

US Opened Doors After Vietnam War and Can Do So Again

People from Central America, as well as those displaced by wars in the Middle East, should get the kind of U.S. welcome that the military helped provide to refugees from Indochina in 1975, writes Ann Wright.

Exodus of 750,000 People

By Ann Wright



The thousands of people now trying to flee violence in Central America are small in number compared to those who were desperately trying to escape from Vietnam and other Indochina countries decades ago.

In the spring of 1975—with the U.S. either on the brink of pulling out of Vietnam, or already gone—over 131,000 South Vietnamese fled the country, some on the last planes out of Vietnam and other in flotillas of small boats. It was the beginning of a much larger exodus. All told, about 750,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos came to the United States between 1975 through 1986. They came under two resettlement initiatives established by Congress: the Refugee Parole Program and the Orderly Departure Program.

After the U.S. signed a peace agreement with North Vietnam, U.S. military ships that were still off South Vietnam began picking up hundreds of people each day who had left South Vietnam on small boats. The vast majority had been on the U.S.-backed Southern side of the war and feared reprisal by the new communist government from the North. At worst they could be killed and at the least forced into re-education

camps.

No equation of those refugees from the Vietnam War with people now and in recent years seeking refuge from widespread social instability in Central America—marked by gangs of drug cartels and linked to [decades of covert U.S. operations](#)—can be exact. But today's refugees from [Honduras](#), [Guatemala](#) and [El Salvador](#), along with the millions of people displaced by [U.S.-backed military interventions in Iraq](#) and elsewhere in the Middle East, deserve comparable consideration, given the U.S. role in disrupting their lives.

Instead, President Donald Trump is turning a [hostile face](#) on Central American migrants and refugees—by [separating children from parents](#), by insisting on building a wall, by having people rounded up. Longstanding concerns about the conditions inside the U.S. detention centers were renewed by the Washington Post report of a [7-year-old girl dying of dehydration](#).

The U.S. has also shown indifference to refugees from Iraq and Syria by barely opening its doors. Admission numbers were already paltry under the Obama administration, when the U.S. was only allowing [tens of thousands of refugees](#) a year. Now, under Trump, 2018 is on track to [hit a 40-year low](#), finds Global Citizen in an analysis of U.S. State Department data. More than 5 million Syrians are registered refugees, with Turkey hosting the highest number, followed by Lebanon and Jordan, according to [December data from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees](#). More than [6 million Syrians](#) have had to seek refuge inside their own country.

In a cruel backtracking of U.S. commitments, the Trump administration is once again signaling its intention to deport Vietnamese immigrants who 40 years ago fled retaliation and have lived in the United States for four decades, according to a Dec. 12 report by [The Atlantic](#). Those targeted for deportation have committed crimes in the U.S. but were still protected by a 2008 bilateral agreement between Vietnam and the U.S. assuring that Vietnamese citizens would not be subject to return if they arrived before July 12, 1995, the year diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States were resumed after the war. [John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran and former U.S. secretary of state, called the move despicable on his Twitter account.](#)

Mobilizing for Newcomers

In 1975, the U.S. military mobilized to take care of newcomers while their paperwork was processed, after which the U.S. government sent them to communities all over the United States.

These measures were by no means a comprehensive attempt at redress. Many people seeking a way out of Vietnam were stranded. Some became part of the [huge wave of "boat people"](#) in 1979, who overwhelmed refugee settlements in Asian countries and caused an international crisis. But it is safe to say the U.S. demonstrated a far more humane response than it does today.

And in 1980, the U.S. once again welcomed people in distress when 125,000 Cubans arrived as a part of the [Mariel boat lift](#) during the Carter administration. Another 15,000 Haitians arrived on the shores of Florida by boat that same

year.

In 1975 I was one of thousands of U.S. military personnel who received the Vietnamese, first on military ships, later at military bases in the Philippines and then in Guam. Ultimately, I wound up volunteering at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, one of the five refugee camps set up in the continental United States. The others were at Camp Pendleton, California; Camp McCoy, Wisconsin; Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

At the time, I was attending law school at the University of Arkansas, 50 miles from the Fort Chaffee base and was in a U.S. Army Civil Affairs Reserve unit. The Army was notified on April 25, 1975, that the five military installations would be used and the Pentagon immediately sent out a call for reservists to help set up the military installations to receive and house up to 30,000 persons at a time.

The first refugees arrived at Fort Chaffee just seven days later, on May 2, on a plane carrying 70 people. Within 22 days, 25,812 refugees were at the base, making it the 11th-largest city in Arkansas. By June, 6,500 reservists had volunteered for active duty at Fort Chaffee.

At the peak of the airlift, as many as 17 flights a day landed at Fort Smith Municipal Airport with passengers bound for Fort Chaffee. All told, 415 refugee flights landed at the Fort Smith airport during the seven months that the base served as a refugee center. When the camp closed on Dec. 20, 1975, it had helped 50,809 people begin to regroup for life in the United States.

Fixing Up the Base

With the exception of annual two-week training cycles for the U.S. Army Reserve and Arkansas National Guard, Fort Chaffee had not been used since the mobilization for the Korean War. The majority of the sprawling barracks, built during World War II and the Korean War, had been shut for over 20 years. Units of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and medical units from Fort Sill, Oklahoma—the closest active-duty U.S. Army installation—arrived in late April 1975 to open up the facilities.

Animals were driven out of the buildings, toilet facilities re-opened. Some barracks were partially renovated for use by families. Giant “mess halls,” or military cafeterias were set up. A small hospital was cleaned and equipped, along with office spaces for refugee placement agencies.

Once the refugees had arrived, an array of hosting demands arose. U.S. Army doctors and nurses tended to people with medical needs. The Army’s kitchen staff began cooking huge caldrons of rice and vegetables and boiling water for tea. Mess halls fed 6,000 people three meals a day and were open around the clock.

Rice Incident

There was an incident over rice. The Vietnamese did not like the rice being served to them, which had been grown in the camp’s host state. It was a diplomatic challenge to inform former President Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, that we would have to get a different type of rice produced in another state because the Vietnamese refugees were not eating Arkansas rice. (That did not go over well in a state where most residents, including myself, didn’t

know there were different kinds of rice.)

Lots of babies arrived with mothers who were so severely stressed that they had trouble producing milk. Any infant formula would have to be lactose-free because in Vietnam cow milk was not used in formulas. One of my jobs was to make this arrangement. Companies cooperated very quickly, turning trucks around from their original destinations and sending them to the military bases and ramping up production for a new lactose-intolerant demographic in the country.

Resettlement was swift. Within two weeks, hundreds were leaving the camps as refugee organizations expertly found communities and groups all over the United States who poured out support, eager to sponsor families and individuals. Churches and civic groups found housing, equipped the houses and found jobs for the people who were arriving.

As the summer of 1975 drew to a close, any refugees who had not been resettled were consolidated in one camp at chilly Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. The U.S. Army general in charge of Fort Chaffee called me into his office and assigned me to procure winter clothing. We wound up finding clothing in the warehouses of the Armed Forces Post Exchange System, which were delivered in September.

All of these stories are to say that the U.S. government today could do far more to alleviate the refugee crisis than it is doing. There is still plenty of room in U.S. society and its land mass for people fleeing violence. All that's missing today is political will.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. She was also a U.S. diplomat and

was in U.S. embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to the lies the Bush administration was stating as the rationale for the invasion, occupation and destruction of Iraq. She is the co-author of "Dissent: Voices of Conscience."

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Watch New Julian Assange Vigil Featuring Whistleblower Dan Ellsberg and Former US Senator Mike Gravel

An online vigil for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange was broadcast live on **Consortium News** on Friday night. If you missed it, watch the replay here.

Among the featured guests were famed whistleblower Dan Ellsberg, former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel, CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou, columnist Caitlin Johnstone, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern and more:

Latest Odds of a Shooting War Between NATO and Russia

Hungarian scholar George Szamuely tells Ann Garrison that he sees a 70 percent chance of combat between NATO and Russia following the incident in the Kerch Strait and that it is

being fueled by Russia-gate.

An Interview with George Szamuely

by Ann Garrison

Special to Consortium News



George Szamuely is a Hungarian-born scholar and Senior Research Fellow at London's Global Policy Institute. He lives in New York City. I spoke to him about escalating hostilities on Russia's Ukrainian and Black Sea borders and about Exercise [Trident Juncture](#), NATO's massive military exercise on Russian borders which ended just as the latest hostilities began.

Ann Garrison: George, the hostilities between Ukraine, NATO, and Russia continue to escalate in the Sea of Azov, the Kerch Strait, and the Black Sea. What do you think the latest odds of a shooting war between NATO and Russia are, if one hasn't started by the time this is published?

George Szamuely: Several weeks ago, when we first talked about this, I said 60 percent. Now I'd say, maybe 70 percent. The problem is that Trump seems determined to be the anti-Obama. Obama, in Trump's telling, "allowed" Russia to take Crimea and to "invade" Ukraine. Therefore, it will be up to Trump to reverse this. Just as he, Trump, reversed Obama's policy on Iran by walking away from the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#), otherwise known as the Iran nuclear deal. So expect ever-increasing US involvement in Ukraine.

AG: NATO's Supreme Commander US General Curtis M. Scaparrotti is reported to have been on the phone with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko "offering his full support." Thoughts on that?

GS: There has been a proxy war within Ukraine since 2014, with NATO backing Poroshenko's Ukrainian government and Russia backing the dissidents and armed separatists who speak Russian and identify as

Russian in Ukraine's southeastern Donbass region. But in the Kerch Strait the hostilities are between Russia and Ukraine, with NATO behind Ukraine.

A shooting war will begin if it escalates to where NATO soldiers shoot and kill Russian soldiers or vice versa. Whoever shoots first, the other side will feel compelled to respond, and then there'll be a war between Russia and NATO or Russia and a NATO nation.

We don't know whether NATO would feel compelled to respond as one if Russians fired on soldiers of individual NATO nations—most likely UK soldiers since the UK is sending more of its Special Forces and already has the largest NATO military presence in Ukraine. Russia could defeat the UK, but if the US gets involved, all bets are off.

AG: It's hard to imagine that the US would allow Russia to defeat the UK.

GS: It is, but on the other hand, the US is the US and the UK is the UK. The United States might well be ready to fight to the last Brit, much as the United States is definitely ready to fight to the last Ukrainian. There are already 300 US paratroopers in Ukraine training Ukrainians, but the British would be well advised that words of encouragement from Washington don't necessarily translate into US willingness to go to war.

AG: The US Congress passed a law that US troops can't serve under any foreign command, so that would require US command.

GS: Yes, and without that, any British military defeat could be blamed on traditional British military incompetence rather than US weakness or foolish braggadocio.

AG: This latest dustup between the Russian and Ukrainian navies took place in the Kerch Strait. I had to study several maps to understand this, but basically neither Russian nor Ukrainian

vessels, military or commercial, can get to or from the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea without passing through the Kerch Strait. That doesn't mean that neither could get to the Black Sea, because both have Black Sea borders, but they couldn't get from ports in the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea and back.

And neither Ukraine nor Russia can get from the Black Sea to Western European waters without passing through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits in Turkey to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, and then further to the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar, which is bordered on one side by Spain and the British territory of Gibraltar, and on the other by Morocco and the Spanish territory Ceuta. So there are many geo-strategic choke points where Russian ships, naval or commercial, could be stopped by NATO nations or their allies, and Ukraine has already asked Turkey to stop them from passing through the Bosphorus Strait. Thoughts on that?

GS: Well, of course Ukraine can ask for anything it likes. There's no way in the world Turkey would try to stop Russian ships going through the Bosphorus Strait. That would be a violation of the 1936 [Montreux Convention](#) and an act of war on the part of Turkey. It isn't going to happen. As for the Kerch Strait, it is Russian territorial water. Ukraine is free to use it and has been doing so without incident since 2014. The only thing the Russians insist on is that any ship going through the strait use a Russian pilot. During the recent incident, the Ukrainian tug refused to use a Russian pilot. The Russians became suspicious, fearing that the Ukrainians were engaged in a sabotage mission to blow up the newly constructed bridge across the strait. You'll remember that [an American columnist](#) not so long ago urged the Ukrainian authorities to blow up the bridge. That's why the Russians accuse Kiev of staging a provocation.



AG: There's a longstanding back channel between the White House and the Kremlin, as satirized in Dr. Strangelove. Anti-Trump fanatics keep claiming this is new and traitorous, but it's long established. Obama and Putin used it to keep Russian and US soldiers from firing on one another instead of the jihadists both claimed to

be fighting in Syria. Kennedy and Khrushchev used it to keep the Bay of Pigs crisis from escalating into a nuclear war. Shouldn't Trump and Putin be talking on that back channel now, no matter how much it upsets CNN and MSNBC?

GS: Well, of course, they should. The danger is that in this atmosphere of anti-Russian hysteria such channels for dialogue may not be kept open. As a result, crises could escalate beyond the point at which either side could back down without losing face. What's terrifying is that so many US politicians and press now describe any kind of negotiation, dialogue, or threat-management as treasonous collusion by Donald Trump.

Remember Trump's first bombing in Syria in April 2017. Before he launched that attack, Trump administration officials gave advance warning to the Russians to enable them to get any Russian aircraft out of harm's way. This perfectly sensible action on the part of the administration—leave aside the illegality and stupidity of the attack—was greeted by Hillary Clinton and the MSNBC crowd as evidence that the whole operation was cooked up by Trump and Putin to take attention off Russia-gate. It's nuts.

AG: Most of us have heard Russia and NATO's conflicting accounts of why the Russian Navy seized several Ukrainian vessels in the Sea of Azov. What's your interpretation of what happened?

GS: As I said, I think the Russians had every right to be suspicious of the intent of the Ukrainian vessels. The Ukrainians know that these are Russian territorial waters. They know that the only way to go through the Kerch Strait is by making use of a Russian pilot. They refused to allow the Russians to pilot the ships through the strait. Whatever the Ukrainians' ultimate intent was—whether it was to carry out an act of sabotage, to provoke the Russians into overreaction and then to demand help from NATO, or simply to go through the strait without a Russian pilot in order to enable President Poroshenko to proclaim the strait as non-Russian—whatever Kiev's intent was, the Russians were entitled to respond. The force the Russians used was hardly excessive. In similar circumstances, the US would have destroyed all of the ships and killed everyone on board. Recall, incidentally, Israel has seized Gaza flotilla boats and arrested everyone on board. In 2010, the Israeli Navy shot nine activists dead during a flotilla boat seizure, and wounded one who died after four years in a coma.

AG: Don't the US, Ukraine, and the UN Security Council refuse to recognize the Kerch Strait as Russian territory, and insist that Russia's claim to it violates various maritime treaties? I know the UNSC refuses to recognize the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, not that that does Syria any good.

GS: According to the 2003 agreement, Russia and Ukraine agreed to consider the strait as well as the Sea of Azov as shared territorial waters. From 2014 on, Russia considered the strait as Russian waters, though it's made no attempt to hamper Ukrainian shipping. The Azov Sea is still shared by Russia and Ukraine. During the recent incident, the Ukrainian Navy acted provocatively, deliberately challenging the Russians. As for what the UNSC accepts, how would NATO respond if Serbia entered Kosovo on some

pretext or other?

AG: OK, now let's go back to NATO's Exercise Trident Juncture, a massive military exercise on Russia's Scandinavian and Arctic borders that concluded on November 24, one day before the Kerch Strait incident. The first phase was deployment, from August to October. The second phase was war games from October 25th to November 7th. The war games were based on the premise that Russia had invaded Scandinavia by ground, air, and sea. They included 50,000 participants from 31 NATO and partner countries, 250 aircraft, 65 naval vessels, and up to 10,000 tanks and other ground vehicles, and I hate to think about how much fossil fuel they burned.

The final phase was a command post exercise to make sure that, should NATO forces ever face a real Russian invasion of Scandinavia, their response could be safely coordinated in Norway and in Italy, far from the war zone.

So George, do Scandinavians have reason to worry that Russia might invade any of their respective nations?

GS: Not at all. This is ridiculous. It was the largest military exercise since the end of the Cold War, and why? Why did they do this? Russia isn't threatening Scandinavia, but it's more likely that it will if NATO continues conducting war games on its borders. Right now tension between East and West is escalating so fast that a single event could be like a match that triggers an explosion, and then there'll be a war.

AG: There was a recent Russian exercise, or joint Russian and Chinese exercise, based on the premise that the US had invaded Korea, right?

GS: Right. But it wasn't anywhere near Europe, so it wasn't threatening the Europeans. It took place in eastern Siberia, so it shouldn't have caused panic in NATO countries. It shouldn't have caused panic in the US either, because the Pacific Ocean separates

the US and the Korean Peninsula.

What's striking about Trident Juncture is that it involved Sweden and Finland, both of whom are traditionally neutral. They were neutral during the Cold War, not joining any alliances. Finlandization came to mean a foreign policy that in no way challenged or antagonized the USSR. So now here's Finland rolling back that policy and joining NATO in this massive military exercise to stop nonexistent Russian aggression.

AG: Has Russia ever attempted to seize territory outside its own borders since the end of the Cold War?

GS: No. Russia never attempted to seize territory outside its own borders. The case cited by the West is Crimea, but that was really an outstanding issue that should have been addressed during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin, the drunken, incompetent stooge that the US installed, just neglected it.

The Russian-speaking and Russian-identified people of Crimea were unhappy about Ukraine claiming sovereignty over them. They had been an autonomous republic within the USSR, and after its dissolution, they still retained their constitutional autonomy. That's what gave them the right to hold a referendum to join the Russia Federation in 2014.

If the West is involved in an uprising, as in Ukraine, it recognizes the "independence" of the government it puts in power. It won't recognize the constitutional autonomy of Crimea, which predated the 2014 Ukrainian revolution or illegal armed coup, whichever you call it, because it wasn't part of their plan.

AG: The NATO nations and their allies say that Russia invaded and occupied Crimea, violating Ukrainian sovereignty according to international law. Democracy Now's Amy Goodman referred to the "illegal annexation" of Crimea at least three times after the Kerch Strait incident. How do you explain the presence of Russian soldiers in Crimea prior to the referendum?

GS: They didn't invade and occupy Crimea. Their forces were there legally, according to a 25-year lease agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

Crimea had been a part of Russia for more than 200 years. For most of the time, during the USSR era, it was an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation. In 1954, Khrushchev transferred some degree of sovereignty over the Crimean Republic to Ukraine. I'm not entirely sure why he did that, but the issue wasn't that important then because Ukraine, Russia and Crimea were all part of the USSR.

Khrushchev didn't envisage an independent Ukraine walking off with such a prize piece of real estate. Crimea is not only a huge tourist destination, it is also the site of Russia's primary naval base on the Black Sea in Sevastopol. Yeltsin failed to address the problem in 1991. Since then, every time Crimeans talked about holding a referendum on their future, Kiev threatened to use force to stop them. Kiev would have used force again in 2014 if the Russians in the Port of Sevastopol had not left their Crimean base and made their presence known.

AG: The US, aka NATO, has an empire of military bases all over the world, and troops right up against Russia's borders as in Exercise Trident Juncture. Does Russia have anything remotely like it?

GS: No. Russia does not have military bases outside its borders, which are now more or less as they were in 1939, when the USSR was surrounded by hostile states that were more than happy to join Hitler. So it's ridiculous to tell Russia, "Don't worry about our troops and war games all over your borders because we don't really mean any harm." Washington is calling Russia an existential enemy, and the UK is promising to stand shoulder to shoulder with its NATO allies and partners against "Russian aggression," which is really Russian defense. So now we have an explosive situation on the Ukrainian and Russian borders that could easily turn into a shooting war.

AG: I read some US/NATO complaints that Russia was conducting exercises on its own side of the border. And last week NATO accused the Russian military of jamming its signals during its rehearsal for a war on Russia's borders.

GS: Yes, that's what the US considers Russian aggression, even though its troops and bases are all over the world and all over Russia's borders.

AG: Competition between US and Russian energy corporations is one of the main undercurrents to all this. The US State Department even said that Europe should abandon the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline project with Russia because of the Kerch Strait incident, but that received a cool response, particularly from Angela Merkel. What are your thoughts about that?

GS: Well, obviously, the Trump administration is determined to push the Europeans to give up on natural gas from Russia and to opt, instead, for US liquefied natural gas (LNG). The problem is that LNG shipped across the Atlantic is much more expensive than natural gas piped to Europe from Russia. So it's clearly not in the interests of the Europeans to have a bigger energy bill. Look what's happening in France. Ordinary people are not making so much money that they can afford to shell out more for energy, particularly when there is no need to do so. Some countries such as Poland are so imbued with hostility toward Russia that they're willing to pay more for gas just to hurt Russia, but Germany won't go down this path.

AG: Anything else you'd like to say for now?

GS: Yes, I think it's amazing that this many years after the Cold War we've reached a point where there's almost no public criticism of a policy that has led to the US abandoning a major arms control agreement, namely the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty signed in 1987.

There's almost no public criticism of the US getting involved in an

armed confrontation on Russia's doorstep, in Ukraine, Syria, Iran, or conceivably even Scandinavia. There's almost no public criticism of roping formerly neutral European powers like Sweden and Finland into NATO military exercises.

Given the fact that the [New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty](#) that went into effect in 2011 will expire in 2021, and given that there's nothing on the horizon to take its place, this is an extraordinarily perilous point in time.

And much of this has to be blamed on the liberals. The liberals have embraced an anti-Russian agenda. The kind of liberal view that prevailed during the Cold War was that we should at least pursue arms control agreements. We might not like the Communists, but we need treaties to prevent a nuclear war. Now there's no such caution. Any belligerence towards Russia is now good and justified. There's next to no pushback against getting into a war with Russia, even though it could go nuclear.

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George H.W. Bush's Bitter Legacy in the Middle East

The avalanche of funeral hagiography drowned any possible discussion of what Bush did to the Middle East. As'ad AbuKhalil writes that he rallied despots against Iraq and established a new, tyrannical security order in the region.

Sequel to 'British Betrayal' of WWI

[By As`ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



Any sober assessment of late President George H.W. Bush's political legacy was drowned last week by the avalanche of hagiography by the mainstream media. This served, in part, the role of catharsis. The more loudly the members of the media praised Bush, whose family has testy relations with President Donald Trump, the more it helped them vent their animosity towards the current president.

Lost in this anti-historical, fact-free binge was any possible discussion of Bush's most important legacies, one of which is certainly his great fake-out of Arab interests in the Middle East. Almost every U.S. president since Harry S. Truman has been more pro-Israel than his predecessor. The sole exception to this was George H.W. Bush. But via the war against Iraq, his administration wound up embracing Israeli interests and regional hegemony to such a degree that it left lasting damage to peace and stability in the region.

H.W. Bush was adept at changing ideologies to suit the venue. The man who emerged from the "moderate" wing of the East Coast Republican Party became the political heir of President Ronald Reagan, who wooed the Religious Right and made abortion a litmus test for all Supreme Court nominees.

While Bush did not leave a presidential memoir, (he is the first since Franklin D. Roosevelt not to do so), he did coauthor a book with Brent Scowcroft, his national security advisor, "A World Transformed." This offers evidence of Bush's close ties with Arab Gulf despots and the deposed Egyptian strongman Husni Mubarak, who served as his chief

advisor on the region.

Bush was obviously impressed by the fabulous wealth and hospitality of Arab potentates. At one point in the book, during a stay in one of King Fahd's marble guest palaces, he marvels at the chandeliers, the air conditioning and goes on at length about a lavish state dinner. "I had never seen so much—and of nearly every conceivable type of food."

Wealthy Arab Friends

Bush's ties with wealthy Arabs served him well. Lebanese businessman Najad Isam Faris and Syrian businessman Jamale Daniel helped the business career of Bush's son, Neil. With his network of Gulf associates, Bush served as a prized advisor to the Carlyle Group, the global, private equity firm based in Washington, D.C., with a specialty of investing in companies that depend on government contracts.

Bush's footprints in the region begin with his oil-business years in Texas. At that point, in the 1950s, oil companies often served as a chief lobbying force for Gulf regimes against the Israeli lobby. This was not due to any humanitarian concern for the plight of the Palestinian people. It was due to the usual financial motivation. The Israel lobby opposed closer ties between the U.S. and all Arab countries, which compelled oil businesses to defend their Gulf suppliers. Since the Israeli lobby opposed U.S. arms sales to Middle East regimes, it had other big-business opponents as well.

Later in his life, Bush also dealt with the Middle East as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and as director of the CIA. (The deputy chief of Saudi intelligence during Bush's

time at the CIA, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, was one of the few foreign dignitaries invited to attend the funeral).

When the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, paid tribute last week to Bush he concealed a long history of Israeli detestation for the man.

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As Ronald Reagan's vice president, Bush—along with James Baker, the White House chief of staff, and Caspar Weinberger, the secretary of defense—had the coolest attitudes towards Israel of any in the administration, which was otherwise loaded with ardent Zionists. Bush was vilified for his 1991 remark that he was a “one lonely guy” battling “a thousand lobbyists on the Hill.”

Nonetheless Bush toed the pro-Israeli line and championed the cause of Soviet Jewish dissidents and the sponsorship of the emigration of Jews from Ethiopia, Syria and the former Soviet Union to Israel. He also recruited ardent Zionists (Jack Kemp, [Condoleezza Rice](#) and [Dennis Ross](#)) for his administration.

As president, Bush was branded an anti-Semite in 1991 for “deferring” for 120 days \$10 billion in loan guarantees to Israel. He did this to prevent Israel from putting the money toward settlements in the occupied lands of 1967. Bush was also trying to persuade Israel to join the U.S.-sponsored peace process.

Serious About Settlements

This was the only time the U.S. government treated the settlements and the Israeli role in the peace process as a

serious matter. The Obama administration did voice mild protestations about the settlements, which violate international law. But after Bush, the settlements never again caused any serious irritation to U.S.-Israeli relations.

The Bush administration also, at one point, banned Ariel Sharon, the Israeli militarist and politician, from entering U.S. government buildings due to his statements against the U.S. role in the peace process. (When Jack Kemp, housing secretary at the time, wanted to meet with Sharon, James Baker instructed him to meet outside government offices).

But in Iraq, the Bush administration began the process of removing a regime that the Israel government had been complaining about for years. This was before Israel discovered the Iranian danger. It was also many years after Israel rid itself of the Egyptian danger thanks to the Camp David Accords between the despotic Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the Israeli government under the auspices of the American human rights president, Jimmy Carter. Going forward, the U.S. bombed everything on Israel's bombing wish list in Iraq.

Bush was intent on going to war against Iraq in 1990. He sent Dick Cheney, then secretary of defense, and Colin Powell, then chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, to Riyadh to persuade the king that U.S. troops were needed on the ground in Saudi Arabia to protect the kingdom from an Iraqi invasion (U.S. ships had moved before Cheney stepped foot on Saudi soil).

Rallying Against Iraq

The H.W.Bush administration rallied Arab despots against Iraq and established a regional tyrannical order. Even the Syrian regime rose above its previous conflicts with the U.S. and got on board. Together, they denied Saddam Hussein, Iraq's president, the one condition that he sought for withdrawal. As Bush admits in the book he coauthored, that sole condition was access to the Persian Gulf.

From 1991 on, most members of the U.S. armed forces—especially the Air Force—began to train over (or on) Arab lands. Today that means bases and military activities in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Syria (illegally), not to mention other places where the U.S. maintains secret military and intelligence bases (it was leaked to the press a few years ago that Dubai hosts one of the largest CIA bases in the world).

Bush exploited the Gulf War to impose a security regime where the U.S.—and not the local despotic clients—called the shots. Furthermore, Bush introduced the misuse of the U.N. as “an added cloak of political cover for U.S. wars and actions,” as is described on page 416 of the book he coauthored.

In targeting Iraq, Bush begin to eliminate the biggest (albeit exaggerated) Arab military power. He also pushed Arab governments to sit face-to-face with Israel in Madrid without securing any concessions from Israel at all.

The “peace process” under Bush was just as it had been under his predecessors and successors. It amounted to empty promises of U.S. rewards for Arab participation in the war on Iraq. It was a repeat of the “British betrayal” of World

War I, when, in exchange for help fighting against the Ottoman Empire, Arabs thought they would earn independence.

As'ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the "Historical Dictionary of Lebanon" (1998), "Bin Laden, Islam and America's New War on Terrorism (2002), and "The Battle for Saudi Arabia" (2004). He tweets as [@asadabukhalil](https://twitter.com/asadabukhalil)

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A Concise History of Consortium News by Robert Parry

During the 2011 Winter Fund Drive, ex-CIA analyst (and peace activist) Ray McGovern suggested that the late Bob Parry write a brief narrative to explain Consortium News' history and goals.

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A Brief Narrative of Consortium

News

By Robert Parry

Special to Consortium News



In 1995, after more than two decades in the mainstream news media (AP, Newsweek and PBS), I founded Consortiumnews.com as a home for the serious journalism that no longer had a place in an American news business that had lost its way.

At the time, I was the lead journalist on what had become known as the Iran-Contra scandal, and I had watched first-hand as senior news executives chose to squelch that inquiry apparently out of fear that it would cause another impeachment crisis around another Republican president, Ronald Reagan.

Such a possibility was deemed “not good for the country,” a view held both inside Congress and in the boardrooms of the elite national news media. But I refused to accept the judgment. I continued to pursue the many loose ends of the scandal, from evidence of drug trafficking by Reagan’s beloved Nicaraguan Contras to suspicions that the arms-for-hostages deals with Iran started much earlier, possibly even during the 1980 presidential campaign.

My insistence on getting to the bottom of this historically important story alienated me from my senior editors at Newsweek and from many of my journalistic colleagues who simply wanted to keep their jobs and avoid trouble. But it offended me that the national press corps was signing off on what amounted to a high-level cover-up.

The era of Watergate had come full circle. Instead of exposing crimes and cover-ups, the Washington press corps’ job had changed into harassing and mocking serious investigators the likes of Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh who stayed on the trail.

Consistency and persistence were oh so passe'. The Washington news media had drifted into a culture of careerism where top jobs paid well into the six- and even seven-figures. Your hair style and glib presentation on TV were far more important than the quality of your reporting. And the most important thing was to avoid the wrath of right-wing attack groups who would "controversialize" you.

By the mid-90s, it had become clear to me that there was no feasible way to do the work that had to be done within the confines of the mainstream media. The pressures on everyone had grown too intense. No matter how solid the reporting, many issues were simply off limits, particularly scandals that reflected badly on the admired duo of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

Even when I obtained highly classified government documents in 1994-95 shedding light on how U.S. policies toward Iraq and Iran had evolved at the start of the Reagan-Bush era, this information could find no home even in the liberal outliers of the mainstream media.

Quitting the Mainstream

So, on the advice of my oldest son Sam, who told me about this strange new phenomenon called the Internet, I started this Web site in fall 1995.

Besides seeing Consortiumnews.com as a place for serious journalism, I also envisioned it as a refuge for quality journalists who faced the same frustrations that I did. I thought we could provide editing and financial support, as well as an outlet that would distribute their stories to the public. Hence, the rather clunky name, Consortiumnews. At the time, I thought I could raise a significant amount of money for the project.

However, during my initial contacts with public-interest and liberal foundations, I was told that a major objection to funding journalism was the cost. The feeling was that information was an

expensive luxury. But I thought I could prove that assumption wrong by applying old-fashioned journalistic standards to this new medium.

To start the Web site the first of its kind on the Internet I cashed out my Newsweek retirement fund and we began producing groundbreaking reporting original to the Web. Over time, we showed that quality journalism could be done at a bargain-basement price.

Yet, despite our journalistic success, foundations and large funders remained skittish. We became an IRS-recognized 501-c-3 non-profit in 1999 (as the Consortium for Independent Journalism) and received some modest grants, but we have never been funded at the level that I had hoped.

Indeed, at the start of the crucial 2000 presidential campaign, our financial situation had grown so dire that I was forced to take an editing job at Bloomberg News and put the Web site on a part-time basis. We still published some important stories about the campaign, including how unfairly the Washington press corps was treating Al Gore and how outrageous the Florida recount was, but we didn't have the impact that we could have had.

During the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2002-03, we also challenged Washington's conventional wisdom, which was solidly behind George W. Bush's case for war. But again our voice was muted.

Finally, in early 2004, I felt it was important to pull together our volumes of original material about the Bush Family before that year's election. For personal financial reasons, I couldn't leave Bloomberg News until April (and I must admit it wasn't easy stepping away from a six-figure salary). But I felt I had no choice.

After quitting, I accelerated the pace at Consortiumnews.com and got to work on a book that became *Secrecy & Privilege*, the history of the Bush Dynasty.

After George W. Bush got his second term, we still kept at it at Consortiumnews.com, contesting his claims about the Iraq War and his broader neoconservative strategy, which combined violence in the Middle East with an assault on civil liberties at home. I felt it was especially crucial to explain the real history of U.S. relations with Iran and Iraq, a narrative that had been grossly distorted by the cover-ups in the 1980s and early 1990s.

MSM and CIA Parallels

To my great satisfaction, we also began developing what might be regarded as unlikely relationships with former CIA analysts, such as Ray McGovern, Peter Dickson, Melvin Goodman and Elizabeth Murray. Though these CIA folks had been trained not to talk to journalists like me, it turned out they also were looking for places to impart their important knowledge.

I found that our experiences had run on parallel tracks. In the 1980s, as the Washington press corps was facing intense pressure to toe the Reagan-Bush line, the CIA analysts were experiencing the same thing inside their offices at Langley. It became clear to me that the Right's central strategy of that era had been to seize control of the information flows out of Washington.

To do so required transforming both CIA analysts and Washington journalists into propagandists. The crowning achievement of that project had been the cowering CIA "analysis" and the fawning "journalism" that had been used to whip up popular support for George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003.

And that is where I fear we still stand, stuck in a dangerous swamp of disinformation, spin and lies.

Though the election of Barack Obama in 2008 showed that the Right's propaganda machine is not all-powerful, it remains the most intimidating political force in the United States. It can literally create scandals out of nothing, like the "birther" controversy that

persuaded many Americans that Obama was born in Kenya despite clear evidence to the contrary. On economic topics, millions of Americans are convinced to oppose their own best interests.

Today, the Right along with much of the Washington mainstream media is reprising the propagandistic treatment of Iraq regarding Iran, with a new conflict increasingly likely as the American public again gets whipped up into a war frenzy.

Still, my hope remains that we can finally gain the financial backing that we need at Consortiumnews.com to be a strong voice for truth and a way to maintain the best principles of journalism in order to counteract the exaggerations and hysteria that are again taking hold in America.

If you want to help us, you can make a donation by credit card at the Web site or by check to Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd.; Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. Or you can use PayPal (our account is named after our e-mail address "consortnew@aol.com").

Since we are a 501-c-3 non-profit, your donation may be tax-deductible. We appreciate any size donation that you can afford.

Here are some other ways you can help us continue our work:

If you'd rather spread out your support in smaller amounts, you can sign up for a monthly donation.

As always, thanks for your support.

Robert Parry

The late Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 as the Internet's first investigative magazine. He saw it as a way to combine modern technology and old-fashioned journalism to counter the increasing triviality of the mainstream U.S. news media.

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Mexico's Solution to the Border Crisis

López Obrador's \$20 billion development plan gives Washington a chance to help rectify the historic damage it's done to the living conditions of people in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, writes Patrick Lawrence.

A Latin American Marshall Plan, at a Discount

[By Patrick Lawrence](#)

Special to Consortium News



With President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatening to [shut down](#) the government if he doesn't get his wall, it's good that someone in a position of authority actually has a workable solution to the migrant crisis festering on the Mexican border with the U.S.

The day after Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office as Mexico's president on Dec. 1, his foreign minister flew to Washington to propose a [\\$20 billion development plan](#) to make Central America a place for people to stay rather than flee. Three-quarters of the money would help create jobs and fight poverty. The rest would pay for border control and law enforcement.

The plan would be funded by Mexico, the U.S. and the three Central American that produce the most refugees and

migrants, according to the size of their economies. The U.S. would pay most, which seems just given the decades of support—including millions in military assistance and police training—that Washington offered corrupt, anti-democratic dictators who oversaw the impoverishment of Central America. In addition, the U.S. backed the 2009 coup in Honduras that has directly led to an influx of refugees streaming towards the U.S. border.

At last there is a plan that addresses the causes, and not just the symptoms of Central America's migrant and refugee crisis: poverty, unemployment, drug trafficking, gang violence, police corruption, the world's highest murder rates. At last an implicit assertion that the U.S. bears some responsibility—and arguably the largest share—for the unlivable conditions of many Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans appears to be at hand.

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's new foreign minister, met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington on Dec. 1 as thousands of migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador were marooned in Tijuana and other locations on the Mexican side of the border. Ebrard compared Mexico's proposal with the Marshall Plan, the 1948–51 program to rebuild Europe. In this case, however, the U.S. would spend far less. In today's dollars, adjusted for inflation, the U.S. contributed nearly \$100 billion to the Marshall Plan (an investment in both reconstruction and the advancement of U.S. business interests in Europe).

The State Department said little in its official response, merely acknowledging the two nations' "shared commitment to address our common challenges and opportunities." Ebrard

said only, "I thank him [Pompeo] for his attitude and respect toward the new administration of President López Obrador."

Translation: Ebrard seems to have gotten nowhere. No surprise since the Trump administration has threatened to cut aid to Central American nations that don't stop the flow of migrants northward. But that flow won't stop until the conditions causing it are alleviated. But Central American nations need help to do that.

Signal Test

This is a test for Trump, the right-wing populist, who said he could work with López Obrador, the left-wing populist.

López Obrador's commitment to alleviating poverty, crime and underdevelopment in Central America was the theme that won him the presidency last year. On his inauguration day he signed a comprehensive Central American development plan with the presidents of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Their document earned U.N. backing.

The U.S. entertained a similar development program not long ago.

In 2000, Vicente Fox proposed an infrastructure development plan for Central America soon after he was elected Mexican president. George W. Bush listened: When he was inaugurated a few months later, Bush declared Mexico Washington's highest foreign policy and national security priority.

Then came Sept. 11, 2001. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria followed at a cost of \$5.6 trillion, according to a recent study by the Watson Institute at Brown University.

That is 280 times the amount Marcelo Ebrard put on the table with Pompeo.

Would there be caravans of migrants heading north from Central America today had Washington partnered with Mexico to make relatively modest investments in regional development programs a couple of decades ago?

There is indeed a history to U.S. development aid to Latin America, and like the Marshall Plan, past efforts were centered on promoting U.S. business interests. President John F. Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress, which was criticized as being intended mostly to help U.S. business interests, including in this 1968 NBC News report (at [14:37](#)).

Like the Marshall plan and the Alliance for Progress, any U.S. development deal today for Central America to keep Central Americans in Central America will likely have to provide an advantage for U.S. business interests there. With a businessman in the White House, it would be hard not to assume that Trump would use his leverage with Obrador to push for this in any deal, if he engages Obrador's proposal at all.

Global Context

The Mexico proposal has a global context, given that continental Europe and the U.S. share variants of the same problem. Both face unmanageable waves of migrants and refugees from their underdeveloped and war-torn peripheries. Regrettably, both also focus on walls, fences, and other kinds of border security to the neglect of root causes.

U.S.-led interventions in Libya and Syria have driven Europe's refugee crisis. Continuing Western exploitation of African resources also contributes to the migrant crisis.

At a four-sided summit in Istanbul last month, the leaders of Germany, France, Turkey and Russia presented [blueprints to restore Syria](#) to a livable nation to which refugees and migrants could return. The U.S, the major foreign contributor to the Syrian tragedy, did not attend.

For those nations that did, the Istanbul gathering can be counted as no more than a first step. But it suggests how developed Western nations should respond to crises in underdeveloped and non-Western nations that they helped create and now amount to a global security problem. [Climate change](#), which Trump denies, and two decades of neoliberal economic policies, are also among the reasons caravans of Central Americans stream northward.

The West's role in creating many of the planet's migration and refugee crises—maybe the majority—needs to be acknowledged and policies should reflect this responsibility. The attendance by France and Germany at the Istanbul gathering gives the U.S. an example to follow towards Mexico and Central America.

Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the International Herald Tribune, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century* (Yale). Follow him @thefloutist. His web site is www.patricklawrence.us. Support his work via www.patreon.com/thefloutist.

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Alexis Tsipras' Failed Attempt at Democratic Socialism

The prime minister who lost his bluff with international creditors in 2015 is now striking another radical pose by giving holidays to assassins, writes John Kiriakou.

Tsipras Has Betrayed the Greek People

By John Kiriakou

Special to Consortium News



The Greek word “syriza” means radical or from the grass roots. That, however, does not describe the man who leads Syriza, Greece’s ruling party of the same name.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras mishandled the dramatic standoff with the EU and international creditors three years

ago. He is now meddling with the country's anti-terrorism laws concerning the Revolutionary Organization 17 November, a far-left group formed in 1975 that has carried out numerous assassinations.

I am not unbiased on this issue. I was a CIA officer in Athens from 1998-2000 working against 17 November, which has killed 23 people, including foreign diplomats, a Greek publisher of a right-wing newspaper, a member of parliament, a CIA station chief in Athens, two U.S. defense attaches, and a U.S. Air Force sergeant.

I left Greece abruptly in August 2000 after 17 November assassinated my neighbor, British Defense Attache Stephen Saunders. The group said in a subsequent communique that they had set out to kill me that morning, but they saw that I was driving an armored car and they knew that I was armed. I was evacuated two hours after the communique was published.

Under Tsipras' reforms, any prisoner who has significant physical disabilities and who is serving a life sentence may be released unconditionally. That law affects only one person, Savvas Xiros, the 17 November assassin whose bomb went off in his hands as he was positioning it to kill a shipowner in the port city of Pireaus. Xiros lost his hands and an eye. He thought he would die from his injuries, so he confessed everything to the police. Then he lived. So far he's still in prison.

Another provision gave furloughs to all of the 17 November terrorists serving life terms for murder, including the group's founder Alexandros Yiotopoulos and its two lead

assassins, [Christodoulos Xiros](#) and [Dimitris Koufondinas](#). They are all serving terms of more than 1,600 years each. Two years ago, while on a two-week Christmas furlough, Christodoulos Xiros simply walked free. He was caught a year later. But instead of being punished with a longer sentence, he is scheduled for another furlough this Christmas.

Tsipras' Betrayal

After becoming prime minister in January 2015, Tsipras, then 44, almost immediately began hinting that Greece would exit the Eurozone and return to the drachma as its national currency unless the “evil troika”—the European Central Bank, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—eased demands to slash government spending, primarily on pensions.

He sent his finance minister at the time, Giannis Varoufakis, who is now [working with Sen. Bernie Sanders to form an international progressive movement](#), to Berlin and London to hold the Greek position as forcefully as possible. Varoufakis did as he was asked. He made it clear that Syriza was willing to leave the European Union and default on its loans to defend Greek citizens from hardship. His comments rattled foreign exchange markets and weakened the euro against the dollar.

As part of these hardline and high-stakes negotiation, Greece missed a payment deadline of its international creditors by 24 hours, further escalating tensions. Tsipras then pulled an infamous publicity stunt. He called for a national referendum on withdrawing from the Eurozone,

calculating that it would fail. He had no intention of dropping the euro and returning to the drachma. But voters approved the referendum.

Varoufakis, who is a personal friend, told me that he was with the prime minister the night of the referendum. When it was clear it would pass, he said, Tsipras looked at him and said, "Shit. We're going to actually win this."

Tsipras decided to ignore the voters. Instead of fulfilling his party's essential, opening promise—to resist demands for massive budget cuts and layoffs from the public sector for Greece—Tsipras capitulated.

Varoufakis Takes the Fall

Tsipras also threw Varoufakis to the wolves. Varoufakis was forced to resign and the country's chief prosecutor wound up charging him with "undermining the national currency" by weakening the euro against the dollar with his threat to withdraw from the Eurozone in meetings with the Germans.

Varoufakis was arraigned on a charge of treason and still faces trial, although he may not see the inside of a courtroom for another 20 years. That's the Greek justice system, where treason cases typically drag on for decades and then fizzle out. The last treason conviction was in the 1970s, when the leaders of the 1967-74 military junta were convicted and sentenced to life in prison. They all died there.

In the years since Greece's drastic face-off with the EU, unemployment has fallen to 19 percent from 30 percent to. Tourism is way up. And the country is no longer on the

brink of insolvency. But none of that has anything to do with the Syriza Party, its platform or its leader. The economy is turning around because it has finally found a natural equilibrium, albeit at a much-reduced size from before the crisis, and in spite of Syriza's policies.

Syriza is a comparatively new party in Greece, founded in 2001 after the socialist PASOK party collapsed under the weight of its own corruption. It's a coalition of stragglers from PASOK and five small Eurocommunist parties. Its platform is socialist and nationalist at the same time: oppose neoliberal economic policies, protect Greek workers, clean up the environment, provide for the elderly, maintain good relations with neighbors, oppose counterterrorism laws and welcome refugees.

Capitalist Moves

But in accordance with the EU's bailout conditions, Tsipras wound up firing thousands of government workers, taking 10,000 priests off the government payroll and selling state monopolies to foreign investors. Thousands of Greeks either lost their pensions or had them slashed. For the first time in generations, many Greeks went hungry and became homeless.

None of that was socialist. It was capitalist. A truly socialist leader would have increased spending to stimulate the economy, while allowing public ownership of key industries. He would have increased exports from already socialized sectors, such as concrete and olive oil production.

Another notable failure of Tsipras concerns the Skouries

mine in northern Greece, which is operated by the Canadian Eldorado Gold Corporation. Greece is a rather important producer of gold, but Eldorado's operation has stirred intense demonstrations to protect the local water supply. Stridently anti-Eldorado graffiti in the northern part of the country expresses some of the local outrage. Instead of taking over the mine, cleaning it up, and selling mining rights to any number of "green" gold mining companies, Tsipras did nothing. As a result, miners went on strike last year and the company has announced layoffs.

On the heels of these failures, Tsipras looked for ways to recover his credentials as a "democratic socialist," bringing him to his current debacle.

Tsipras's predecessors, prime ministers from both the conservative New Democracy and socialist PASOK parties, all asked U.S., British and Israeli intelligence services for help against 17 November. Flouting that precedent, Tsipras decided to weaken the country's anti-terrorism laws. Since many of these laws were pushed by the United States, he saw it as a way to set himself apart from Greek conservatives.

I've been a Greek citizen since 2008. The Tsipras government hired me to help it write a new whistleblower protection law, enacted in April. But Tsipras has turned his back on democratic socialism. He's turned his back on the poor, the elderly, the environment, and even the victims of terrorism for no good reason. Tsipras has set back his professed democratic socialism by a generation.

John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act—a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration’s torture program.

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Watch Vigil for Assange

Consortium News broadcast the latest vigil for Julian Assange as the publisher comes under new pressure to be expelled from Ecuador’s London embassy, while charges await him in the United States.

The broadcast was Friday night. With Ray McGovern, Chris Hedges, Margaret Kimberly, Suzie Dawson and more:

Kwiatkowski Gets 2018 Sam Adams Award.

Read the Citation and Her Acceptance Speech Here.

Here is Karen Kwiatkowski's acceptance speech for the 2018 Sam Adams Award at a ceremony in Washington on Saturday night, preceded by the citation, that was read by former CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

Citation

Karen Kwiatkowski

"If you see something, say something," we so often hear. Karen Kwiatkowski took that saying to heart.

She saw her Pentagon superiors acting as eager accomplices to the Cheney/Bush administration's deceit in launching a war of aggression on Iraq. And she said something – and helped Knight Ridder reporters Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay see beneath the official lies and get the sordid story right **before** the war.

Karen's courage brings to mind the clarion call of Rabbi Abraham Heschel against the perpetrators of an earlier war – Vietnam. "Few are guilty," he said, "but all are responsible. Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself." Karen would not be indifferent to evil.

Ed Snowden, Sam Adams awardee in 2013, noted that we tend to ignore some degree of evil in our daily life, but, as Ed put it, "We also have a breaking point and when people find that, they act." As did Karen. As did 16 of Karen's predecessors honored with this award.

With all the gloom and doom enveloping us, we tend to wonder whether people with the conscience and courage of Ed or Karen still exist in and outside our national security establishment. Our country is in dire need of new patriots of this kind.

Meanwhile, we call to mind the courageous example not only of Karen and Ed, but also of Coleen Rowley and Elizabeth Gun, our first two awardees, who took great risks in trying to head off the attack on Iraq. And we again honor Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange who is now isolated in what the UN has called "arbitrary detention," for exposing the war crimes resulting from that war.

Karen Kwiatkowski has made her own unique contribution to this company of conscience and courage, and Sam Adams Associates are pleased to honor her.

Presented this 8th day of December 2018 in Washington by admirers of the example set by the late CIA analyst, Sam Adams. Know all ye by these presents that Karen Kwiatkowski is hereby honored with the traditional Sam Adams Corner-Brightener Candlestick Holder, in symbolic recognition of her courage in shining light into dark places.

'Thoughts on the Sam Adams Award': Remarks by Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatowski

I am honored beyond belief to be the 2018 recipient of the Sam Adams Award, and I thank Ray McGovern and the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay of Knight Ridder during the run up to the second invasion of Iraq, and Rob Reiner for putting together a great movie that was so consistently truthful, that for me, it looked almost like a documentary. I want to also thank the late David Hackworth, a man I never met who

published my first anonymous essays from the Pentagon, and of course, Lew Rockwell, who has published so many of my essays examining and trying to understand our government and our offensive policies over the past 15 years.

There have been many American patriots and truth tellers who have received the honor you have given me tonight – and I am going to name them here because I stand in awe of all of them:

Coleen Rowley of the FBI; Katharine Gun of British Intelligence; Sibel Edmonds of the FBI; Craig Murray, former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan; Sam Provance, former US Army Sgt; Maj. Frank Grevil of Danish Army Intelligence; Larry Wilkerson, Col., US Army (ret.), former chief of staff to Colin Powell at State; Julian Assange, of WikiLeaks; Thomas Drake, of NSA; Jesselyn Radack, formerly of Dept. of Justice and now National Security Director of Government Accountability Project; Thomas Fingar, former Deputy Director of National Intelligence and Director, National Intelligence Council, and Edward Snowden, former contractor for the National Security Agency; Chelsea Manning, US Army Private who exposed (via WikiLeaks) key information on Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as State Department activities; and to retired National Security Agency official William Binney, who challenged decisions to ignore the Fourth Amendment in the government's massive – and wasteful – collection of electronic data.

Again, I am very humbled and almost speechless tonight. But not entirely speechless.

My backstory is pretty well-known to most people here, and

to anyone who was interested in understanding US war policy in the early 2000s. I had a small role to play, in concert with a number of other truth tellers in media and in the national security bureaucracy. For every one of us, there were probably 20 to 50 people working beside us and around us, who understood a lot about what was happening, and who probably got a funny feeling about being in an organization where we all swore to uphold the Constitution, but in fact were engaged in promulgating lies of both omission and commission, mistruths and misdirection, aimed not at our enemies abroad but against the American people.

We were lying, with the help of a compliant and war-supportive media, to patriots young and old. Millions of Americans were eager to enlist, to fight, to sacrifice their life and health – for a made-up government fairy tale.

A sense of unease, I believe, was shared by many, many people who never blew a whistle, and never said a word. To their credit, some of these people passively resisted within their organizations, and tried to set things straight where they could. Some of these people simply called their assignments guy and got orders out of the Pentagon, others were removed if they resisted too much. There is always a cost when you seriously question the directions or actions of the bureaucracy that employs you.

It is in our country's interest – as security professionals, as intelligence professionals, as soldiers and citizens, as writers and newsmakers – to be sensitive to the lawlessness, the immorality, and the wrongdoing of the bureaucracies and the leaders of the organizations we are a part of. That is the first thing we must cultivate and encourage – a

sensitivity to and an awareness of something as simple as right and wrong. This is fundamental. From knowing right and wrong, we move to the factor that motivates so many whistleblowers, something that we all share as human beings, and that is an idea of justice.

The truth tellers who have been honored with Sam Adams Award, and thousands of others we may not be aware of around the world, share a concept of justice. For those who try to correct our U.S. government, particularly in its initiation and exercise of war, state-sanctioned murder and physical devastation of whole societies, we as American have tools that many others around the world don't have. We have a Constitution that many of us swore to uphold. Americans tend to have a good grounding in the fundamentals of right and wrong, derived from religion or tradition, or both. We live in something that calls itself a Republic, and it is a fine form of government, with a solid set of rules.

But how do we get from a certain moral discomfort, from seeing something going on around us that is wrong, to trying to do something about it? How do we decide if we want to leave the room, turn our backs, put our head down, or instead take some sort of action that will put us on a collision course with very powerful people? What if we, as truth tellers, are like blind men describing an elephant – we see only one part of a larger story? How do we decide that our faith in our leadership is misplaced, and that more is at stake than just our jobs?

When you look at the experiences of people who made the dangerous and difficult decision to act, like Daniel Ellsberg, and Sam Adams, and Sibel Edwards, Jesselyn

Raddick, Colleen Rowley, Thomas Drake, Ed Snowden, Julian Assange, and many others, you realize that speaking up and doing the right thing had a primary impact. That impact wasn't improved transparency, a more informed democracy, a more aware and alert citizenry and better government decisions by our elected leaders.

Those were all secondary impacts, and in many cases tenuous, as the improved level of national understanding seems to last for less than a single generation. No, the primary impact was the unimaginable wrath of the state aimed at the life, livelihood, reputation, family, character and credibility of the truth teller. In several cases, this included physical and psychological abuse, prison time, gag orders, and even more devious programs. The rage of the state against these truth tellers is not impulsive and short-lived – it is a forever project funded by tax dollars, and fueled by very profitable agendas.

Knowing all of this, can we really expect to see a healthy and growing flow of truth tellers, whistleblowers, and simply bold honest people speaking out about government lies?

I think we can, and I am optimistic about the possibilities of better government through honest, bold, and forthright people working in and around this government.

To start with, as I mentioned, we as government employees and uniformed service-members need to have a solid sense of right and wrong. We need to cultivate a sense of justice. In a wonderful way, our younger generations are well prepared for this, at least in terms of cultivating a sense of

justice. The young people we see portrayed, often disparagingly, as young socialists may not completely understand the nature of government or the state, but they do cherish ideas of justice.

We also need people in government service who are sensitive to what is going on in their organizations, and how people are feeling and behaving around them. It is not coincidence that many of the people who have been honored by this award are women, who may be paying closer attention to the mood and morality of their organizations. There's a country song that has a line in it about "Old men talking about the weather, and old women talking about old men." We need both in our organizations, to be in tune with what is happening, and who is leading us.

We need people in government service who are willing to walk away from a job, and to say or even broadcast why they are leaving, without worrying about the next job, without worrying about being blacklisted, without worrying that they can't make their next house payment or college tuition payment, or the alimony or child support payment. We need people in government who travel light, so to speak, and do their job because they love what they are doing and what it stands for.

This grounding and lack of rigid self-identification with their employing bureaucracy is extremely important. Thanks to technology and societal evolution, the younger generations of Americans are very likely to walk away from a job that they believe to be immoral, to act to correct what they see as wrong or unjust, and incidentally, are less likely to own a home, and more likely to define themselves

by what they believe and stand for, not where they work, and how many promotions they had planned for themselves in that organization.

But even with our younger generations coming into government service – with a good sense of justice, a strong sense of self, and a willingness to speak openly about what they believe and know – there is risk when someone questions the collective government story.

There is risk in the act of challenging authority and one's peer group, risk of being wrong and suffering loss of credibility. There is the rational and real risk of incurring the rage of the state, and being jailed, harmed, ruined and even killed on the whispers of an incensed or threatened agency.

There is another risk that we really don't talk about much. I think most concerning for many people is the risk that you are actually right, that you have discovered something damning and dark in your country, in your government, in your organization. Once this happens, if it happens, your life is irreversibly changed, and nothing is ever going to be the same. Understanding how your government actually works, in particular how it works to create and provoke war and murder, how it works to extract the wealth of the nation and use this blessing to commit Constitutional crimes and untold evil, in your name – for many this understanding is not a gift, but a curse. I estimate at least 10% of our country, 20 – 30 million Americans, many of them veterans the U.S. Empire's global adventures in the past 50 years, feel this curse, and many of them deal with it by turning away from the dark side of Washington D.C., and not talking,

writing, or speaking about what they know.

If anyone has followed the case of former Marine Sergeant Brandon Raub a few years ago, you realize that the government keeps a close and paranoid eye on what veterans are doing and saying. Given how things work today, they may be wise to turn away silently from the truth they know.

I think this is why it is often hard for us to demand more truth-tellers come forward, especially in the defense and security and intelligence arena, when we should be shouting it from the rooftops.

Some years ago, I did an online radio program where I would interview interesting people, like Ray McGovern and Sam Provance and Sibel Edmonds , among many others. One person, in our conversation, expressed surprise that I was a short (formerly) brown haired woman, when he thought I would be a tall blonde. I was reminded of this when watching Shock and Awe, because Rob Reiner and the writers did not know who I was, and they portrayed me as a tall light-haired woman, a modern day Viking of sorts. Notwithstanding that this is a popular and attractive stereotype, I think there is something to be learned here. We want to believe that anyone who stands up to authority, who knows his or her own mind, who is willing to enter into a battle of wills with the state, and to take a risk is somehow taller, stronger, bolder and braver than the rest of us.

But it isn't true. There is something remarkably childlike and simple in being honest, in observing without fear what is happening around you, and reporting this to the person who pays the bills. In the case of the national security

arena, the bill payer is the American people.

To tell the truth is simple, honorable, and good for the health of the Republic. The fact that it drives the security apparatus and the government crazy is just icing on the cake. Granted, we all need jobs, and our mental health, and we don't want to be imprisoned, tortured or killed. But the more of us – specifically those working with and inside the US government today – who tell the truth, the less likely that government embarrassment will result in harm to a whistleblower, and the less likely in the long run that we will see whistleblowers as we tend to see them today.

In a world of that values honesty, they would be receiving the public commendation of a proud Congress, a grateful media and President, and a contented population.

I'm not a Pollyanna, and I'm worried about the role the US government is playing at home and abroad. The kind of devastation that the US tolerates, supports and initiates around the world – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, of course Yemen comes to mind, the horrendous situation that Julian Assange is still facing as we speak – is not limited to “overseas.”

The industrial warfare state is as dangerous to Americans as it is to Iraqis, Syrians, and Yemenis. The arts of the warfare state are already being practiced here, against Americans. We – average Americans – are increasingly controlled, spied on, monitored, tracked, threatened, boxed in, and shut down by tools that were first used and tested on some contrived wartime enemy.

You don't need me to tell you this, it's in every newspaper

every day, on every page. It is our modern reality. Truth and transparency are its only antidote, and truth and transparency needs all of us. To live in a society, to be a citizen, to love your country – you cannot sleepwalk through it.

People who value wisdom, people who value common sense, people who value justice and people who believe that being woke is a good thing – congratulations! You are the majority! You are alive, you are in charge of this country, and you can choose. America is worth preserving, healing, and saving – and if she is to be saved we will do it by first learning the difference between the truth and a lie, and then speaking the truth loudly, boldly, to anyone who will listen, over and over and over again.

The Bushes' 'Death Squads'

George H.W. Bush was laid to rest on Wednesday but some of his murderous policies lived on through his son's administration and until this day, as Robert Parry reported on January 11, 2005.

How George W. Bush Learned From His Father

By Robert Parry

Special to Consortium News



By refusing to admit personal misjudgments on Iraq, George W. Bush instead is pushing the United States toward becoming what might be called a permanent “counter-terrorist” state, which uses torture, cross-border death squads and even collective punishments to defeat perceived enemies in Iraq and around the world.

Since securing a second term, Bush has pressed ahead with this hard-line strategy, in part by removing dissidents inside his administration while retaining or promoting his protégés. Bush also has started prepping his younger brother Jeb as a possible successor in 2008, which could help extend George W.’s war policies while keeping any damaging secrets under the Bush family’s control.

As a centerpiece of this tougher strategy to pacify Iraq, Bush is contemplating the adoption of the brutal practices that were used to suppress leftist peasant uprisings in Central America in the 1980s. The Pentagon is “intensively debating” a new policy for Iraq called the “Salvador option,” [*Newsweek*](#) magazine reported on Jan. 9.

The strategy is named after the Reagan-Bush administration’s “still-secret strategy” of supporting El Salvador’s right-wing security forces, which operated clandestine “death squads” to eliminate both leftist guerrillas and their civilian sympathizers, *Newsweek* reported. “Many U.S. conservatives consider the policy to have been a success – despite the deaths of innocent civilians,” *Newsweek* wrote.

Central America Veterans

The magazine also noted that a number of Bush administration

officials were leading figures in the Central American operations of the 1980s, such as John Negroponte, who was then U.S. Ambassador to Honduras and is now U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

Other current officials who played key roles in Central America include Elliott Abrams, who oversaw Central American policies at the State Department and who is now a Middle East adviser on Bush's National Security Council staff, and Vice President Dick Cheney, who was a powerful defender of the Central American policies while a member of the House of Representatives.

The insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala were crushed through the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians. In Guatemala, about 200,000 people perished, including what a truth commission later termed a genocide against Mayan Indians in the Guatemalan highlands. In El Salvador, about 70,000 died including massacres of whole villages, such as the slaughter carried out by a U.S.-trained battalion against hundreds of men, women and children in and around the town of El Mozote in 1981.

The Reagan-Bush strategy also had a domestic component, the so-called "perception management" operation that employed sophisticated propaganda to manipulate the fears of the American people while hiding the ugly reality of the wars. The Reagan-Bush administration justified its actions in Central America by portraying the popular uprisings as an attempt by the Soviet Union to establish a beachhead in the Americas to threaten the U.S. southern border.

[For details about how these strategies worked and the role

of George H.W. Bush, see Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq.](#)]

More Pain

By employing the "Salvador option" in Iraq, the U.S. military would crank up the pain, especially in Sunni Muslim areas where resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq has been strongest. In effect, Bush would assign other Iraqi ethnic groups the job of leading the "death squad" campaign against the Sunnis.

"One Pentagon proposal would send Special Forces teams to advise, support and possibly train Iraqi squads, most likely hand-picked Kurdish Perhmerga fighters and Shiite militiamen, to target Sunni insurgents and their sympathizers, even across the border into Syria, according to military insiders familiar with discussions," Newsweek reported.

Newsweek quoted one military source as saying, "The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving the terrorists. ... From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation."

Citing the Central American experiences of many Bush administration officials, we wrote in November 2003 – more than a year ago – that many of these Reagan-Bush veterans were drawing lessons from the 1980s in trying to cope with the Iraqi insurgency. We pointed out, however, that the conditions were not parallel. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Iraq: Quicksand & Blood."](#)]

In Central America, powerful oligarchies had long surrounded

themselves with ruthless security forces and armies. So, when uprisings swept across the region in the early 1980s, the Reagan-Bush administration had ready-made – though unsavory – allies who could do the dirty work with financial and technological help from Washington.

Iraqi Dynamic

A different dynamic exists in Iraq, because the Bush administration chose to disband rather than co-opt the Iraqi army. That left U.S. forces with few reliable local allies and put the onus for carrying out counterinsurgency operations on American soldiers who were unfamiliar with the land, the culture and the language.

Those problems, in turn, contributed to a series of counterproductive tactics, including the heavy-handed round-ups of Iraqi suspects, the torturing of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and the killing of innocent civilians by jittery U.S. troops fearful of suicide bombings.

The war in Iraq also has undermined U.S. standing elsewhere in the Middle East and around the world. Images of U.S. soldiers sexually abusing Iraqi prisoners, putting bags over the heads of captives and shooting a wounded insurgent have blackened America's image everywhere and made cooperation with the United States increasingly difficult even in countries long considered American allies.

Beyond the troubling images, more and more documents have surfaced indicating that the Bush administration had adopted limited forms of torture as routine policy, both in Iraq and the broader War on Terror. Last August, an FBI counterterrorism official criticized abusive practices at

the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

“On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water. Most times they had urinated or defecated on themselves, and had been left there for 18-24 hours or more,” the official wrote. “When I asked the M.P.’s what was going on, I was told that interrogators from the day prior had ordered this treatment, and the detainee was not to be moved. On another occasion ... the detainee was almost unconscious on the floor, with a pile of hair next to him. He had apparently been literally pulling his own hair out throughout the night.”

Despite official insistence that torture is not U.S. policy, the blame for these medieval tactics continues to climb the chain of command toward the Oval Office. It appears to have been Bush’s decision after the Sept. 11 attacks to “take the gloves off,” a reaction understandable at the time but which now appears to have hurt, more than helped.

TV World

Many Americans have fantasized about how they would enjoy watching Osama bin Laden tortured to death for his admitted role in the Sept. 11 attacks. There is also a tough-guy fondness for torture as shown in action entertainment – like Fox Network’s “24” – where torture is a common-sense shortcut to get results.

But the larger danger arises when the exceptional case becomes the routine, when it’s no longer the clearly guilty al-Qaeda mass murderer, but it is now the distraught Iraqi father trying to avenge the death of his child killed by

American bombs.

Rather than the dramatic scenes on TV, the reality is usually more like that desperate creature in Guantanamo lying in his own waste and pulling out his hair. The situation can get even worse when torture takes on the industrial quality of government policy, with subjects processed through the gulags or the concentration camps.

That also is why the United States and other civilized countries have long banned torture and prohibited the intentional killing of civilians. The goal of international law has been to set standards that couldn't be violated even in extreme situations or in the passions of the moment.

Yet, Bush – with his limited world experience – was easily sold on the notion of U.S. “exceptionalism” where America's innate goodness frees it from the legal constraints that apply to lesser countries.

Bush also came to believe in the wisdom of his “gut” judgments. After his widely praised ouster of Afghanistan's Taliban government in late 2001, Bush set his sights on invading Iraq. Like a hot gambler in Las Vegas doubling his bets, Bush's instincts were on a roll.

Now, however, as the Iraqi insurgency continues to grow and inflict more casualties on both U.S. troops and Iraqis who have thrown in their lot with the Americans, Bush finds himself facing a narrowing list of very tough choices.

Bush could acknowledge his mistakes and seek international help in extricating U.S. forces from Iraq. But Bush abhors admitting errors, even small ones. Plus, Bush's belligerent

tone hasn't created much incentive for other countries to bail him out.

Instead Bush appears to be upping the ante by contemplating cross-border raids into countries neighboring Iraq. He also would be potentially expanding the war by having Iraqi Kurds and Shiites kill Sunnis, a prescription for civil war or genocide.

Pinochet Option

There's a personal risk, too, for Bush if he picks the "Salvador option." He could become an American version of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet or Guatemala's Efraim Rios Montt, leaders who turned loose their security forces to commit assassinations, "disappear" opponents and torture captives.

Like the policy that George W. Bush is now considering, Pinochet even sponsored his own international "death squad" – known as Operation Condor – that hunted down political opponents around the world. One of those attacks in September 1976 blew up a car carrying Chilean dissident Orlando Letelier as he drove through Washington D.C. with two American associates. Letelier and co-worker Ronni Moffitt were killed.

With the help of American friends in high places, the two former dictators have fended off prison until now. However, Pinochet and Rios Montt have become pariahs who are facing legal proceedings aimed at finally holding them accountable for their atrocities.

[For more on George H.W. Bush's protection of Pinochet, see

Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

One way for George W. Bush to avert that kind of trouble is to make sure his political allies remain in power even after his second term ends in January 2009. In his case, that might be achievable by promoting his brother Jeb for president in 2008, thus guaranteeing that any incriminating documents stay under wraps.

President George W. Bush's dispatching Florida Gov. Jeb Bush to inspect the tsunami damage in Asia started political speculation that one of the reasons was to burnish Jeb's international credentials in a setting where his personal empathy would be on display.

Though Jeb Bush has insisted that he won't run for president in 2008, the Bush family might find strong reason to encourage Jeb to change his mind, especially if the Iraq War is lingering and George W. has too many file cabinets filled with damaging secrets.

This is how this article originally [appeared](#) on Consortium News.

The late investigative reporter Robert Parry, the founding editor of Consortium News, broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and *Newsweek* in the 1980s. His last book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, can be obtained in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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