

Should NATO Protect the Palestinians?

Israeli hardliners have long rejected the idea of a foreign peacekeeping force on the West Bank because it might restrict Israel's freedom to attack Palestinians. But such a proposal is now on the table and has put Prime Minister Netanyahu on the spot, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The suggestion by Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas that a NATO force might be indefinitely stationed in a Palestinian state in the West Bank to meet Israeli security concerns sounds at first glance like a can of worms that the United States and its allies would best avoid, and perhaps it is.

It would seem to put Western soldiers in the middle of a conflict so long and so bitter that, even with a peace settlement, of which such a deployment would be one of the terms, some distrust and doubt would linger and some extremist wild cards would still be in play. But the idea should not be peremptorily discarded. Maybe the North Atlantic Council should discuss it.

Consider first of all the basic reasonableness of what Abbas was saying. He explicitly recognized that Israel has legitimate security concerns about what would be going on in a Palestinian state on the West Bank, concerns that some sort of security force would have to assuage. He also disavowed creation of a Palestinian army, for that or any other purpose.

But for Israel's military to stick around in the territories would be indistinguishable from continued occupation, an end to which is a central part of what the peace negotiations are supposed to be about. That leaves the alternative of a third party force.

Consider also precedents, especially that of the peace observation force in the Sinai known as the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), which was created pursuant to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The MFO is not a NATO mission, but the United States and several other members of NATO participate in it.

(More attention should be given to the Egyptian-Israeli peace as a precedent in other respects as well, including demonstrating what trading land for peace really means and avoiding extraneous negotiation-inhibiting demands such as insisting that one side characterize the other in terms of a particular ethnic or religious group.)

It's not as if a NATO force in the West Bank would be likely to get in some big fight in the course of performing the mission of helping to keep Israel safe

from foreign threats. Much of what the current Israeli government has been saying about such threats is fundamentally phony, especially as it relates to a supposed need to maintain defenses in the Jordan River valley. No NATO force would have to repel an invasion force coming across the river.

Individual acts of terrorism are a different matter, of course. But it cannot be said often enough that a peace agreement that ends the occupation would drastically change the bidding and change the motivation and likelihood of attacks on Israel of any sort.

There would remain the possibility of a terrorist act by a rejectionist fringe, and the stickiest situation in which a NATO force might find itself would come in the wake of such an attack. Israel might then chomp at the bit to do what it has done several times on different azimuths in the past, which is to send its forces across a border and wreak some destruction, with its only hesitation this time being that some NATO troops would be in the way.

If that caused Israeli decision-makers to think twice before launching yet another attack, that would be a good thing. It would be hard for anyone to make a case that Israel's previous similar attacks, when all their secondary effects are taken into account, have reduced terrorism. It would be easier to make a case that such attacks have strengthened the roots and motivations of further terrorism. It is an ironclad case that such attacks have increased the total number of innocent people killed.

Meanwhile, some positive reaction to Abbas's suggestion, as a supplement or modification to whatever was in General Allen's security plan, might have some modest additional benefits.

One would be in effect to call the bluff of the Netanyahu government regarding whether some of what it terms a security need is really just a desire to cling to land. That government is unlikely to change any of its positions in response, but perhaps a few more Israelis would be stimulated to think hard about whether endless conflict and reliance on repeated use of their own military resources is how they really want to live.

Such a gesture might also lend one small bit of balance to the U.S. tilt toward the Israeli negotiating position and thus reduce the chance that the Palestinians will feel they have no choice but to abandon the peace talks. The gesture, moreover, would be one taken in the name of Israeli security.

Finally, if the proposal ever were implemented it might give the old Cold War alliance something useful to do. It would probably be better than endlessly waging a war in Afghanistan.

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When the CIA's Empire Struck Back

Exclusive: In the mid-1970s, Rep. Otis Pike led a brave inquiry to rein in the excesses of the national security state. But the CIA and its defenders accused Pike of recklessness and vowed retaliation, assigning him to a political obscurity that continued to his recent death, as Lisa Pease recounts.

By Lisa Pease

Otis Pike, who headed the House of Representatives' only wide-ranging and in-depth investigation into intelligence agency abuses in the 1970s, died on Jan. 20. A man who should have received a hero's farewell passed with barely a mention. To explain the significance of what he did, however, requires a solid bit of back story.

Until 1961, U.S. intelligence agencies operated almost entirely outside the view of the mainstream media and with very limited exposure to members of Congress. But then, the CIA had its first big public failure in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

CIA Director Allen Dulles lured an inexperienced President John F. Kennedy into implementing a plan hatched under President Dwight Eisenhower. In Dulles's scheme, the lightly armed invasion by Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs was almost surely doomed to fail, but he thought Kennedy would then have no choice but to send in a larger military force to overthrow Fidel Castro's government. However, Kennedy refused to commit U.S. troops and later fired Dulles.

Despite that embarrassment, Dulles and other CIA veterans continued to wield extraordinary influence inside Official Washington. For instance, after Kennedy's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, Dulles became a key member of the Warren Commission investigating Kennedy's murder. Though the inquiry was named after U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, it should have been called the Dulles Commission because Dulles spent many more hours than anyone else hearing testimony.

One might say the Warren Commission was the first formal investigation of the CIA, but it was really a cursory inquiry more designed to protect the CIA's

reputation, aided by Dulles's strategic position where he could protect the CIA's secrets. Dulles never told the other commission members the oh-so-relevant fact that the CIA had been plotting to knock off leftist leaders for a decade, nor did he mention the CIA's then contemporary assassination plots against Castro. Dulles made sure the commission never took a hard look in the CIA's direction.

Fighting Exposure

In 1964, another wave of attention came to the CIA from Random House's publication of *The Invisible Government*, by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, who sought to expose, albeit in a friendly way, some of the CIA's abuses and failures. Despite this mild treatment, the CIA considered buying up the entire printing, but ultimately decided against it. That CIA leaders thought to do that should have rung alarm bells, but no one said anything.

Then, in 1967, an NSA scandal broke, but then the NSA referred to the National Student Association. Ramparts, the cheeky publication of eccentric millionaire Warren Hinckle, found out that the CIA had recruited ranking members of the student group and involved some of them in operations abroad.

By 1967, the CIA also was using these student leaders to spy on other students involved in Vietnam War protests, a violation of the CIA's charter which bars spying at home. A reluctant Congress had approved the creation of the CIA in 1947 on the condition that it limit its operations to spying abroad for fear it would become an American Gestapo.

However, when these illegal operations were exposed, no one went to jail. No one was punished. Sure, the CIA was embarrassed again, and CIA insiders who consider maintaining the secrets of the agency as nearly a religious endeavor might have felt simply exposing such operations was punishment enough. But it wasn't.

During the Vietnam War, the CIA ran a wide range of controversial covert operations, including the infamous Phoenix assassination program which targeted suspected Viet Cong sympathizers for death. Meanwhile, Air America operations in Laos implicated the agency in heroin trafficking. The CIA and its operatives also continued to entangle themselves in sensitive activities at home.

President Richard Nixon recruited a team of CIA-connected operatives to undertake a series of politically inspired break-ins, leading to the arrest of five burglars inside the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972. Nixon then tried to shut down the investigation by citing national security and the CIA's involvement, but the ploy failed.

After more than two years of investigations and with the nation getting a

frightening look into the shadowy world of government secrecy Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, 1974. He was subsequently pardoned by his successor, Gerald Ford, who had served on the Warren Commission and had become America's first unelected president, having been appointed Vice President after Nixon's original Vice President, Spiro Agnew, was forced to resign in a corruption scandal.

The intense public interest about this secretive world of intelligence opened a brief window at mainstream news organizations for investigative journalists to look into stories that had long been off limits. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published revelations in the New York Times about CIA scandals, known as the "family jewels" including domestic spying operations. The CIA's Operation Chaos not only spied on and disrupted anti-Vietnam War protests but undermined media organizations, such as Ramparts, that had dared expose CIA abuses.

Ford tried to preempt serious congressional investigations by forming his own "Rockefeller Commission," led by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. It included such blue bloods as former Warren Commission member David Belin, Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon and California Gov. Ronald Reagan, in other words people who were sympathetic to the CIA and who knew how to keep secrets. But the commission was widely seen in the media as an attempt by Ford to whitewash the CIA's activities.

Congressional Inquiries

So the Senate convened a committee led by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, called the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities but more commonly known as the "Church Committee," and the House convened a House Select Committee on Intelligence Oversight led originally by Lucien Nedzi, D-Michigan.

Some House Democrats, Rep. Michael Harrington of Massachusetts in particular, complained that Nedzi was too friendly with the CIA and challenged his ability to lead a thorough investigation. Nedzi had been briefed two years earlier on some of the CIA's illegal activities and had done nothing. Although the House voted overwhelmingly (and disturbingly) to keep this friend of the CIA in charge of the committee examining CIA activities, under pressure, Nedzi finally resigned.

Rep. Otis Pike, D-New York, took over what became known as the "Pike Committee." Under Pike, the committee put some real teeth into the investigation, so much so that Ford's White House and the CIA went on a public-relations counterattack, accusing the panel and its staff of recklessness. The CIA's own historical review acknowledged as much:

“Confrontation would be the key to CIA and White House relationships with the Pike Committee and its staff. [CIA Director William] Colby came to consider Pike a ‘jackass’ and his staff ‘a ragtag, immature and publicity-seeking group.’ The CIA Review Staff pictured the Pike staffers as ‘flower children, very young and irresponsible and naive.’

“Donald Gregg, the CIA officer responsible for coordinating Agency responses to the Pike Committee, remembered, ‘The months I spent with the Pike Committee made my tour in Vietnam seem like a picnic. I would vastly prefer to fight the Viet Cong than deal with a polemical investigation by a Congressional committee, which is what the Pike Committee [investigation] was.’

“As for the White House, it viewed Pike as ‘unscrupulous and roguish.’ Henry Kissinger, while appearing to cooperate with the committee, worked hard to undermine its investigations and to stonewall the release of documents to it. Relations between the White House and the Pike Committee became worse as the investigations progressed.

“The final draft report of the Pike Committee reflected its sense of frustration with the Agency and the executive branch. Devoting an entire section of the report to describing its experience, the committee characterized Agency and White House cooperation as ‘virtually nonexistent.’ The report asserted that the executive branch practiced ‘footdragging, stonewalling, and deception’ in response to committee requests for information. It told the committee only what it wanted the committee to know. It restricted the dissemination of the information and ducked penetrating questions.”

Punishing Pike

Essentially, the CIA and the White House forbade the Pike report’s release by leaning on friendly members of Congress to suppress the report, which a majority agreed to do. But someone leaked a copy to CBS News reporter Daniel Schorr, who took it to the Village Voice, which published it on Feb. 16, 1976.

Mitchell Rogovin, the CIA’s Special Counsel for Legal Affairs, threatened Pike’s staff director, saying, “Pike will pay for this, you wait and see We [the CIA] will destroy him for this. There will be political retaliation. Any political ambitions in New York that Pike had are through. We will destroy him for this.”

And, indeed, Pike’s political career never recovered. Embittered and disillusioned by the failure of Congress to stand up to the White House and the CIA, Pike did not seek reelection in 1978 and retired into relative obscurity.

But what did Pike’s report say that was so important to generate such hostility? The answer can be summed up with the opening line from the report: “If this

Committee's recent experience is any test, intelligence agencies that are to be controlled by Congressional lawmaking are, today, beyond the lawmaker's scrutiny."

In other words, Otis Pike was our canary in the coal mine, warning us that the national security state was literally out of control, and that lawmakers were powerless against it.

Pike's prophetic statement was soon ratified by the fact that although former CIA Director Richard Helms was charged with perjury for lying to Congress about the CIA's cooperation with ITT in the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende, Helms managed to escape with a suspended sentence and a \$2,000 fine.

As Pike's committee report stated: "These secret agencies have interests that inherently conflict with the open accountability of a political body, and there are many tools and tactics to block and deceive conventional Congressional checks. Added to this are the unique attributes of intelligence – notably, 'national security,' in its cloak of secrecy and mystery – to intimidate Congress and erode fragile support for sensitive inquiries.

"Wise and effective legislation cannot proceed in the absence of information respecting conditions to be affected or changed. Nevertheless, under present circumstances, inquiry into intelligence activities faces serious and fundamental shortcomings.

"Even limited success in exercising future oversight requires a rethinking of the powers, procedures, and duties of the overseers. This Committee's path and policies, its plus and minuses, may at least indicate where to begin."

The Pike report revealed the tactics that the intelligence agencies had used to prevent oversight, noting the language was "always the language of cooperation" but the result was too often "non-production." In other words, the agencies assured Congress of cooperation, while stalling, moving slowly, and literally letting the clock run out on the investigation.

The Pike Committee, alone among the other investigations, refused to sign secrecy agreements with the CIA, charging that as the representatives of the people they had authority over the CIA, not the other way around.

Pike's Recommendations

The Pike Committee issued dozens of recommendations for reforming and revamping the U.S. intelligence community. They included:

- A House Select Committee on Intelligence be formed to conduct ongoing

oversight of intelligence agencies. This now exists, although it has often fallen prey to the same bureaucratic obfuscations and political pressures that the Pike Committee faced.

– “All activities involving direct or indirect attempts to assassinate any individual and all paramilitary activities shall be prohibited except in time of war.” We are now in a perpetual state of war against the (so we are told) omnipresent threat of terrorism, meaning that assassinations (or “targeted killings”) have become a regular part of American statecraft.

– “The existence of the National Security Agency (which to that time had been a state secret) should be recognized by specific legislation and that such legislation provide for civilian control of NSA. Further, it is recommended that such legislation specifically define the role of NSA with reference to the monitoring of communications of Americans.” As NSA contractor Edward Snowden exposed last year, the NSA is collecting metadata on the communications of virtually every American and many others across the globe.

– A true Director of Central Intelligence be established to coordinate information sharing among the numerous intelligence agencies and reduce redundant collection of data. After the 9/11 attacks, Congress created a new office, the Director of National Intelligence, to oversee and coordinate the various intelligence agencies, but the DNI has struggled to assert the office’s authority over CIA and other U.S. intelligence fiefdoms.

Not all of the Pike Committee’s recommendations appeared sound. For example, the committee recommended abolishing the Defense Intelligence Agency and transferring all control of covert operations to the CIA. President Kennedy had expressly created the DIA as a way to take unregulated CIA activities out of the hands of the cowboys who ran unaccountable operations with untraceable funds and put them under the control of the (then) more orderly and hierarchically controlled Pentagon.

Possibly, the most important recommendation, because it could have such a far-reaching impact, was this: “The select committee recommends that U.S. intelligence agencies not covertly provide money or other valuable considerations to persons associated with religious or educational institutions, or to employees or representatives of any journal or electronic media with general circulation in the United States or use such institutions or individuals for purposes of cover. The foregoing prohibitions are intended to apply to American citizens and institutions.”

In other words, the Pike Committee wanted the CIA to stop paying journalists and academics to cover for U.S. intelligence and to stop providing cover for U.S.

spying and propaganda operations. The committee also recommended that intelligence agencies “not covertly publish books or plant or suppress stories in any journals or electronic media with general circulation in the United States.”

Otis Pike’s final and lasting legacy may be that he tried to warn the country that the American Republic and its democratic institutions were threatened by an out-of-control national security state. He thought there might be a solution if Congress asserted itself as the primary branch of the government (as the Framers had intended) and if Congress demanded real answers and instituted serious reforms.

But the Ford administration’s successful pushback against Pike’s investigation in 1975-76 a strategy of delay and deflection that became a model for discrediting and frustrating subsequent congressional inquiries into intelligence abuses represented a lost opportunity for the United States to protect and revive its democracy.

Though Otis Pike failed to achieve all that he had hoped and his contribution to the Republic faded into obscurity the reality that he uncovered has become part of America’s cultural understanding of how this secretive element of the U.S. government functions. You see it in the “Bourne” movies, where an abusive national security elite turns on its own agents, and in ABC’s hit series “Scandal,” where a fictional branch of the CIA, called B613, is accountable to no one and battles even the President for dominance.

At one point in the TV show, the head of B613 refuses to give information to the President, saying: “That’s above your pay grade, Mr. President.” It’s a storyline that Otis Pike would have understood all too well.

Lisa Pease is a writer who has examined issues ranging from the Kennedy assassination to voting irregularities in recent U.S. elections.

A Rare Indictment of US Atrocities

Since World War II, the U.S. government has routinely sidestepped blame for the slaughters that have accompanied American foreign policy. One of the few high-profile condemnations occurred when playwright Harold Pinter accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, as Gary G. Kohls recalls.

By Gary G. Kohls

British playwright Harold Pinter won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005. For me, his acceptance speech was an important glimpse into and sort of a summary of – the innumerable documentable U.S. war crimes that were facilitated by the multinational corporations, national security apparatus and political and military leaders that shaped American foreign policy since World War II.

True patriots must be honest about the dishonorable, dark side of their own nations. In the case of the United States and its willing accomplice, his own Great Britain Pinter (who died in 2008) saw that reality clearly.

There are obvious parallels between Pinter's powerful speech and Martin Luther King Jr.'s courageous "Beyond Vietnam" speech of April 4, 1967, almost four decades earlier. Both indicted American foreign policy, but while King focused on the Vietnam bloodbath then being waged by President Lyndon Johnson Pinter concentrated on the slaughters in Central America under President Ronald Reagan and on the Iraq War, which was launched by President George W. Bush with the smooth-talking help of British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

In Pinter's Nobel speech, after reflecting on some of his own plays and their often ambiguous grasp of what is real and what is not the playwright declared that in the realm of history and politics, "As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?"

Pinter continued, "Before I come back to the present I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny, which is all that time will allow here.

"Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

"My contention here is that the U.S. crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognized as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now.

"Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States' actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

"Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favored method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity

conflict.’ Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop.

“It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beaten to death – the same thing – and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed.”

The Nicaraguan Slaughter

Recalling a particularly egregious case under President Ronald Reagan, Pinter said: “The tragedy of Nicaragua was a highly significant case. I choose to offer it here as a potent example of America’s view of its role in the world, both then and now. I was present at a meeting at the U.S. embassy in London in the late 1980s. The United States Congress was about to decide whether to give more money to the Contras in their campaign against the state of Nicaragua.

“I was a member of a delegation speaking on behalf of Nicaragua but the most important member of this delegation was a Father John Metcalf. The leader of the U.S. body was Raymond Seitz (then number two to the ambassador, later ambassador himself).

“Father Metcalf said: ‘Sir, I am in charge of a parish in the north of Nicaragua. My parishioners built a school, a health center, a cultural center. We have lived in peace. A few months ago a Contra force attacked the parish. They destroyed everything: the school, the health center, the cultural center. They raped nurses and teachers, slaughtered doctors, in the most brutal manner. They behaved like savages. Please demand that the U.S. government withdraw its support from this shocking terrorist activity.’

“Raymond Seitz had a very good reputation as a rational, responsible and highly sophisticated man. He was greatly respected in diplomatic circles. He listened, paused and then spoke with some gravity. ‘Father,’ he said, ‘let me tell you something. In war, innocent people always suffer.’ There was a frozen silence. We stared at him. He did not flinch.

“‘Innocent people, indeed, always suffer.’ Finally somebody said: ‘But in this case “innocent people” were the victims of a gruesome atrocity subsidized by your government, one among many. If Congress allows the Contras more money further atrocities of this kind will take place. Is this not the case? Is your government not therefore guilty of supporting acts of murder and destruction upon the citizens of a sovereign state?’

“Seitz was imperturbable. ‘I don’t agree that the facts as presented support

your assertions,' he said. As we were leaving the Embassy a U.S. aide told me that he enjoyed my plays. I did not reply. I should remind you that at the time President Reagan made the following statement: 'The Contras are the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.'

"The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution. The Sandinistas weren't perfect. They possessed their fair share of arrogance and their political philosophy contained a number of contradictory elements. But they were intelligent, rational and civilized. They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society.

"The death penalty was abolished. Hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken peasants were brought back from the dead. Over 100,000 families were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. A quite remarkable literacy campaign reduced illiteracy in the country to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated."

Denouncing 'Subversion'

Pinter continued, "The United States denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion. In the view of the U.S. government, a dangerous example was being set. If Nicaragua was allowed to establish basic norms of social and economic justice, if it was allowed to raise the standards of health care and education and achieve social unity and national self-respect, neighboring countries would ask the same questions and do the same things. There was of course at the time fierce resistance to the status quo in El Salvador.

"I spoke earlier about 'a tapestry of lies' which surrounds us. President Reagan commonly described Nicaragua as a 'totalitarian dungeon.' This was taken generally by the media, and certainly by the British government, as accurate and fair comment. But there was in fact no record of death squads under the Sandinista government. There was no record of torture. There was no record of systematic or official military brutality.

"No priests were ever murdered in Nicaragua. There were in fact three priests in the government, two Jesuits and a Maryknoll missionary. The totalitarian dungeons were actually next door, in El Salvador and Guatemala. The United States had brought down the democratically elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and it is estimated that over 200,000 people had been victims of successive military dictatorships.

“Six of the most distinguished Jesuits in the world were viciously murdered at the Central American University in San Salvador in 1989 by a battalion of the Atlacatl regiment trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA. That extremely brave man Archbishop Romero was assassinated while saying mass. It is estimated that 75,000 people died.

“Why were they killed? They were killed because they believed a better life was possible and should be achieved. That belief immediately qualified them as communists. They died because they dared to question the status quo, the endless plateau of poverty, disease, degradation and oppression, which had been their birthright.

“The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. ‘Democracy’ had prevailed.

“But this ‘policy’ was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened.

“United States supported and in many cases engendered every right-wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven.”

A Memory Hole

Referring to the extraordinary ability of the U.S. government and the U.S. media to whitewash these bloody realities, Pinter said: “Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to U.S. foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn’t know it.

“It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them.

“You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It’s a

brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.

"I put to you that the United States is without doubt the greatest show on the road. Brutal, indifferent, scornful and ruthless it may be but it is also very clever. As a salesman it is out on its own and its most saleable commodity is self love. It's a winner. Listen to all American presidents on television say the words, 'the American people,' as in the sentence, 'I say to the American people it is time to pray and to defend the rights of the American people and I ask the American people to trust their president in the action he is about to take on behalf of the American people.'

"It's a scintillating stratagem. Language is actually employed to keep thought at bay. The words 'the American people' provide a truly voluptuous cushion of reassurance. You don't need to think. Just lie back on the cushion. The cushion may be suffocating your intelligence and your critical faculties but it's very comfortable. This does not apply of course to the 40 million people living below the poverty line and the 2 million men and women imprisoned in the vast gulag of prisons, which extends across the US.

"The United States no longer bothers about low intensity conflict. It no longer sees any point in being reticent or even devious. It puts its cards on the table without fear or favor. It quite simply doesn't give a damn about the United Nations, international law or critical dissent, which it regards as impotent and irrelevant. It also has its own bleating little lamb tagging behind it on a lead, the pathetic and supine Great Britain."

Moral Questions

Given this grim reality, Pinter asked: "What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days conscience? A conscience to do not only with our own acts but to do with our shared responsibility in the acts of others? Is all this dead? Look at Guantanamo Bay. Hundreds of people detained without charge for over three years, with no legal representation or due process, technically detained forever.

"This totally illegitimate structure is maintained in defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not only tolerated but hardly thought about by what's called the 'international community.' This criminal outrage is being committed by a country, which declares itself to be 'the leader of the free world.' Do we think about the inhabitants of Guantanamo Bay?

"What does the media say about them? They pop up occasionally a small item on page six. They have been consigned to a no man's land from which indeed they may

never return. At present many are on hunger strike, being force-fed, including British residents. No niceties in these force-feeding procedures. No sedative or anesthetic. Just a tube stuck up your nose and into your throat. You vomit blood. This is torture.

“What has the British Foreign Secretary said about this? Nothing. What has the British Prime Minister said about this? Nothing. Why not? Because the United States has said: to criticize our conduct in Guantanamo Bay constitutes an unfriendly act. You’re either with us or against us. So Blair shuts up.

“The invasion of Iraq was a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law. The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies upon lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public; an act intended to consolidate American military and economic control of the Middle East masquerading as a last resort all other justifications having failed to justify themselves as liberation.

“A formidable assertion of military force responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands and thousands of innocent people. We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery, degradation and death to the Iraqi people and call it ‘bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East.’

“How many people do you have to kill before you qualify to be described as a mass murderer and a war criminal? One hundred thousand? More than enough, I would have thought. Therefore it is just that Bush and Blair be arraigned before the International Criminal Court of Justice. But Bush has been clever. He has not ratified the International Criminal Court of Justice.

“Therefore if any American soldier or for that matter politician finds himself in the dock Bush has warned that he will send in the Marines. But Tony Blair has ratified the Court and is therefore available for prosecution. We can let the Court have his address if they’re interested. It is Number 10, Downing Street, London.

“Death in this context is irrelevant. Both Bush and Blair place death well away on the back burner. At least 100,000 Iraqis were killed by American bombs and missiles before the Iraq insurgency began. These people are of no moment. Their deaths don’t exist. They are blank. They are not even recorded as being dead. ‘We don’t do body counts,’ said the American General Tommy Franks.

“Early in the invasion there was a photograph published on the front page of British newspapers of Tony Blair kissing the cheek of a little Iraqi boy. ‘A

grateful child,' said the caption. A few days later there was a story and photograph, on an inside page, of another four-year-old boy with no arms. His family had been blown up by a missile. He was the only survivor. 'When do I get my arms back?' he asked. The story was dropped.

"Well, Tony Blair wasn't holding him in his arms, nor the body of any other mutilated child, nor the body of any bloody corpse. Blood is dirty. It dirties your shirt and tie when you're making a sincere speech on television."

Pinter concluded his speech with these words: "I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us – the dignity of man."

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Ronald Reagan: Worst President Ever?

From the Archive: Ronald Reagan, who was born on Feb. 6, 1911, ranks among the most honored U.S. presidents of modern times with his name etched into public buildings across the country. Even Democrats shy from criticizing his legacy. But is this Reagan worship deserved, Robert Parry asked in 2009.

By Robert Parry (Originally published June 3, 2009)

There's been talk that George W. Bush was so inept that he should trademark the phrase "Worst President Ever," though some historians would bestow that title on pre-Civil War President James Buchanan. Still, a case could be made for putting Ronald Reagan in the competition.

Granted, the very idea of rating Reagan as one of the worst presidents ever will infuriate his many right-wing acolytes and offend Washington insiders who have made a cottage industry out of buying some protection from Republicans by lauding the 40th President.

But there's a growing realization that the starting point for many of the catastrophes confronting the United States today can be traced to Reagan's

presidency. There's also a grudging reassessment that the "failed" presidents of the 1970s Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter may deserve more credit for trying to grapple with the problems that now beset the country, despite their other shortcomings as leaders.

Nixon, Ford and Carter won scant praise for addressing the systemic challenges of America's oil dependence, environmental degradation, the arms race, and nuclear proliferation all issues that Reagan essentially ignored and that now threaten America's future.

Despite egregious abuses of power, Nixon helped create the Environmental Protection Agency; he imposed energy-conservation measures; he opened the diplomatic door to communist China. Nixon's administration also detected the growing weakness in the Soviet Union and advocated a policy of *détente* (a plan for bringing the Cold War to an end or at least curbing its most dangerous excesses).

After Nixon's resignation in the Watergate scandal, Ford continued many of Nixon's policies, particularly trying to wind down the Cold War with Moscow. However, confronting a rebellion from Reagan's Republican Right in 1976, Ford abandoned "*détente*."

Ford also let hard-line Cold Warriors (and a first wave of young intellectuals who became known as neoconservatives) pressure the CIA's analytical division to begin exaggerating the Soviet menace, and he promoted a new generation of hard-liners, including Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, into key government jobs.

After defeating Ford in 1976, Carter injected more respect for human rights into U.S. foreign policy, a move some scholars believe put an important nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union, leaving it hard-pressed to justify the repressive internal practices of the East Bloc. Carter also emphasized the need to contain the spread of nuclear weapons, especially in unstable countries like Pakistan.

Domestically, Carter pushed a comprehensive energy policy and warned Americans that their growing dependence on foreign oil represented a national security threat, what he famously called "the moral equivalent of war."

However, powerful vested interests both domestic and foreign managed to exploit the shortcomings of these three presidents to sabotage any sustained progress. By 1980, Reagan had become a pied piper luring the American people away from the tough choices that Nixon, Ford and Carter had defined.

Cruelty with a Smile

With his superficially sunny disposition and a ruthless political strategy of

exploiting white-male resentments Reagan convinced millions of Americans that the threats they faced were: African-American welfare queens, Central American leftists, a rapidly expanding Evil Empire based in Moscow, and the do-good federal government.

In his First Inaugural Address in 1981, Reagan declared that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”

When it came to cutting back on America’s energy use, Reagan’s message could be boiled down to the old reggae lyric, “Don’t worry, be happy.” Rather than pressing Detroit to build smaller, fuel-efficient cars, Reagan made clear that the auto industry could manufacture gas-guzzlers without much nagging from Washington.

The same with the environment. Reagan intentionally staffed the Environmental Protection Agency and the Interior Department with officials who were hostile toward regulation aimed at protecting the environment. George W. Bush didn’t invent Republican hostility toward scientific warnings of environmental calamities; he was just picking up where Reagan left off.

Reagan pushed for deregulation of industries, including banking; he slashed income taxes for the wealthiest Americans in an experiment known as “supply side” economics, which held falsely that cutting rates for the rich would increase revenues and eliminate the federal deficit.

Over the years, “supply side” would evolve into a secular religion for many on the Right, but Reagan’s budget director David Stockman once blurted out the truth, that it would lead to red ink “as far as the eye could see.”

While conceding that some of Reagan’s economic plans did not work out as intended, his defenders including many mainstream journalists still argue that Reagan should be hailed as a great President because he “won the Cold War,” a short-hand phrase that they like to attach to his historical biography.

However, a strong case can be made that the Cold War was won well before Reagan arrived in the White House. Indeed, in the 1970s, it was a common perception in the U.S. intelligence community that the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was winding down, in large part because the Soviet economic model had failed in the technological race with the West.

That was the view of many Kremlinologists in the CIA’s analytical division. Also, I was told by a senior CIA’s operations official that some of the CIA’s best spies inside the Soviet hierarchy supported the view that the Soviet Union was headed toward collapse, not surging toward world supremacy, as Reagan and his foreign policy team insisted in the early 1980s.

The CIA analysis was the basis for the détente that was launched by Nixon and Ford, essentially seeking a negotiated solution to the most dangerous remaining aspects of the Cold War.

The Afghan Debacle

In that view, Soviet military operations, including sending troops into Afghanistan in 1979, were mostly defensive in nature. In Afghanistan, the Soviets hoped to prop up a pro-communist government that was seeking to modernize the country but was beset by opposition from Islamic fundamentalists who were getting covert support from the U.S. government.

Though the Afghan covert operation originated with Cold Warriors in the Carter administration, especially National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the war was dramatically ramped up under Reagan, who traded U.S. acquiescence toward Pakistan's nuclear bomb for its help in shipping sophisticated weapons to the Afghan jihadists (including a young Saudi named Osama bin Laden).

While Reagan's acolytes cite the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan as decisive in "winning the Cold War," the counter-argument is that Moscow was already in disarray and while failure in Afghanistan may have sped the Soviet Union's final collapse it also created twin dangers for the future of the world: the rise of al-Qaeda terrorism and the nuclear bomb in the hands of Pakistan's unstable Islamic Republic.

Trade-offs elsewhere in the world also damaged long-term U.S. interests. In Latin America, for instance, Reagan's brutal strategy of arming right-wing militaries to crush peasant, student and labor uprisings left the region with a legacy of anti-Americanism that is now resurfacing in the emergence of populist leftist governments.

In Nicaragua, for instance, Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega (whom Reagan once denounced as a "dictator in designer glasses") is now back in power. In El Salvador, the leftist FMLN won the last national election (and led the first round of balloting in the 2014 election). Indeed, across the region, hostility to Washington is now the rule, creating openings for China, Iran, Cuba and other American rivals.

In the early 1980s, Reagan also credentialed a young generation of neocon intellectuals, who pioneered a concept called "perception management," the shaping of how Americans saw, understood and were frightened by threats from abroad.

Many honest reporters saw their careers damaged when they resisted the lies and distortions of the Reagan administration. Likewise, U.S. intelligence analysts

were purged when they refused to bend to the propaganda demands from above.

To marginalize dissent, Reagan and his subordinates stoked anger toward anyone who challenged the era's feel-good optimism. Skeptics were not just honorable critics, they were un-American defeatists or in Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick's memorable attack line they would "blame America first."

Under Reagan, a right-wing infrastructure also took shape, linking media outlets (magazines, newspapers, books, etc.) with well-financed think tanks that churned out endless op-eds and research papers. Plus, there were attack groups that went after mainstream journalists who dared disclose information that poked holes in Reagan's propaganda themes.

In effect, Reagan's team created a faux reality for the American public. Civil wars in Central America between impoverished peasants and wealthy oligarchs became East-West showdowns. U.S.-backed insurgents in Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan were transformed from corrupt, brutal (often drug-tainted) thugs into noble "freedom-fighters."

With the Iran-Contra scandal, Reagan also revived Richard Nixon's theory of an imperial presidency that could ignore the nation's laws and evade accountability through criminal cover-ups. That behavior also would rear its head again in the war crimes of George W. Bush. [For details on Reagan's abuses, see Robert Parry's *Lost History* and *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Wall Street Greed

The American Dream also dimmed during Reagan's tenure. While he played the role of the nation's kindly grandfather, his operatives divided the American people, using "wedge issues" to deepen grievances especially of white men who were encouraged to see themselves as victims of "reverse discrimination" and "political correctness."

Yet even as working-class white men were rallying to the Republican banner (as so-called "Reagan Democrats"), their economic interests were being savaged. Unions were broken and marginalized; "free trade" policies shipped manufacturing jobs abroad; old neighborhoods were decaying; drug use among the young was soaring.

Meanwhile, unprecedented greed was unleashed on Wall Street, fraying old-fashioned bonds between company owners and employees. Before Reagan, corporate CEOs earned less than 50 times the salary of an average worker. By the end of the Reagan-Bush-I administrations in 1993, the average CEO salary was more than 100 times that of a typical worker. (At the end of the Bush-II administration, that CEO-salary figure was more than 250 times that of an average worker.)

Many other trends set during the Reagan era continued to corrode the U.S. political process in the years after Reagan left office. After 9/11, for instance, the neocons reemerged as a dominant force, reprising their “perception management” tactics, depicting the “war on terror” like the last days of the Cold War as a terrifying conflict between good and evil.

The hyping of the Islamic threat mirrored the neocons’ exaggerated depiction of the Soviet menace in the 1980s and again the propaganda strategy worked. Many Americans let their emotions run wild, from the hunger for revenge after 9/11 to the war fever over invading Iraq.

Arguably, the descent into this dark fantasyland that Ronald Reagan began in the early 1980s reached its nadir in the flag-waving early days of the Iraq War. Only gradually did reality begin to reassert itself as the death toll mounted in Iraq and the Katrina disaster in 2005 reminded Americans why they needed an effective government.

Still, the disasters set in motion by Ronald Reagan continued to roll in. Bush’s Reagan-esque tax cuts for the rich blew another huge hole in the federal budget and the Reagan-esque anti-regulatory fervor led to a massive financial meltdown that threw the nation into economic chaos.

Love Reagan; Hate Bush

Ironically, George W. Bush has come in for savage criticism (much of it deserved), but the Republican leader who inspired Bush’s presidency Ronald Reagan remained an honored figure, his name attached to scores of national landmarks including Washington’s National Airport.

Even leading Democrats genuflect to Reagan. Early in Campaign 2008, when Barack Obama was positioning himself as a bipartisan political figure who could appeal to Republicans, he bowed to the Reagan mystique, hailing the GOP icon as a leader who “changed the trajectory of America.”

Though Obama’s chief point was that Reagan in 1980 “put us on a fundamentally different path” a point which may be historically undeniable Obama went further, justifying Reagan’s course correction because of “all the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, and government had grown and grown, but there wasn’t much sense of accountability.”

While Obama later clarified his point to say he didn’t mean to endorse Reagan’s conservative policies, Obama seemed to suggest that Reagan’s 1980 election administered a needed dose of accountability to the United States when Reagan actually did the opposite. Reagan’s presidency represented a dangerous escape from accountability and reality.

Still, Obama and congressional Democrats continue to pander to the Reagan myth. In 2009, as the nation approached the fifth anniversary of Reagan's death, Obama welcomed Nancy Reagan to the White House and signed a law creating a panel to plan and carry out events to honor Reagan's 100th birthday in 2011.

Obama hailed the right-wing icon. "President Reagan helped as much as any President to restore a sense of optimism in our country, a spirit that transcended politics, that transcended even the most heated arguments of the day," Obama said. [For more on Obama's earlier pandering about Reagan, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Obama's Dubious Praise for Reagan.](#)"]

Despite the grievous harm that Reagan's presidency inflicted on the American Republic and the American people, it may take many more years before a historian has the guts to put this deformed era into a truthful perspective and rate Reagan where he belongs, near the bottom of the presidential list.

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](#).
