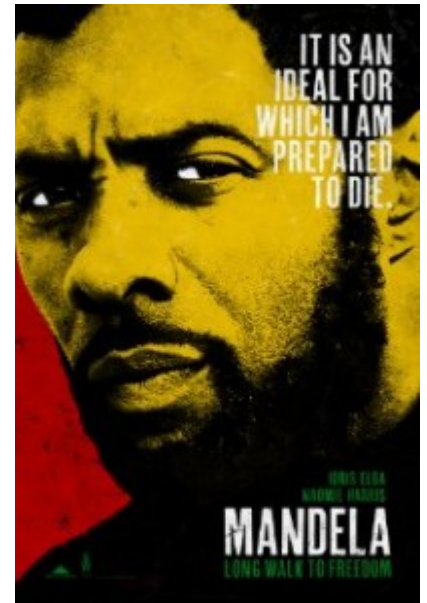
Only a month ago, Nelson Mandela's death brought much of the world together to honor his legacy in overturning South Africa's white supremacist regime. But the new film about his life may get short shrift as the movie-award season opens, says Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

The whole world recognized and paid tribute to South African icon Nelson Mandela when he died at age 95 on Dec. 5, 2013. Ninety-one heads of state attended his funeral. The UN General Assembly organized a special tribute. Mandela's legacy is secure in official circles, and in the hearts of South Africans, but will there be recognition in the place that seems to matter to the media even more: Hollywood?

The Oscar nominations are due on Thursday, and early on, it seemed, as if "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom," the epic movie about the world's most revered icon was a sure thing for Oscar consideration. Most of the big newspaper reviewers loved it and its American distributor Harvey Weinstein has specialized

in influencing Academy decisions.



But of late, it lost its buzz and appears to be treated as an also-ran, buried by the hype machine for other movies. The entertainment media no longer seems to take the movie seriously, as Oscar-worthy. All the focus is on other films and the big U.S. stars.

The producers of the movie, made in South Africa, albeit with a British director, Judson Chadwick, and Oscar-celebrated screenwriter William Nicholson, were earlier hopeful that they had a good chance of winning at least one of the statuettes that quickly translate into a place in cinema history and more bang at the box-office.

For them, however, making this film was always far more than a commercial endeavor. In my book, *Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*, producer Anant Singh shares his passion for the subject and explains that it took 16 years and as many as 50 versions of script to put together the money and the cast.

He was making it not only to honor Mandela but also tell the story of his country's liberation. His team worked as independents with no major studio behind them.

They were also very commercial in their calculations, doing what they felt they had to do to get it made and get it out, also conscious of deferring to Hollywood formula, by focusing on the love story between Nelson and Winnie and, in effect, depoliticizing the story of a very political figure once known for saying, "The Struggle Is My Life."

On the Left, there was disappointment as the review in Britain's *Counterfire* expressed this way: "This absence of ideological perspective is probably to be

expected but the concluding effect of the film is to produce a sanitized and depoliticized Mandela that does not help us comprehend his massive impact. The apolitical Mandela in the film is the one neoliberal warmongers like Blair, Bush and Obama are happy to eulogize.”

I am sure if the filmmakers had tried to please ideologues on all sides, the movie probably wouldn't have even been made, much less released, with the small fortune in marketing monies required to be considered competitive. That said, it did make news with lots of star-studded attention grabbing premieres and some media write-ups, especially, after Mandela died while a Royal screening was underway in England.

The movie itself got less attention than its stars and its connection with a well-known leader. Some say that's because of the movie format, as in this review by Wamuwi Mbaob in South Africa:

“The biopic genre further restricts the possible creative directions the narrative can take, and the result is a movie that tries to do a lot but ultimately does not succeed in rising above the textbook facts to give us the story of this larger-than-life man. At every point, the discerning audience member feels dissatisfied, goaded by annoying inaccuracies, and manhandled by soaring strings doing their frenetic best to convince us that this is the story as it should be told. It isn't.”

Most of the South African reviews were positive, but this reviewer found the film not South African enough, unhappy that it was made for a global audience.

Other critics were even less enamored, putting it down as too conventional. Writes reviewer John Beifuss, “a no-show in best-of-2013 year-end critics' polls, ‘Mandela’ is not vivid, daring or passionate enough to exploit, for better or worse, the unexpected current-events context of its arrival. It is not an adequate tribute to South Africa's first black president nor is it a disgrace to his memory. It is a rather conventional and pious movie biography that misses the opportunity to be more to use art and imagination to bring insight to a life history that otherwise might be better served with a straight documentary.”

That was a comment that raised my eyebrows because I made six documentaries about Mandela and had been documenting the making and meaning of the movie. Dramas and documentaries can rarely be fused. Terms like “might be better served” are vague and often pretentious.

What these critics rarely do is to get specific and say what they wanted to see, or how they felt the story could have been handled differently. Perhaps that's not their job but vague prescriptions are often a cop-out. There is often no

substance in their calls for more substance.

Also, the Academy voters are hardly hostile or naive about the topic. Mandela was a big hit when he visited Los Angeles on his national trip in 1990. A reception drew every major black star in town, including many pols, liberal luminaries and sports icons such as Muhammad Ali. Mandela received the key to the city and a rally packed the old Los Angeles Coliseum. The Artists for a Free South Africa has been based in Los Angeles and kept some public attention focused on the "beloved country's" artists and needs.

Years ago, one of my Mandela documentaries was passed over for Oscar consideration, but the Academy, out of interest I am sure, hosted a screening in L.A. under their auspices. I was pleased to be there and got lots of positive comments from the audience. That was the closest I got to the Oscar people.

So, yes, there is sympathy in Tinsel Town, but, perhaps, not much more because commerce, celebrities and movie grosses not newsy issues are always topic #1 in the industry city. Movies about the great and the good have an uphill battle in challenging Hollywood product that, this year again, seems more mesmerized by big-time crime dramas like "American Hustle" and "The Wolf of Wall Street" that make con men appear cool and groovy. Their only morality is amorality.

Those movies feature better-known stars and more made in the USA storylines, aided and abetted by even bigger and more recent advertising budgets. "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" didn't have the deep pockets to compete with the blitzkrieg of new ads when the film went into "wide release" on Christmas Day. By then, it was already considered old.

The Golden Globes did give "Mandela" three nominations, one to Idris Elba, the male lead, and two for music, one to the Irish band U2 for the hardly political upbeat end song, "Ordinary Love," which did win the award for "best original song."

Getting the band to the awards ceremony enhanced that show's appeal, but everyone knows the Globes reflect the picks of many self-styled foreign correspondents, not died-in-the-wool movie industry Americans.

The NAACP image awards also honored Elba. In Britain, the film academy nominated "Mandela" for the best *British* film of the year, even though it was primarily made by Videovision, a South African company. The director, screenwriter and a producer did hail from England. Curiously, the nationalism and racial identity embedded in those awards represented the very values that the real Mandela rejected.

"12 Years a Slave," which won the Golden Globe for best drama, is the "black"

movie that seems to have the best chance to win an Oscar. In that drama, a white man played by superstar Brad Pitt took action to free one African-American who had been kidnapped into slavery. There was no people's revolt overturning an unjust system.

The movie's major appeal may be its careful depiction of slavery and the lack of attention this historic human rights crime has received in the land of slavery. Recall black activist H. Rap Brown once observing "violence is as American as cherry pie."

"Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" features violence too, but oppressive state violence, more than individual bad guys whom you can hate. Apartheid may be a more recent crime than slavery but the latter is part of a U.S history that some Americans not all, for sure are ashamed of. We know more about it than what happened in faraway Africa albeit with U.S. support. (Apartheid was modeled partially on our brutal system of relocating Indians to reservations.)

Slavery as a subject is also presented only as American, while Mandela dramatizes a freedom struggle in Africa that has not been front and center much lately in a news system that routinely treats Africa as a backward continent of wars, massacres and coups.

Mandela was one of the few African leaders even reported about in the U.S. news media and the fact that his death occasioned considerable coverage may have reinforced the idea that his story has been over-exposed. Why see a movie version when the real man was on TV, etc.?

That's a perception that certainly cut into the film's ticket sales. If "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" is not on the Oscar list, it will be gone from theaters quickly, probably to return on TV movie channels and video. See it while you still can. You will be glad you did!

Danny Schechter made documentaries about the making and meaning of the movie "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom." He also wrote the book, *Madiba AtoZ: the Many Faces of Nelson Mandela* (Madibabook.com) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org
