

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in December looked at the new propaganda war against dissident news outlets, the nasty fallout from the U.S. presidential election, and the bleak winter for neocons.

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Thanking Trump for Killing TPP?

Progressives have long called for the death of the Trans-Pacific Partnership but many are holding their applause now that President Trump was the one who killed it, observes anti-war activist John V. Walsh.

By John V. Walsh

President Trump wasted little time living up to his promise to drive a stake through the heart of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the economic piece of the “Pivot to Asia,” a provocative challenge to China that was vigorously promoted by neocons and liberal interventionists, as well as President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (until she turned against the deal during the campaign).

TPP was a trade agreement that linked 12 Pacific Rim nations but pointedly excluded China in an effort to isolate and weaken it. Thus in his first week in office Trump has made a substantive move away from confrontation with China – and the overall goal of U.S. global domination.

While you might expect that such a move would elicit support and congratulations from foes of war and empire, so far there has not been much of that.

While it’s true that Trump had attacked TPP during the campaign – so his move was expected – he might well have revived it if he wanted to please corporate America and the neocons. After all, Republicans hold majorities in the House and Senate – and there are many Democrats pining to please their corporate donors who have sought to resuscitate TPP. But Trump did not do this.

Trump’s first week in office also advanced his promised détente with Russia as Sen. Marco Rubio grudgingly announced he would vote to confirm Rex Tillerson as Trump’s Secretary of State, giving Tillerson the support of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on a party-line 11-10 vote.

Exxon-Mobil CEO Tillerson has had friendly relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and has a clear understanding of Russia. Because he has not joined in the recent Russia-bashing, Tillerson has been the target of the neocons who hoped to stop him.

Rubio tried to pressure him into declaring Putin a “war criminal” during the confirmation hearings, something that Tillerson refused to do. Like Trump,

Tillerson does not seem like the kind of person who is easily pushed around.

The Hated TPP

Regarding TPP, it was opposed by many progressives and labor leaders for reasons other than a desire for peace. For many labor leaders, it was seen as one more trade deal that would encourage the export of American manufacturing jobs and thus depress domestic wages even more. Progressive activists saw it as an attack on democracy and sovereignty, written in secret and designed to give corporations and banks control over the terms of trade and laws of the land.

Democratic Party progressives opposed TPP vehemently, and so it would make sense for them to hail Trump's action. But look at the comments at that bastion of conformist progressivism, the HuffPost, and you will find that many progressives have abruptly switched and are opposing Trump and even praising TPP.

Still, there are a few commenters at least honest enough to admit the hypocrisy behind the switch.

One HuffPost commenter wrote: "OK, when Bernie [Sanders] was talking about how bad the TPP was almost every comment here [on Huffington Post] was how they didn't trust Hillary to get us out of the TPP. Now that Trump pulled us out, people are taking the opposite view. ... At least admit that this is a good thing. Does it matter who stops TPP? 9 months ago we all agreed it was a bad thing."

This stance is all too reminiscent of Democratic "progressives" who were out in force opposing the war on Iraq under George W. Bush but were nowhere to be seen when Barack Obama came into office and continued the war.

To his credit, Sen. Sanders announced his pleasure with Trump's deep-sixing TPP, according to the Guardian, which reported: "Sanders praised Trump's decision, saying TPP is 'dead and gone'... 'If President Trump is serious about a new policy to help American workers then I would be delighted to work with him.'"

Richard Trumka, head of the AFL-CIO, also praised the termination of TPP, but unlike Sanders he did not mention Trump by name, which is not surprising since most labor leaders did not back Sanders and instead threw their financial and political support behind Clinton, who only broke with TPP when she realized that it might cost her the Democratic nomination.

Sanders's and Trumka's objections to TPP are primarily economic, the concerns usually reported in the mainstream media. But the neocons and liberal hawks understood TPP's imperial aspects, as explained by neocon Sen. John McCain.

As reported by the Guardian, "Senator John McCain criticized the move.

‘President Trump’s decision to formally withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a serious mistake that will have lasting consequences for the American economy and *our strategic position in the Asia Pacific region,*’ he said.” (Emphasis added)

In East Asia, TPP has been running into troubles as well, with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and possibly even South Korea moving toward closer ties with China and away from U.S.-promoted strife between China and its neighbors.

Trump’s position – and the recent actions of East Asian countries – may be manifestations of a less confrontational approach toward the world and a new balance of power taking shape. From that point of view, President Trump, by rejecting TPP, is simply moving to negotiate the best deal possible for the U.S. in this new developing global arrangement.

The question for liberals/progressives is will they reflexively oppose Trump on everything he does or will they support what is desirable and criticize what is not. That question will come to the fore soon if Trump and Tillerson manage to fashion Détente 2.0 with Russia.

The War Party, both its neocon and liberal interventionist wings, will fiercely oppose any reduction of tensions with Russia. When that happens, will liberals/progressives support Détente 2.0 – even though it comes from Donald Trump – or will they rally behind the neocons and liberal hawks in their desire for Cold War 2.0?

John V. Walsh can be reached at John.Endwar@gmail.com .

Getting Better Results Than Law-and-Order

Exclusive: Despite President Trump’s tough law-and-order rhetoric, courts and schools are finding that “restorative justice” – as an alternative to traditional punishments – can reduce offenses and save money, writes Don Ediger.

By Don Ediger

Early next month, police in Portland, Maine, are scheduled to meet with 17 men charged with misdemeanors during a Black Lives Matter protest last July. At the meetings, they’ll discuss a wide range of subjects, from the motivation for the protests to the damage they caused. They’ll also talk about ways to prevent

similar infractions in the future.

In Spotsylvania County, Virginia, training seminars are now available for school staff who are interested in ways to discipline misbehaving students without expulsion or other punishments that can interrupt their education.

These and dozens of other programs throughout the country are part of “restorative justice,” a term that a few years ago was almost unknown. Restorative justice has several meanings, but today it usually refers to a system where people who commit offenses can avoid jail time by repairing the damage they caused.

This restorative process plays out through “community justice conferencing” between perpetrators and victims. State courts also have restitution procedures, but restitution occurs at a much higher rate when it’s the result of an agreement between the victim and offender than when it’s ordered by a judge.

Restorative justice systems are also being adopted by schools and colleges that believe misbehaving students have a better chance of reform after they talk about their problems with the people they’ve hurt and with counselors who can recommend a better course for the future.

New York City public schools adopted restorative justice several years ago and recently announced that 2015-16 was the safest year on record. Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina credits restorative justice for the improvement, citing a 70 percent reduction in student suspensions.

Her announcement was one of the few times that restorative justice has made the news, but experts in the subject say that’s likely to change in the next year or two. That’s because more courts and schools are using the process, because proponents are growing in number and because opponents have become more vocal.

Meanwhile, more universities in the U.S. and Canada are offering courses in restorative justice. The University of California at Berkeley, for example, has a Restorative Justice Center that’s on the forefront of research into the subject. In Canada, Simon Fraser University offers four courses in restorative justice.

Backers of restorative justice, including Dr. Gregory Zubacz of the Criminology & Restorative Justice Studies at Fresno Pacific University, cite reports showing that restorative justice costs less than standard court trials and that perpetrators are less likely to repeat offenses. When the cost of incarceration is included, he says, restorative justice is even cheaper when compared with the traditional system.

Zubacs points to a recent study showing that the average cost of a case that goes through the court system is \$9,500 while a case diverted to the restorative justice process costs an average of \$1,200 if the case is resolved before trial and probation for one year is ordered instead of incarceration. With incarceration, costs increase to upwards of \$30,000 per year of incarceration.

He cites a recent Berkeley study that shows recidivism is considerably less in the restorative justice system than in the traditional judicial process: within three months of the offense, 26 percent of the juveniles whose cases had not been diverted to community justice conferencing (CJC) had re-offended, while only 6 percent of those in restorative justice had re-offended.

"Then, within six months the rates were 22 percent for non-CJC participants and 4 percent for participants," Zubacs says. "At the one-year mark, the rates were 15 percent for non-CJC participants and 2 percent for CJC participants. At the two-year mark, the rates were 13 percent for non-CJC participants and 2 percent for CJC participants."

Defenders of Status Quo

Opponents include many officials in the criminal court and penal systems.

"I would be very wary of arguments that restorative justice is beneficial to all involved," says a former university official who ran the prison education system in a major Midwest state. "The sample data is so small that you cannot draw conclusions."

He also points out that most criminals are aware of the consequences of a crime, both for the victim and themselves: "Or as guys in the joint say, if you can't do the time, don't do the crime."

Proponents of restorative justice are accustomed to hearing detractors say that it's soft on crime. "In fact," says Zubacs, "it's not soft on crime since the perpetrator must take personal responsibility. Sometimes juveniles would prefer to go to jail than have to sit down with their parents present and accept responsibility for their conduct."

Criticism of restorative justice also comes from teachers. In Fresno, California, for instance, teachers have complained that some students aren't suspended regardless of how many acts of violence they commit.

Last month, the Fresno Bee reported that at least 70 of the 85 teachers at McLane High School signed a petition demanding a stricter and more consistent student discipline policy than the school's restorative justice system provides. Teachers say there are far too many disruptions and fights at the school and

that teachers are often verbally abused.

The petition in Fresno may slow further implementation of restorative justice in the state, and so may the fact that no powerful organizations are yet backing the system. That's a reason why proponents are trying to demonstrate, as in Portland, Maine, how restorative justice benefits governments and populations.

The person overseeing the process in Portland, Fred Van Liew, acknowledges that it's often difficult to persuade officials in the criminal justice system to try restorative systems. Van Liew says, "The mantra back then and often now is that you do the crime, you do the time. Many think it's being soft on the criminals. It just doesn't fit within their world view."

Van Liew has personal knowledge of the subject. He's a lawyer who served as assistant attorney general in his home state of Iowa. "In 1991," he says, "I got a letter from a minister who recommended restorative justice. I had never heard of it, so I did some research, including reading *Changing Lenses*, the book on restorative justice by the criminologist Howard Zehr. That changed my life." Zehr's book is often cited as the impetus behind the U.S. restorative justice movement.

Even before he read the book, Van Liew had doubts about the traditional justice procedure, saying: "I didn't think that a punishment-driven system made sense. So when I found out that restorative justice suggests that the proper response to wrongdoing is to repair the harm, this immediately resonated with me. I got a hold of 25 copies of *Changing Lenses* and gave them to the mediators at the neighborhood mediation centers of the county attorneys' offices. We all read the book and brought in a trainer and soon started doing intermediation in adult felony criminal cases."

That was in 1991. Today Van Liew is a leader in the restorative justice movement. He says several of the prosecutors he's working with in Maine tell him that restorative justice could make their jobs more meaningful. "It's difficult being a prosecutor," Van Liew says, "because you have to ask yourself if locking people up or fining them will really make a difference."

Zehr told me that he believes the future is bright for restorative justice but that there may be many unexpected hurdles, chiefly because it often goes counter to the legal training of prosecutors and counter to their own view of self-interest.

As head of the Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice, which he founded in 2012, Zehr speaks regularly with prosecutors and defense attorneys. During these discussions, Zehr says, both sides often express their frustration with the

current system. "Some of the attorneys tell me that restorative justice gives their careers a whole new meaning and reminds them of why they went into practice in the first place."

Don Ediger is a veteran journalist who has worked for The Miami Herald, Associated Press, BusinessWeek and the International Herald Tribune, among other publications. He is currently a resident of Miami.

Trump's Pipeline Orders Challenge Protesters

Ignoring environmental concerns and tribal objections, President Trump has put the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines back on track without even consulting the opponents, Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

On his second business day in office, President Donald Trump signed executive actions to restart construction of the controversial Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, sending shockwaves through the indigenous environmental communities at Standing Rock and their supporters across the U.S. and around the world.

After Trump's actions, I spoke with Tom Goldtooth, Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, who has worked on various grassroots environmental issues with tribal governments to develop indigenous-based environmental protection infrastructures. He was a key organizer at the Standing Rock protests that convinced President Obama to consider alternative pipeline routes.

Dennis Bernstein: Give us your initial response, your overview.

Tom Goldtooth: Yes, our network, which is a grassroots Native organization of frontline organizations and individuals and tribal members throughout North America, are very concerned. We're very alarmed at how fast he has put this ... insane initiative forward.

[...] We definitely are opposed to their recklessness, and the political motivation behind these kinds of fossil fuel development projects. As we know, [Trump] is invested in the Dakota Access Pipeline. And this is just a really bad step on his behalf, as a new-seated President of the United States.

He is violating existing, government to government policies between the United States and tribes, as federally recognized tribes. He never consulted... no one in his administration consulted with the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, nor any of the other federally recognized tribes, on this initiative that he is putting forward.

And so, we're very concerned as he's taken this executive action towards making the first step towards approving of the easement of the Dakota Access Pipeline across the Missouri River. So, you know, we're very concerned. We had a couple calls with members in the community at Standing Rock. Some people in leadership with the Oceti Sakowin Camp, as well as many of our other supporters. So, we definitely are bringing attention to this ... where's this going to end? [...]

We know that these kinds of pipelines are violating the private rights of private land owners, ranchers and farmers along that corridor, with threats of eminent domain. They were forced. It was a forced choice many of those private land owners were faced with, on these kinds of energy developments. So we're going to see that more under this privatization initiative that Trump has put forward around jobs and economic development. But at what expense?

DB: This is about the most blatant... one of the most blatant things I've seen in my lifetime. But this really does continue, shall we say, Columbus' American tradition of genocide... I mean, this is a white ruler acting on behalf of the white race. Wouldn't you say? It has to be seen that way.

TG: It's a continuation of those colonial policies that are at the foundation of the United States. And throughout past decades under social justice and environmental justice movement initiatives, we begin to try to unwrap these colonial policies built upon racism. And here we are. We got a president in office that is racist and, many people say, is a fascist. And so, this is just another continuing practice that we have to stop. We have to mobilize and stop this right now.

Like I said, this initiative is indicating to us, right now, that he doesn't respect the sovereignty rights of our American Indians and our Alaskan Natives. And this decision he's making, if he moves forward and implements this action with these executive orders, it's going to violate the treaty rights of the Lakota/Dakota people. But where's it going to stop? It's going to violate, again, all of our Native rights. So, we've spoken out against this pipeline and the Black Snake initiative, with all these pipelines. And Trump is portraying his true self, joining forces with that darkness.

There's no light in his decisions. These prairie lands are very rich culturally, and environmentally, and it's a very spiritual relationship our people have with

the land. And he's violating that, as well.

DB: It seems that all the actions at Standing Rock were, in a way, preparation for the resistance of this next level of violence. Would you say that the work that people have done will do them well, in terms of the continued resistance? And perhaps people are already thinking about that, in deep ways?

TG: Well, one of the things that many thousands of people ... that have come to Oceti Sakowin Camp and the Sacred Stone Camp, at Standing Rock, have consistently said... they said, "This is a spiritual movement." They felt that connection to the sacredness of Mother Earth. They saw that our people... both Native and non-Native, were standing in prayer, in peace.

And they saw that there is a meaning when we say "Water is life." And there's meaning when we say we have to recognize the sacredness of our Mother Earth. But, yet, we're dealing with the colonial system of laws and regulations that are often violating those natural laws, as we know it, of protection of that sacredness of Mother Earth, and Father Sky.

So, that's why we [have] definitely been opposed. And many of Trump's comments in his election process, talking about privatization—what that means to us is the privatization of nature, of land, of water. So that it gives those rights to the corporate, private sector. They have more rights than we have.

Those corporations like Dakota Access Pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, ConocoPhillips, Shell, Exxon, Chevron... they have more standing than our own first Nations, or our Native people. Whether it's in Canada in the Tar Sands, or whether it's right here in the prairie lands with these pipe lines. So, definitely we saw a wake up, as millions of people globally looking at what's going on at Standing Rock. So, we're going to utilize that movement that we're building here.

And we're going to see what Trump is going to do. We're going to demand that he pull back from implementing these executive orders. Otherwise, we're going to put that call out. There's going to be massive mobilization, and civil disobedience, on a scale that may never have been seen on newly seated presidents of the United States. So, we're going to keep this movement going. This resistance is stronger now than ever before. It's not just about Standing Rock. It's not just about this specific pipeline. It's about a whole system that is not sustainable. Something has to change and Trump is not going to be that leader that is going to be looking at the best interests of everyone's future.

DB: Final question, now. The climate denialists obviously own Trump. He's one of

them. ... This battle ... is the cutting edge ... [of] those who understand how important it is to protect the Earth and the water ... [against] these fascists who put profits over everything ... The line really is drawn at these pipelines, isn't it?

TG: It is, it is. It was that dream that that Lakota woman had years ago on this Trans-Canada Keystone XL pipeline... when that dream told her that this pipeline has a darkness to it, that it's a black snake. And that we have to, somehow, cut the head off of that snake. So the question is what do these pipelines represent? It's like a whole system that's clouding the reality of what we need to do. And now it has the leadership that is put into office.

So that's why our spiritual leaders are telling people that we need to go back to a prayer. We need to go back to having ceremonies, and this is what's going to bring in that light of understanding, of peace and compassion. And maybe that's one reason I got that Gandhi peace award, here, you know, last year.

And, there's a link between how we as modern society and this world have separated itself from that sacredness of Mother Earth. And, we need to, as a humanity, throughout the world, including President Trump, his cabinet, Congress, and state by state, county by county, city by city, and our families, we all need to look at what's going on.

We need to come back to understanding what our relationship is to these natural creative laws, these principles, that many land-based peoples still have, many of our Native peoples still have. And so, it's that critical right now. We know that the current economic system of unlimited growth is barely hanging in there, on a thread. But it's trying to survive. At what expense, though? So it is an indigenous issue, but it's all of people's issue, our future children's issue. So it's that critical.

DB: And that Gandhian prayerful, peaceful resistance, which was really engaging the youth, that's going to continue defining this movement as the resistance grows. You feel sure and certain of that?

TG: Yes, we gotta continue. We've got to continue to put our thoughts together, from our heart. Let's link up and bring together our mind and our heart. Sometimes that's the furthest distance that is created in these modern times. So we gotta let that heart speak up.

Compassion and prayer is very strong. It can move mountains. And so, as our Native spiritual leaders have said in these ceremonies ... we have to stand there in resistance, taking action in peace and prayer. And we will continue to do that at Standing Rock, with the leadership of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe,

with its elders, and their youth and their women.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

The Injustices of Manning's Ordeal

Exclusive: For exposing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, Pvt. Chelsea Manning suffered nearly seven years in prison, an ordeal President Obama finally is ending but without acting on the crimes she revealed, says Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

After overseeing the aggressive prosecution and near-seven-year incarceration of Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning, President Obama – in one of his last acts in office – commuted all but four months of her remaining sentence but ignored the fact that he had taken no action on the war crimes that Manning revealed.

At his final news conference, Obama explained his reasons for commuting Manning's record-setting 35-year sentence for leaking classified information to the public. Manning is scheduled to be released on May 17.

"Chelsea Manning has served a tough prison sentence," Obama said. "It has been my view that given she went to trial; that due process was carried out; that she took responsibility for her crime; that the sentence that she received was very disproportionate relative to what other leakers had received; and that she had served a significant amount of time; that it made sense to commute and not pardon her sentence. ... I feel very comfortable that justice has been served."

But there has been no justice for the Iraqis and Afghans whose unjustified deaths and mistreatment were exposed by the then-22-year-old Army private, known at the time as Bradley Manning. An Army intelligence analyst in Iraq, Manning sent hundreds of thousands of classified files, documents and videos, including the "Collateral Murder" video, the "Iraq War Logs," the "Afghan War Logs" and State Department cables, to WikiLeaks. Many of the items that she transmitted contained evidence of war crimes.

In an online chat attributed to Manning, she wrote, "If you had free reign over classified networks... and you saw incredible things, awful things... things that belonged in the public domain, and not on some server stored in a dark room in

Washington DC... what would you do?"

Manning went on to say, "God knows what happens now. Hopefully worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms... I want people to see the truth... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public."

Callous Killings

The Collateral Murder video depicts a U.S. Apache attack helicopter killing 12 people, including two Reuters journalists, and a passerby who stopped his van to rescue the wounded. Also wounded were two children in the van. Finally, a U.S. tank drove over one of the bodies, cutting the man in half. These acts constitute three separate war crimes under the Geneva Conventions and the U.S. Army Field Manual.

Manning fulfilled her legal duty to report war crimes. She complied with her duty to obey lawful orders but also her duty to disobey unlawful orders. Enshrined in the U.S. Army Subject Schedule No. 27-1 is "the obligation to report all violations of the law of war."

Manning went to her chain of command and asked them to investigate the Collateral Murder video and other "war porn," but her superiors refused. "I was disturbed by the response to injured children," Manning stated. She was also bothered by the soldiers depicted in the video who "seemed to not value human life by referring to [their targets] as 'dead bastards.'"

The Uniform Code of Military Justice sets forth the duty of a service member to obey lawful orders. But that duty includes the concomitant duty to disobey unlawful orders. An order not to reveal evidence of war crimes would be an unlawful order. Manning had a legal duty to expose the commission of war crimes.

Manning's revelations actually saved lives. After WikiLeaks published her documentation of Iraqi torture centers established by the United States, the Iraqi government refused Obama's request to extend immunity to U.S. soldiers who commit criminal and civil offenses there. As a result, Obama had to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq.

Although Manning pled guilty to 10 offenses that carried 20 years in prison, military prosecutors insisted on pursuing charges of aiding the enemy and violation of the Espionage Act, that carry life in prison. Manning was not allowed to present evidence that she had been acting in the public interest.

When she entered her plea, Manning stated, "I believed if the public, particularly the American public, could see this it could spark a debate on the military and our foreign policy in general as it applied to Iraq and

Afghanistan.” She added, “It might cause society to reconsider the need to engage in counter terrorism while ignoring the situation of the people we engaged with every day.”

Col. Denise Lind, the presiding judge, found Manning not guilty of the most serious charge – aiding the enemy – because the evidence failed to establish that Manning knew information she provided to WikiLeaks would reach Al Qaeda. A conviction of aiding the enemy would have sent a chilling message to the media and to whistleblowers that leaked classified information could lead to sentences of life in prison. That would deprive the public of crucial information.

Although that draconian possibility was averted, Manning still was convicted of 20 crimes, including Espionage Act offenses, itself an ominous warning that could deter future whistleblowers from exposing government wrongdoing. Traditionally, the act has been used only against spies and traitors, not whistleblowers. Yet Obama used the Espionage Act to prosecute more whistleblowers than all prior administrations combined.

Judge Lind, who sentenced Manning to 35 years in prison, reduced her sentence by 112 days because of the mistreatment she suffered in custody.

Harsh Treatment

For the first 11 months, Manning was held in solitary confinement and subjected to humiliating forced nudity during inspection. In fact, Juan Mendez, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, characterized her treatment as cruel, inhuman and degrading. He said, “I conclude that the 11 months under conditions of solitary confinement (regardless of the name given to [her] regime by the prison authorities) constitutes at a minimum cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of article 16 of the Convention against Torture. If the effects in regards to pain and suffering inflicted on Manning were more severe, they could constitute torture.”

Mendez could not conclusively say Manning’s treatment amounted to torture because he was denied permission to visit her under acceptable circumstances. Mendez also concluded that, “imposing seriously punitive conditions of detention on someone who has not been found guilty of any crime is a violation of [her] right to physical and psychological integrity as well as of [her] presumption of innocence.”

Manning, who began her gender transition following her sentencing, has been denied critical and appropriate treatment related to her gender identity at various points during her imprisonment. Her long sentence and harsh incarceration also drew protests from other human rights advocates.

“Chelsea Manning exposed serious abuses, and as a result her own human rights have been violated by the U.S. government for years,” said Margaret Huang, executive director of Amnesty International USA. “President Obama was right to commute her sentence, but it is long overdue. It is unconscionable that she languished in prison for years while those allegedly implicated by the information she revealed still haven’t been brought to justice.”

“Instead of punishing the messenger, the U.S. government can send a strong signal to the world that it is serious about investigating the human rights violations exposed by the leaks and bringing all those suspected of criminal responsible to justice in fair trials,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International.

The commutation was the culmination of efforts by the Chelsea Manning Support Network, her legal team, and hundreds of thousands of people who signed petitions demanding her release.

Indeed, Kathleen Gilberd, executive director of the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild, stated, “While Chelsea’s freedom is long-overdue, we are gratified that she has been afforded some measure of delayed justice. There is no doubt that the tremendous outpouring of public support and organizing for commuting the sentence contributed to this outcome. Still,” she added, “we remain critical of a government that seems more intent on prosecuting those who expose war crimes than those who commit them.”

(An earlier version of this story incorrectly put Manning’s scheduled release at March 17, instead of May 17.)

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and on the advisory board of Veterans for Peace. Her books include *Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent* (with Kathleen Gilberd) and *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. Visit her website at <http://marjoriecohn.com/> and follow her on Twitter @MarjorieCohn

Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?

From the Archive: Though President Obama commuted Chelsea Manning’s prison sentence, he showed no appreciation for her brave disclosures, including one that undercut war plans with Iran, Robert Parry reported in 2013.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on Aug. 19, 2013)

From U.S. embassy cables leaked by Pvt. Bradley Manning, you can easily imagine how the propaganda game might have played out, how Americans could have been panicked into supporting another unnecessary war in the Middle East, this time against Iran. Except that Manning's release of the documents spoiled the trick.

The gambit might have gone this way: One morning, a story would have led the front page of, say, the Washington Post citing how the widely respected International Atomic Energy Agency and its honest-broker Director-General Yukiya Amano had found startling "evidence" that Iran was nearing a nuclear bomb despite a longstanding U.S. intelligence estimate to the contrary and despite Iranian denials.

Next, the neocon-dominated opinion pages would ridicule anyone who still doubted these "facts." After all, these articles would say, "even" the IAEA, which had challenged President George W. Bush's claims about Iraq in 2002, and "even" Amano, who had initially believed Iran's denials, were now convinced.

Neocon think tanks would rush to join the chorus of alarm, dispatching WMD "experts" to TV talk shows bracing the American people on the need for military action. From Fox News to CNN to MSNBC, there would be a drumbeat about Iran's perfidy. Then, as hawkish Republicans and Democrats ratcheted up their rhetoric – and as Israeli leaders chortled "we told you so" – the war-with-Iran bandwagon might have begun rolling with such velocity that it would be unstoppable.

Perhaps, only years later after grave human costs and severe economic repercussions would the American people learn the truth: that the IAEA under Amano wasn't the objective source that they had been led to believe, that Amano was something of a U.S.-Israeli puppet who had feigned a pro-Iranian position early on to burnish his credentials for pushing an anti-Iranian line subsequently, that after he was installed, he had even solicited U.S. officials for money and had held secret meetings with Israelis (to coordinate opposition to Iran's nuclear program while maintaining a polite silence about Israel's rogue nuclear arsenal).

However, because of the actions of Bradley Manning, the rug was pulled out from under this possible ruse. The U.S. embassy cables revealing the truth about Amano were published by the U.K. Guardian in 2011 (although ignored by The New York Times, The Washington Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets). The cables also drew attention from Web sites, such as Consortiumnews.com.

So, the gambit could not work. If it had been tried, enough people would have known the truth. They wouldn't be fooled again and they would have alerted their

fellow citizens. Bradley Manning had armed them with the facts.

And this scenario, while admittedly hypothetical, is not at all far-fetched. When the cables were leaked about a year after Amano's appointment, his IAEA was busy feeding the hysteria over Iran's nuclear program with reports trumpeted by think tanks, such as the Institute for Science and International Security, and by The Washington Post and other U.S. news media.

Revealing Cables

According to those leaked U.S. embassy cables from Vienna, Austria, the site of IAEA's headquarters, American diplomats in 2009 were cheering the prospect that Amano would advance U.S. interests in ways that outgoing IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei wouldn't; Amano credited his election to U.S. government support; Amano signaled he would side with the United States in its confrontation with Iran; and he stuck out his hand for more U.S. money.

In a July 9, 2009, cable, American chargé Geoffrey Pyatt said Amano was thankful for U.S. support of his election. "Amano attributed his election to support from the U.S., Australia and France, and cited U.S. intervention with Argentina as particularly decisive," the cable said.

The appreciative Amano informed Pyatt that as IAEA director general, he would take a different "approach on Iran from that of ElBaradei" and he "saw his primary role as implementing safeguards and UNSC [United Nations Security Council] Board resolutions," i.e. U.S.-driven sanctions and demands against Iran.

Amano also discussed how to restructure the senior ranks of the IAEA, including elimination of one top official and the retention of another. "We wholly agree with Amano's assessment of these two advisors and see these decisions as positive first signs," Pyatt commented.

In return, Pyatt made clear that Amano could expect strong U.S. financial support, stating that "the United States would do everything possible to support his successful tenure as Director General and, to that end, anticipated that continued U.S. voluntary contributions to the IAEA would be forthcoming. Amano offered that a 'reasonable increase' in the regular budget would be helpful."

Pyatt learned, too, that Amano had consulted with Israeli Ambassador Israel Michaeli "immediately after his appointment" and that Michaeli "was fully confident of the priority Amano accords verification issues." Michaeli added that he discounted some of Amano's public remarks about there being "no evidence of Iran pursuing a nuclear weapons capability" as just words that Amano felt he had to say "to persuade those who did not support him about his 'impartiality.'"

In private, Amano agreed to “consultations” with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Pyatt reported. (It is ironic indeed that Amano would have secret contacts with Israeli officials about Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program, which has yet to yield a single bomb, when Israel possesses a large and undeclared nuclear arsenal.)

In a subsequent cable dated Oct. 16, 2009, the U.S. mission in Vienna said Amano “took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency. Amano reminded ambassador [Glyn Davies] on several occasions that he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.

“More candidly, Amano noted the importance of maintaining a certain ‘constructive ambiguity’ about his plans, at least until he took over for DG ElBaradei in December” 2009.

In other words, Amano was a bureaucrat eager to bend in directions favored by the United States and Israel regarding Iran’s nuclear program. Amano’s behavior surely contrasted with how the more independent-minded ElBaradei resisted some of Bush’s key claims about Iraq’s supposed nuclear weapons program, correctly denouncing some documents as forgeries.

Update: It also is significant that Geoffrey Pyatt was rewarded for his work lining up the IAEA behind the anti-Iranian propaganda campaign by being made U.S. ambassador to Ukraine where he helped engineer the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich. Pyatt was on the infamous “fuck the E.U.” call with Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland weeks before the coup as Nuland handpicked Ukraine’s new leaders and Pyatt pondered how “to midwife this thing.”

Salvaging Some Hype

Though Manning’s release of the U.S. embassy cables from Vienna apparently scotched any large-scale deployment of the Amano ploy, some elements of the gambit did go forward nonetheless, albeit with less oomph than they might have had.

In February 2013, the front page of The Washington Post offered a taste of what the propaganda campaign might have looked like when investigative reporter Joby Warrick hyped an account about Iran’s nuclear program pushed by David Albright, director of the Institute for Science and International Security who had given support to Bush’s invasion of Iraq a decade ago.

The Albright/Warrick alarm cited Iran’s alleged effort to place an Internet

order for 100,000 ring-shaped magnets that would work in some of the country's older centrifuges.

"Iran recently sought to acquire tens of thousands of highly specialized magnets used in centrifuge machines, according to experts and diplomats, a sign that the country may be planning a major expansion of its nuclear program that could shorten the path to an atomic weapons capability," Warrick wrote in his lede paragraph.

You had to read to the end of the long story to hear a less strident voice, saying that Iran had previously informed IAEA inspectors that it planned to build more of its old and clunkier centrifuges, which use this sort of magnet, and that the enrichment was for civilian energy, not a nuclear bomb.

"Olli Heinonen, who led IAEA nuclear inspections inside Iran before his retirement in 2010, said the type of magnet sought by Iran was highly specific to the IR-1 centrifuge and could not, for example, be used in the advanced IR-2M centrifuges that Iran has recently tested," according to the final paragraphs of Warrick's article.

"The numbers in the order make sense, because Iran originally told us it wanted to build more than 50,000 of the IR-1s,' Heinonen said. 'The failure rate on these machines is 10 percent a year, so you need a surplus.'"

At the bottom of Warrick's story, you'd also learn that "Iran has avoided what many experts consider Israel's new 'red line': a stockpile of medium-enriched uranium greater than 530 pounds, roughly the amount needed to build a weapon if further purified."

So there was nothing urgent or particularly provocative about this alleged purchase, though the structure and placement of the Post story suggested otherwise. Many readers likely were expected to simply jump to the conclusion that Iran was on the verge of building an atomic bomb and that it was time for President Barack Obama to join Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in another Middle East war.

The pressure from the Post and other neocon-leaning news outlets on the Obama administration to fall in line with Netanyahu's belligerence toward Iran has been building for years, often with Warrick channeling anti-Iranian propaganda from Albright and his ISIS, which, in turn, seems to be a pipeline for hardliners at the IAEA.

A decade ago, Albright and his ISIS [not to be confused with the head-chopping terrorist outfit] were key figures in stoking the hysteria for invading Iraq around the false allegations of its WMD program. In recent years, Albright and

his institute have adopted a similar role regarding Iran and its purported pursuit of a nuclear weapon, even though U.S. intelligence agencies say Iran terminated that weapons project in 2003.

Nevertheless, Albright has transformed his organization into a sparkplug for a new confrontation with Iran. Though Albright insists that he is an objective professional, ISIS has published hundreds of articles about Iran, which has not produced a single nuclear bomb, while barely mentioning Israel's rogue nuclear arsenal.

An examination of the ISIS Web site reveals only a few technical articles relating to Israel's nukes while ISIS has expanded its coverage of Iran's nuclear program so much that it's been moved onto a separate Web site. The articles not only hype developments in Iran but also attack U.S. media critics who question the fear-mongering about Iran.

Despite this evidence of bias, the Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets typically present Albright as a neutral analyst. They also ignore his checkered past, for instance, his prominent role in promoting President Bush's pre-invasion case that Iraq possessed stockpiles of WMD.

Stoking a War

At the end of summer 2002, as Bush was beginning his advertising roll-out for the Iraq invasion and dispatching his top aides to the Sunday talk shows to warn about "smoking guns" and "mushroom clouds," Albright co-authored a Sept. 10, 2002, article entitled "Is the Activity at Al Qaim Related to Nuclear Efforts?" which declared:

"High-resolution commercial satellite imagery shows an apparently operational facility at the site of Iraq's al Qaim phosphate plant and uranium extraction facility. This site was where Iraq extracted uranium for its nuclear weapons program in the 1980s. This image raises questions about whether Iraq has rebuilt a uranium extraction facility at the site, possibly even underground. The uranium could be used in a clandestine nuclear weapons effort."

Albright's alarming allegations fit neatly with Bush's propaganda barrage, although as the months wore on with Bush's warnings about aluminum tubes and yellowcake from Africa growing more outlandish Albright did display more skepticism about the existence of a revived Iraqi nuclear program.

Still, he remained a "go-to" expert on other Iraqi purported WMD, such as chemical and biological weapons. In a typical quote on Oct. 5, 2002, Albright told CNN: "In terms of the chemical and biological weapons, Iraq has those now."

After Bush launched the Iraq invasion in March 2003 and Iraq's secret WMD caches didn't materialize, Albright admitted that he had been conned, explaining to the Los Angeles Times: "If there are no weapons of mass destruction, I'll be mad as hell. I certainly accepted the administration claims on chemical and biological weapons. I figured they were telling the truth. If there is no [unconventional weapons program], I will feel taken, because they asserted these things with such assurance." [See FAIR's "[The Great WMD Hunt](#),"]

Given the horrendous costs in blood and treasure resulting from the Iraq fiasco, an objective journalist might feel compelled to mention Albright's track record of bias and error. But the Post's Warrick didn't, even though Albright and his ISIS were at the core of the February story, receiving credit for obtaining copies of the magnet purchase order.

So, while we'll never know if the Amano ploy would have been tried – since Manning's disclosures made it unfeasible – it surely would not have been unprecedented. The American people experienced similar deceptions during the run-up to war with Iraq when the Bush-43 administration assembled every scrap of suspicion about Iraq's alleged WMD and fashioned a bogus case for war.

Eventually, Manning was pulled into that war as a young intelligence analyst. He confronted so much evidence of brutality and dishonesty that he felt compelled to do something about it. What he did in leaking hundreds of thousands of documents to WikiLeaks and, thus, to other news outlets was to supply "ground truth" about war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

His disclosure of diplomatic cables also gave the American people and the world a glimpse behind the curtain of secrecy that often conceals the dirty dealings of statecraft. Perhaps most significantly, those revelations helped sparked the Arab Spring, giving people of the Middle East a chance to finally take some political control over their own lives.

And, by letting Americans in on the truth about Amano's IAEA, Bradley Manning may have helped prevent a war with Iran.

[**Update:** In August 2013, Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison for leaking classified documents. Although President Obama supported her prosecution, he did – in one of his final acts in office – commute Manning's sentence to her nearly seven years already served in prison. She is scheduled for release on March 17.]

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

and [barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)).
