

The Right's Second Amendment Lies

From the Archive: In the wake of the latest gun massacre in the United States, we republish an article by Robert Parry debunking some of the right-wing myths about the Second Amendment that have prevented common sense gun laws.

By Robert Parry ([first published December 21, 2012](#))

Right-wing resistance to meaningful gun control is driven, in part, by a false notion that America's Founders adopted the Second Amendment because they wanted an armed population that could battle the U.S. government. The opposite is the truth, but many Americans seem to have embraced this absurd, anti-historical narrative.

The reality was that the Framers wrote the Constitution and added the Second Amendment with the goal of creating a strong central government with a citizens-based military force capable of putting down insurrections, not to enable or encourage uprisings. The key Framers, after all, were mostly men of means with a huge stake in an orderly society, the likes of George Washington and James Madison.

The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 weren't precursors to France's Robespierre or Russia's Leon Trotsky, believers in perpetual revolutions. In fact, their work on the Constitution was influenced by the experience of Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786, a populist uprising that the weak federal government, under the Articles of Confederation, lacked an army to defeat.

Daniel Shays, the leader of the revolt, was a former Continental Army captain who joined with other veterans and farmers to take up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

The rebellion alarmed retired Gen. George Washington who received reports on the developments from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as Gen. Henry Knox and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Washington was particularly concerned that the disorder might serve the interests of the British, who had only recently accepted the existence of the United States.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information from a friend in Connecticut, Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe."

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the spreading unrest. "What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?" Lincoln responded: "Many of them appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity."

However, the U.S. government lacked the means to restore order, so wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington expressed satisfaction at the outcome but remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

"If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite – a fit subject for a mad house," Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws anarchy & confusion must prevail."

Washington's alarm about Shays' Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in and preside over the Constitutional Convention, which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to "We the People" and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

A central point of the Constitution was to create a peaceful means for the United States to implement policies favored by the people but within a structure of checks and balances to prevent radical changes deemed too disruptive to the established society. For instance, the two-year terms of the House of Representatives were meant to reflect the popular will but the six-year terms of the Senate were designed to temper the passions of the moment.

Within this framework of a democratic Republic, the Framers criminalized taking up arms against the government. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but "domestic Violence," and treason is one of the few crimes defined in the Constitution as "levying war against" the United States as well as giving "Aid and Comfort" to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

But it was the Constitution's drastic expansion of federal power that prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia's Patrick Henry who denounced the Constitution and rallied a movement known as the Anti-Federalists. Prospects for the Constitution's ratification were in such

doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were.

To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Madison's political maneuvering succeeded as the Constitution narrowly won approval in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights which were ratified in 1791. [For details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

Behind the Second Amendment

The Second Amendment dealt with concerns about "security" and the need for trained militias to ensure what the Constitution called "domestic Tranquility." There was also hesitancy among many Framers about the costs and risks from a large standing army, thus making militias composed of citizens an attractive alternative.

So, the Second Amendment read: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Contrary to some current right-wing fantasies about the Framers wanting to encourage popular uprisings over grievances, the language of the amendment is clearly aimed at maintaining order within the country.

That point was driven home by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of "a well-regulated militia" by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

In 1794, President Washington, who was determined to demonstrate the young government's resolve, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels. Their revolt soon collapsed and order was restored, demonstrating how the Second Amendment helped serve the government in maintaining "security," as the Amendment says.

Beyond this clear historical record that the Framers' intent was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions there is also the simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation's aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land. They recognized that a strong central government and domestic tranquility were in their economic interests.

So, it would be counterintuitive as well as anti-historical to believe that

Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people at least the white males so uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays' Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts, could be repulsed.

However, the Right has invested heavily during the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government. To that end, a few incendiary quotes are cherry-picked or taken out of context.

This "history" has then been amplified through the Right's powerful propaganda apparatus Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today's gun-owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

The mythology about the Framers and the Second Amendment is, of course, only part of the fake history that the Right has created to persuade ill-informed Tea Partiers that they should dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and channel the spirits of men like Washington and Madison.

But this gun fable is particularly insidious because it obstructs efforts by today's government to enact commonsense gun-control laws and thus the false narrative makes possible the kinds of slaughters that erupt periodically across the United States, most recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were murdered in minutes by an unstable young man with a civilian version of the M-16 combat rifle.

While it's absurd to think that the Founders could have even contemplated such an act in their 18th Century world of single-fire muskets that required time-consuming reloading right-wing gun advocates have evaded that obvious reality by postulating that Washington, Madison and other Framers would have wanted a highly armed population to commit what the Constitution defined as treason against the United States.

Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false.

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

Vietnam's Lessons and the U.S. Culture of Violence

In the wake of another deadly school shooting in Florida, the lessons of past massacres in Vietnam can teach us about U.S. violence and the need to reform unchecked gun culture, discusses Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Back in October 2016 I wrote an analysis entitled "[Are Humans Natural-Born Killers?](#)" It described and commented on research on the origins of human violence published in the science journal *Nature*. The conclusion offered in the article is that humans come from an evolutionary line that has the capability for violent behavior genetically built into it. It is a reasonable hypothesis. As just about every serious historian knows, the human propensity for lethal violence goes back as far as the evidence can take us – so far that there can be little doubt that this trait is inherited from our pre-human ancestors.

Yet, as the *Nature* scholars also point out, in the case of our species, culture has the ability to "modulate our bloodthirsty tendencies."

I bring this up now because there is new interest in the slaughter and massacres that took place during the Vietnam War. This may in part be a response to the fact that last month marked the 50th anniversary of that war's Tet offensive.

America waged war in Vietnam roughly from 1961 to 1975. The starting date is a "rough" one because the United States never actually declared war. In this 14-year span it is generally accepted that the turning point in the struggle came during the Tet offensive of 1968. Tet is the term used for the Vietnamese new year, and that celebratory time in 1968 was when the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong launched attacks in some 100 South Vietnamese towns and cities, in an effort to change the course of the war in their favor.

Though very costly (there were an estimated 50,000 Vietnamese casualties) the offensive worked, at least in the long run. Within a year the United States started a gradual withdrawal from the country. Although the fighting dragged on for another seven years (until the fall of Saigon in 1975) it was Washington's stubborn search for face-saving terms that largely kept it going.

By the time of the Tet offensive, the war had degenerated into mutual slaughter. The U.S. ended up killing some 3 million Vietnamese, many of them civilians. The

massacre at My Lai on 16 March 1968, has often been cited as the “singular” American example of such criminal behavior. It was on this date that a company of soldiers of the 23rd Americal Division murdered, without provocation, 504 peasant villagers of all ages and both sexes.

The massacre itself, and its background year of 1968, have been accurately described in a recent book, *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968 and the Descent into Darkness*, by Howard Jones (Oxford University Press, 2017). In turn the book has been expertly reviewed and elaborated upon in the popular *London Review of Books* (LRB) (25 January 2018) by Max Hastings.

It is to be noted that both the publisher and the reviewing magazine are located in the United Kingdom. The reviews of the book offered in the United States have been, to date, in academic journals, including the U.S. Army’s own *Army University Press*. Just about all of them have described Jones’s work as definitive and a seminal important read. Whether this will translate into public attention in the U.S. is doubtful.

Explaining Wartime Massacres

Modern efforts to explain happenings like the My Lai massacre usually bring up the problem of waging war when it has become hard to know who the enemy is – in other words, when not everyone is wearing a uniform and a lot of resistance is coming from irregular forces. The *Army University Press* review raises this issue.

Another possibility is that such behavior is an “inevitable consequence of combat.” In his *LRB* review, Max Hastings gives a long introductory account of a number of other massacres committed by soldiers in modern times, including in Vietnam. As a consequence one comes away with the feeling that, within a war zone, these criminal acts are almost common.

While it is no doubt true that a combat situation (or perhaps we can say the culture of combat) does raise the probability of massacres, they do not make them “inevitable.” Suggesting that they are, sounds more like an excuse than an explanation. After all, most combat soldiers are not participants in massacres.

This brings us back to the judgment of the research published in *Nature* – we all might well be potential natural born killers who are restrained or encouraged by cultural variables. Within the combat scenario, Hastings suggests that a culture of self-restraint accepted and enforced by the officer corps can forestall mass killings.

This is of particular interest when it comes to the peculiar culture of the United States. In Vietnam many of the massacres (My Lai was by no means unique)

were perpetrated by soldiers as well as their officers from the so-called “land of the free.” I use this descriptive term intentionally because one of the things that is often declared to be constitutionally “free” from rational regulation in the U.S. are guns. And, as a consequence, these troops came out of a “gun culture.”

It should be kept in mind that the American gun culture, with its accompanying violence, is not new. The 2014 book *Gun Violence and Public Life* documents this history. If anything has changed from the 1960s to today it is that the public now has access to military grade weapons. What also existed then as now is a culture of bigotry and racism. In the 1960s this was just being confronted by the Civil Rights Movement. It all made for an explosive mix that carried over to influence perceptions of and behavior toward the Vietnamese.

Manipulating Culture

If the *Nature* study’s conclusions can be believed, modern violence both of military and civilian origin can be moderated by manipulating culture. In the American case this means overcoming the gun culture as well as racism. There are many ways to do this. It can be done through public education as well as the way a society designs and applies its laws.

However, if any of these approaches to a safer, less violent society is to work, citizens must commit to a consistently enforced, long-term, indeed multi-generational, effort of reform. None of this will happen until politicians and the courts understand the Second Amendment of the Constitution (the present interpretation of which underpins the nation’s gun culture) in a more literal and reasonable way. And that won’t happen until public opinion overwhelms the ideological rigidity of the U.S. gun lobby.

In the United States the desire for rational reform of the gun laws goes up after each mass shooting and then is stymied by a rigid, but very politically influential, gun lobby. This scenario is part of a “culture war” that is ongoing within the American body politic. It involves not only the issue of gun control but also other issues such as abortion, gay rights, the promotion of racial equality and immigrant rights. So heated is this “culture war” that one might see it as a (so far) non-violent form of civil war.

The lessons of Vietnam, and a greater awareness of the massacres that occurred during this war, speak to the need to reform U.S. culture – to make it less violent and more tolerant. Thus the Vietnam experience should be incorporated into the current debate about guns in America. It would be a major achievement if the 1968 slaughter at My Lai could help stop today’s slaughter on the streets of the U.S.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

Honduras Nearing Ten Years of Stolen Elections, Neo-Colonial Rule

Despite an organized and active grassroots movement, Honduran politics have been repeatedly steamrolled by the self-interests of international ruling elites, as journalist and filmmaker Jesse Freeston explained to Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

For weeks following its stolen election, the corrupt right-wing, neo-fascist government of Juan Orlando Hernández's in Honduras has been terrorizing its people. Street protests and spontaneous blockades have been met by extreme violence. Dozens have already died on the frontlines and many more have been arrested and brutalized in detention, while often being held incommunicado.

I spoke to Jesse Freeston, who has been based in Honduras for the last eight years working as a video-journalist and documentary filmmaker, ever since the US supported/Hillary Clinton sustained 2009 coup d'état that purged the duly elected president, Manuel Zelaya. Freeston, who has reported for the Real News Network and Democracy Now en Español, is the producer of the feature documentary "Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley."

Freeston reports that, among other crimes against the people, "this regime has: stolen an election; ignored calls from the Organization of American States to hold a new election; passed a law prohibiting the prosecution of all former and current members of Congress in the midst of a series of massive corruption scandals [and has] appointed a new national police chief who has clear evidence against him of drug trafficking..."

I spoke to Freeston on February 7.

Dennis Bernstein: We continue our drumbeat coverage of Honduras and the recent stolen election there, an attempt to suppress the will of the people who, by all accounts, want to have a more progressive government. It has been a very violent situation since the election. We are hearing that dozens of people have

been killed and that the atrocities being perpetrated by the government have resulted in a nightmare. Could you put this in the context of the last two recent election cycles in Honduras?

Jesse Freeston: On June 28, 2009, there was a vote on a non-binding resolution put forward by President Manuel Zelaya, who had taken up the call of various indigenous groups in the country to rewrite the constitution. When people went out to vote on that day, the military staged a coup d'état and Zelaya wound up in Costa Rica.

This led to the most organized national resistance movement Honduras has ever seen. Assemblies were held, which brought together all these people who stood to gain from a new constitution. Just about every sector of the society were represented, except perhaps the oligarchy.

This led to the formation of the Libre Party, which participated in the 2013 elections [with Manuel Zelaya's wife, Xiomara Castro, running as the party's presidential candidate]. The election was officially won by Juan Orlando Hernandez but there was massive fraud. The November, 2017 elections were even more of a farce.

Despite all that, when the electoral tribunal released its first results, the Oppositional Alliance were up by 5% with 60% of the votes counted. One of the magistrates on the tribunal described it at the time as an "irreversible trend." Then, counting stopped for over a day when the computer system supposedly crashed. When it was back up again, the tendency had completely flipped and Hernandez ended up winning by one percentage point.

This led to another massive uprising. On one day of action there were 48 blockades of highways and major boulevards in the country. During the last two months, this has been happening a couple times a week.

Even international observers such as the European Union Commission and the Organization of American States—who have been discredited here after turning their back many times in the last eight years to the crimes of this regime—even they have said that they have to redo the election or there has to be a recount.

Nevertheless, the members of those organizations, like Canada, like the United States and the countries of the European Union, went ahead and validated the election.

DB: We have heard that activists and members of the resistance have been arrested.

JF: Yes, there are dozens of political prisoners behind bars right now. One of

the most worrying cases is that of Edwin Espinal. He is someone who has consistently paid a price for his resistance against the ongoing coup d'état.

In September of 2009, Edwin Espinal's wife died from tear gas inhalation after taking part in several protests. A week later, Edwin was at a small neighborhood protest after which he was arrested for kidnapping because he took a child with him on his motorcycle when he was fleeing the tear gas. The mother of the child went over and over to the police station to explain that she had pleaded with Edwin to take her kid with him. Another time he was jailed for car theft for driving a friend's car.

The first thing that the newly-formed military-trained urban police force did was raid Espinal's house, claiming they had proof that he was a drug trafficker. The police falsely accused him of being involved in the Marriot Hotel fire and right now he is in a maximum security prison on that charge. Journalists and human rights workers are not allowed in to talk to him, his family have not been allowed to see him. This is the first time since the 1980's that a civilian will be tried inside a military base.

DB: How would you describe the US role in this situation? We know that Hillary Clinton played a key role in sustaining the coup in 2009.

JF: I think that informed people in Honduras realize that changes in political leadership in the US don't make much difference in how Honduras is treated. Decisions are made here at the US Embassy and ambassadors act as de-facto rulers here, as shadow presidents.

The one constant here is the massive military funding from the US. Since the coup, the Honduran military has received more direct funding from the US than any other country in the Americas, despite the fact that they have not been involved in a single military conflict or been threatened with one.

The military is purely used against people inside the country. Although the United States is by far the largest funder of the Honduran military, other countries are also involved because humanitarian and other aid is typically diverted to the military.

DB: You said that there is a continuity between the last administration's policy toward Honduras and the Trump administration's policy. In terms of so-called US interests, the real problem is that we push a program of "free trade" and we insist on having our military bases there. So we have every reason to sustain the government as long as it provides us with an opportunity to police the region. Could you talk about the geopolitical part of this?

JF: I think the more a country depends on its natural resources, the more

everything comes down to who controls the land. In 1961, [John F.] Kennedy launched a program called The Alliance for Progress, which was billed as a kind of Marshall Plan for Latin America. It was a response to the Cuban revolution and an attempt to ward off similar revolutions across Latin America.

We were going to give billions of dollars to countries in Latin America if they promised to undertake land reform, if the oligarchy agreed to give up a portion of their land. When Johnson replaced Kennedy there was much less priority assigned to this program. Nonetheless, the Honduran government had to pass a number of land reform laws to receive the money, but none of those laws were ever implemented.

If the US intends to keep its business interests here alive—the sweatshop sector as well as bananas and palm oil—and for Canada, gold mining primarily—they need to maintain their alliance with this land-holding oligarchy. It is this alliance that the resistance is asking the countries of the North and the West to break.

With eight and a half years of organizing experience, the people of Honduras could put together a government so fast it would make your head spin. This movement is very organized. They know who to trust, they know who can provide intellectual support, they know who can run the economy. They are just waiting for the international community to change its alliances.

DB: So will the resistance to the Hernandez regime go on?

JF: The Oppositional Alliance has decided to wage a “peaceful insurrection,” something they are entitled to do under the Honduran constitution, which states that no one owes obedience to a government which takes power by force. The numbers now at the protests have been considerably less than in the past two months, particularly since the inauguration on January 27.

It is hard to predict what will happen but the vast majority of the population do not want this regime. There is a massive corruption scandal developing and we will see what happens with that. Students are planning a strike for next month. But we will have to wait to see what kinds of ideas are going to be put forward in Honduras.

People are looking at Honduras as a laboratory for the ultra-right of the world. Fortunately, there is a well-organized movement here that will be rising up again and again. It is up to those of us in the international community to put pressure on those who claim to represent us to change their allegiances.

DB: Would you say that this is a movement inspired by young people in the country?

JF: Yes, and that is the key to understanding this new law that the National Party is trying to pass which would regulate social media. It has to do with this young generation that has grown up in this period following the coup.

Someone like Zelaya doesn't necessarily reach them. This new law the government is trying to pass would give them the right to criminalize anyone posting anything they deem "hateful" on social media. And this is a government that labels "racist" people who are defending rivers from dams being built.

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.

Ten Commonsense Suggestions for Making Peace, Not War

President Trump's first year in office brought an escalation of military aggression abroad as he built on the interventions of previous administrations, but there are steps America can take to move towards a more peaceful future, writes retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel William J. Astore at TomDispatch.

By William J. Astore

Whether the rationale is the need to wage a war on terror involving 76 countries or renewed preparations for a struggle against peer competitors Russia and China (as Defense Secretary James Mattis suggested recently while introducing America's new National Defense Strategy), the U.S. military is engaged globally.

A network of 800 military bases spread across 172 countries helps enable its wars and interventions. By the count of the Pentagon, at the end of the last fiscal year about 291,000 personnel (including reserves and Department of Defense civilians) were deployed in 183 countries worldwide, which is the functional definition of a military uncontained. Lady Liberty may temporarily close when the U.S. government grinds to a halt, but the country's foreign military commitments, especially its wars, just keep humming along.

As a student of history, I was warned to avoid the notion of inevitability.

Still, given such data points and others like them, is there anything more predictable in this country's future than incessant warfare without a true victory in sight? Indeed, the last clear-cut American victory, the last true "mission accomplished" moment in a war of any significance, came in 1945 with

the end of World War II.

Yet the lack of clear victories since then seems to faze no one in Washington.

In this century, presidents have regularly boasted that the U.S. military is the finest fighting force in human history, while no less regularly demanding that the most powerful military in today's world be "rebuilt" and funded at ever more staggering levels. Indeed, while on the campaign trail, Donald Trump promised he'd invest so much in the military that it would become "so big and so strong and so great, and it will be so powerful that I don't think we're ever going to have to use it."

As soon as he took office, however, he promptly appointed a set of generals to key positions in his government, stored the mothballs, and went back to war.

Here, then, is a brief rundown of the first year of his presidency in war terms.

Trump's First Year of War-Making

In 2017, Afghanistan saw a mini-surge of roughly 4,000 additional U.S. troops (with more to come), a major spike in air strikes, and an onslaught of munitions of all sorts, including MOAB (the mother of all bombs), the never-before-used largest non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. arsenal, as well as precision weapons fired by B-52s against suspected Taliban drug laboratories. By the Air Force's own count, 4,361 weapons were "released" in Afghanistan in 2017 compared to 1,337 in 2016. Despite this commitment of warriors and weapons, the Afghan war remains – according to American commanders putting the best possible light on the situation – "stalemated," with that country's capital Kabul currently under siege.

How about Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State? U.S.-led coalition forces have launched more than 10,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since Donald Trump became president, unleashing 39,577 weapons in 2017. (The figure for 2016 was 30,743.) The "caliphate" is now gone and ISIS deflated but not defeated, since you can't extinguish an ideology solely with bombs.

Meanwhile, along the Syrian-Turkish border a new conflict seems to be heating up between American-backed Kurdish forces and NATO ally Turkey.

Yet another strife-riven country, Yemen, witnessed a sixfold increase in U.S. airstrikes against al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (from 21 in 2016 to more than 131 in 2017). In Somalia, which has also seen a rise in such strikes against al-Shabaab militants, U.S. forces on the ground have reached numbers not seen since the Black Hawk Down incident of 1993. In each of these countries, there are yet more ruins, yet more civilian casualties, and yet more displaced people.

Finally, we come to North Korea. Though no real shots have yet been fired, rhetorical shots by two less-than-stable leaders, “Little Rocket Man” Kim Jong-un and “dotard” Donald Trump, raise the possibility of a regional bloodbath.

Trump, seemingly favoring military solutions to North Korea’s nuclear program even as his administration touts a new generation of more usable nuclear warheads, has been remarkably successful in moving the world’s doomsday clock ever closer to midnight.

Clearly, his “great” and “powerful” military has hardly been standing idly on the sidelines looking “big” and “strong.” More than ever, in fact, it seems to be lashing out across the Greater Middle East and Africa. Seventeen years after the 9/11 attacks began the Global War on Terror, all of this represents an eerily familiar attempt by the U.S. military to kill its way to victory, whether against the Taliban, ISIS, or other terrorist organizations.

This kinetic reality should surprise no one. Once you invest so much in your military – not just financially but also culturally (by continually celebrating it in a fashion which has come to seem like a quasi-faith) – it’s natural to want to put it to use. This has been true of all recent administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, as reflected in the infamous question Madeleine Albright posed to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell in 1992: “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”

With the very word “peace” rarely in Washington’s political vocabulary, America’s never-ending version of war seems as inevitable as anything is likely to be in history. Significant contingents of U.S. troops and contractors remain an enduring presence in Iraq and there are now 2,000 U.S. Special Operations forces and other personnel in Syria for the long haul. They are ostensibly engaged in training and stability operations. In Washington, however, the urge for regime change in both Syria and Iran remains strong – in the case of Iran implacably so. If past is prologue, then considering previous regime-change operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the future looks grim indeed.

Despite the dismal record of the last decade and a half, our civilian leaders continue to insist that this country must have a military not only second to none but globally dominant. And few here wonder what such a quest for total dominance, the desire for absolute power, could do to this country. Two centuries ago, however, writing to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams couldn’t have been clearer on the subject. Power, he said, “must never be trusted without a check.”

The question today for the American people: How is the dominant military power of which U.S. leaders so casually boast to be checked? How is the country’s

almost total reliance on the military in foreign affairs to be reined in? How can the plans of the profiteers and arms makers to keep the good times rolling be brought under control?

As a start, consider one of Donald Trump's favorite generals, Douglas MacArthur, speaking to the Sperry Rand Corporation in 1957:

"Our swollen budgets constantly have been misrepresented to the public. Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear – kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor – with the cry of grave national emergency. Always there has been some terrible evil at home or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up if we did not blindly rally behind it by furnishing the exorbitant funds demanded. Yet, in retrospect, these disasters seem never to have happened, seem never to have been quite real."

No peacenik MacArthur. Other famed generals like Smedley Butler and Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke out with far more vigor against the corruptions of war and the perils to a democracy of an ever more powerful military, though such sentiments are seldom heard in this country today. Instead, America's leaders insist that other people judge us by our words, our stated good intentions, not our murderous deeds and their results.

Perpetual Warfare Whistles Through Washington

Whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere in the war on terror, the U.S. is now engaged in generational conflicts that are costing us trillions of dollars, driving up the national debt while weakening the underpinnings of our democracy. They have led to foreign casualties by the hundreds of thousands and created refugees in the millions, while turning cities like Iraq's Mosul into wastelands.

In today's climate of budget-busting "defense" appropriations, isn't it finally time for Americans to apply a little commonsense to our disastrous pattern of war-making? To prime the pump for such a conversation, here are 10 suggestions for ways to focus on, limit, or possibly change Washington's now eternal war-making and profligate war spending:

1. Abandon the notion of perfect security. You can't have it. It doesn't exist. And abandon as well the idea that a huge military establishment translates into national safety. James Madison didn't think so and neither did Dwight D. Eisenhower.
2. Who could have anything against calling the Pentagon a "defense" department, if defense were truly its focus? But let's face it: the Pentagon is actually a war department. So let's label it what it really

is. After all, how can you deal with a problem if you can't even name it accurately?

3. Isn't it about time to start following the Constitution when it comes to our "wars"? Isn't it time for Congress to finally step up to its constitutional duties? Whatever the Pentagon is called, this country should no longer be able to pursue its many conflicts without a formal congressional declaration of war. If we had followed that rule, the U.S. wouldn't have fought any of its wars since the end of World War II.
4. Generational wars – ones, that is, that never end – should not be considered a measure of American resolve, but of American stupidity. If you wage war long, you wage it wrong, especially if you want to protect democratic institutions in this country.
5. Generals generally like to wage war. Don't blame them. It's their profession. But for heaven's sake, don't put them in charge of the Department of "Defense" (James Mattis) or the National Security Council (H.R. McMaster) either – and above all, don't let one of them (John Kelly) become the gatekeeper for a volatile, vain president. In our country, civilians should be in charge of the war makers, end of story.
6. You can't win wars you never should have begun in the first place. America's leaders failed to learn that lesson from Vietnam. Since then they have continued to wage wars for less-than-vital interests with predictably dismal results. Following the Vietnam example, America will only truly win its Afghan War when it chooses to rein in its pride and vanity – and leave.
7. The serious people in Washington snickered when, as a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2008, Congressman Dennis Kucinich called for a Department of Peace. Remind me, though, 17 years into our latest set of wars, what was so funny about that suggestion? Isn't it better to wage peace than war? If you don't believe me, ask a wounded veteran or a Gold Star family.
8. Want to invest in American jobs? Good idea! But stop making the military-industrial complex the preferred path to job creation. That's a loser of a way to go. It's proven that investments in "butter" create double or triple the number of jobs as those in "guns." In other words, invest in education, health care, and civilian infrastructure, not more weaponry.
9. Get rid of the very idea behind the infamous Pottery Barn rule – the warning Secretary of State Colin Powell offered George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq that if the U.S. military "breaks" a country, somehow we've "bought" it and so have to take ownership of the resulting mess. Whether stated or not, it's continued to be the basis for this century's unending wars. Honestly, if somebody broke something valuable you owned, would you trust that person to put it back together? Folly doesn't decrease

by persisting in it.

10. I was an officer in the Air Force. When I entered that service, the ideal of the citizen-soldier still held sway. But during my career I witnessed a slow, insidious change. A citizen-soldier military morphed into a professional ethos of “warriors” and “warfighters,” a military that saw itself as better than the rest of us. It’s time to think about how to return to that citizen-soldier tradition, which made it harder to fight those generational wars.

Consider retired General John Kelly, who, while defending the president in a controversy over the president’s words to the mother of a dead Green Beret, refused to take questions from reporters unless they had a personal connection to fallen troops or to a Gold Star family. Consider as well the way that U.S. politicians like Vice President Mike Pence are always so keen to exalt those in uniform, to speak of them as above the citizenry. (“You are the best of us.”)

Isn’t it time to stop praising our troops to the rooftops and thanking them endlessly for what they’ve done for us – for fighting those wars without end – and to start listening to them instead? Isn’t it time to try to understand them not as “heroes” in another universe, but as people like us in all their frailty and complexity? We’re never encouraged to see them as our neighbors, or as teenagers who struggled through high school, or as harried moms and dads.

Our troops are, of course, human and vulnerable and imperfect. We don’t help them when we put them on pedestals, give them flags to hold in the breeze, and salute them as icons of a feel-good brand of patriotism. Talk of warrior-heroes is worse than cheap: it enables our state of permanent war, elevates the Pentagon, ennobles the national security state, and silences dissent. That’s why it’s both dangerous and universally supported in rare bipartisan fashion by politicians in Washington.

So here’s my final point. Think of it as a bonus 11th suggestion: don’t make our troops into heroes, even when they’re in harm’s way. It would be so much better to make ourselves into heroes by getting them out of harm’s way.

Be exceptional, America. Make peace, not war.

William Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and history professor, is a TomDispatch regular. He blogs at Bracing Views. [This article originally appeared at TomDispatch.com and is republished with permission.]

Connecticut Court Decision Highlights U.S. Educational Failures

A recent court decision in Connecticut overturned a mandate that would have addressed inadequate education funding for poorer communities, a historic problem of the U.S. educational system, which relies on local resources instead of federal wealth, as Jonathan Kozol and Dennis J. Bernstein discussed.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In 1973, I was a struggling young teacher working in inner city Brooklyn when I discovered Jonathan Kozol's National Book Award-winning *Death at an Early Age*.

It became my young teacher's bible on understanding the nature of the school system and the pervasive racism at its core. Its subtitle, "The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools" is as relevant now as it was when it was published some 53 years ago.

Witness the recent decision by the Connecticut Supreme Court [Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding v. Rell], which rejected a claim by a coalition of municipalities, parents and students that the state's education funding formula is unconstitutional.

According to the AP, a divided court recently overturned a lower court ruling that had ordered state officials to develop plans for an overhaul of the state's education system, citing a huge gap in test scores between students in rich and poor towns. In response, Kozol remarked recently that this Court decision condones and sustains a system of virtual total segregation.

Kozol has worked with children in inner city schools for some fifty years.

Death at an Early Age was followed by a series of books, each one a powerful indictment of the public school system in the US, even as he celebrates the kids he meets and their teachers who continue to do their best, despite the abandonment of public schools and the racism that accompanies it.

His subsequent books include *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, and *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*.

I spoke with Kozol on January 31st in Boston.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you begin by describing what the decision was that the court overturned and explaining why it is significant.

Jonathan Kozol: A lower court had found that the inequalities within the state

between wealthy and poor school districts were unacceptable and unconstitutional. But the Connecticut Supreme Court in a divided decision unfortunately overturned the lower court judge. This has been a pattern all over the United States. By and large, we have seen this for decades.

In the 1990's we had the same situation in Ohio. They actually prevailed three times in showing that the system was blatantly unequal and won at the supreme court level. Even then, in contempt of court, the governor and legislature refused to obey the order. The governor finally packed the court with new appointees and the next time around they accepted the status quo.

This kind of thing has happened everywhere. Legislatures and governors have a thousand ways to drag their heels. In some cases they just say they don't have the money to do it.

There is a very poor town in Virginia named Petersburg. It is an important city in a way because it was a center of the slave trade and some important slave rebellions took place there. They have basically an all-Black school system.

They get about \$10,000 per child a year. Not so far away, in Arlington, Virginia, they're spending \$19,000 every year per child. That is almost twice as much, and of course the irony was that the kids in Petersburg were more in need!

They don't have parents who can take them to Paris before their French finals.

They don't get three years of preschool like wealthy kids do. There's just no level playing field in the United States.

I don't think this is ever going to be solved at the state level. The problem will only be solved when the education of every child in America is financed with the real wealth of the nation by the federal government. This is the way it is done in almost every other advanced society in the world.

We can't do that now because of a dreadful court decision [San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez] way back in 1972 in Texas. The poor districts prevailed at the local level and then the US Supreme Court overruled the district court. They ruled that education is not a protected right under the US Constitution.

DB: Your first book, *Death at an Early Age*, really broke the story of the unequal distribution of wealth among schools. As a substitute teacher in New York City, I remember that I would get called into a school on the east side of Manhattan and they had everything: a gymnasium, a library full of books, guidance counselors. You go up twenty or thirty blocks and the Dewey decimal system is still in place, athletics amounts to "here's a basketball, go out and play." It was always amazing for me to see the incredible difference in the same school system!

JK: I must say parenthetically that even in these very poorly funded schools, I keep running into terrific teachers. I've spent some time in Kern County, California, in schools that are just an hour and a half drive from L.A. These are badly funded schools but I would run into these great teachers and good principals, too.

But when these poorer kids do badly on these standardized tests, who does the media blame? They don't blame the state for cheating these kids from the hour of their birth, they blame the kids or else they blame their teachers. We have this whole regime now in the United States that holds the victims accountable.

In the poorer schools, we spend half the year drilling them for the tests, which has little to do with education but is training them to outsmart the test. We try to pump the scores a couple points and if that doesn't happen we blame the teachers.

The new solution is to set up charter schools in these cities, which become drill academies. Virtually all of them are apartheid schools because they specifically target minorities. And if they can raise the scores a few points, then the media says ah, that's the answer! Actually, they are just slightly higher-scoring separate and unequal schools.

If it were only inequality, then we could say it is a technical problem, we can solve it somehow. But there is a toxic synergy between financially unequal schools and virtually total abandonment of any integration efforts. In fact, when I talk about integration at school conferences, the corporate types that sponsor these events start to yawn.

What they do is sort of reinvent Dr. King's dream. They say, this is an all-Black school but we are living Dr. King's dream because we are training these Black and Latino kids to be more responsible for themselves and improving their character.

But Dr. King didn't say, "I have a dream that one day our victims will be more productive." It was about separate and unequal. We are back to that again. In my hometown of Boston, the system is more segregated than when I started teaching in 1964.

You mentioned New York and the Upper East Side. The Upper West Side is the classic example of what is happening now. There are a lot of affluent white professionals who are historically liberal in every way except this one. Just ten, twenty blocks to the north in Harlem you have virtually all-minority schools. And there are some schools that are kind of on the border between the two neighborhoods, but white people, for all their liberal beliefs, shun those

schools.

When enlightened civic leaders ask why these kids can't go to school together, the white parents aren't as obvious in their racism as people were in Alabama fifty years ago, but they will say, of course we believe in diversity, but if they go to those schools our kids won't do as well.

There is still this assumption of basic inferiority in the minority kids. They wouldn't say it is genetic inferiority but, for a combination of social reasons, these kids are going to ruin our kids' education. That is what it amounts to.

It is heartbreaking to me. I am 81 years old and I felt sure in 1968 that all this was going to change within ten years.

There are answers, of course. At least in small or middle-sized cities like Boston, we could very easily create a metropolitan school system. It wouldn't be a long ride for a kid to go in either direction. But that agenda is off the table, it's unfashionable now. This withdrawal from the mountaintop has been going on for a quarter century.

DB: One important point you make in *Savage Inequalities* is that we have to change the way public schools are funded. Schools are set up for failure from the get-go when so much depends on the local economic base. Is a lack of resources at the heart of the matter?

JK: These experts at the Hoover Institution and Heritage Foundation are always asking, "Is money really the answer?" Supposed liberals will look me in the face and say, "Jonathan, can you really solve the problems of those kinds by throwing money at them?" These are the same people who send their kids to prep schools that cost \$60,000 a year. My answer is always: "It seems to work for your kids, doesn't it?" It is sheer hypocrisy.

The basic funding for public schools comes from property taxes. States contribute what is known as "foundation money" so that no school goes without the bare minimum even if their local property taxes are insignificant.

The problem is that these foundation levels are always set so low. All the wealthy districts have to do is have a small bond levy and raise their property taxes half of one percent, and since they have lots of million dollar homes their funding shoots way up. Or they hold fundraising parties and in one night they will raise half a million dollars to build a new library or bring in art and music teachers. A poor district is lucky if they can raise \$800.

The only answer, I believe, is to do what all other developed nations do already and fund education out of the real wealth of the nation. It makes sense not only in practical terms, but in moral terms, in terms of citizenship. You don't

go to school to be a citizen of Nebraska or California. We go to school to be Americans. Kids pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States.

What we have today is an uneven social contract. If not for that decision in 1972, equal education would be a fundamental right under the US Constitution.

If Bernie Sanders had won, perhaps we would have ended up with a Supreme Court that would reexamine that decision.

DB: Finally, what do you think of the job our Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is doing?

JK: She is a catastrophe. First of all, although she is not very smart, she is slick and gives a slick veneer to this old slogan “freedom of choice.”

This was the slogan of segregationists in the South after the Brown decision, when they started so-called “voucher schools.” She is not simply in favor of more and more of these segregated charter schools, which are even more segregated than public schools; she is also in favor of vouchers, the invidious idea that goes way back to Milton Friedman in the 1950’s and was tested out in Pinochet’s Chile.

Devos also wants to open this up to religious schools. She represents the spearhead of the privatization movement that would like to do away with public education altogether.

We are at the lowest point in the history of education in America that I can remember since the hopeful moment at the tail end of the 1960’s. Fortunately, there is a younger generation that is gathering momentum now. I am working with Black Lives Matter on a project. They are talking about these issues at last.

When I visit colleges, I’ll stay up half the night with these young minority kids, and sometimes some damn decent white kids who identify with the struggle.

Maybe they are going to save us.

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.

Pawns in the Game: A Brief History of America and the Kurds

The Kurds find themselves caught in the middle of a power struggle between the U.S., Russia, Turkey, Iran and Syria – a familiar situation that follows decades

of geopolitical strife in their region, explains Ted Snider.

By Ted Snider

The only thing that has ever been faithful to the Kurds is history: it has faithfully, without fail, betrayed them. The Kurds have been cast in the role of the pawn in powerful countries' games of chess. They do much of the hard work only to be sacrificed when checkmate is in sight.

Most recently, the U.S. rediscovered the Kurds as useful pawns in the war on the Islamic State. But, despite being one of the most effective forces fighting the Islamic State, now that the end is in sight, the Kurds are, once again, in danger of being abandoned.

The United States, unlike Russia and Iran, was never invited into Syria. The U.S. insisted, though, that it was only there to save Syria from the Islamic State. Recently, however, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson tipped the American hand. America has no intention of leaving Syria once the Islamic State is checkmated, he said. The U.S. will stay after the war is over, and the uninvited stay has to do with more than just keeping the Islamic State down – it has to do with keeping Iran out.

Consistent with the current strategic pivot from Syria to Iran and Hezbollah, keeping American forces in Syria appears geared more toward kicking Iran and Iranian ally Bashar al-Assad out of Syria than it does with keeping the Islamic State out of Syria.

But to checkmate the Ayatollah, America needs to employ its pawns, and those pawns, once again, are the Kurds. The 30,000-soldier border force the U.S. would deploy to block Iran would be made up mostly of Kurds. But an armed Kurdish presence on the northern border with Turkey is a red line that Turkey has long warned it would not allow the Kurds to cross. So, the American decision has brought the wrath of Turkey down upon the Kurds.

As Turkey invades and bombs Afrin and the villages around it, experts on the region, such as Patrick Cockburn, warn that the Kurdish villages will be “reduced to mounds of smashed masonry.” As the number of dead and wounded rises, and as doctors in the region warn “of a rapidly worsening humanitarian situation,” senior Kurdish politician Aldar Khalil demanded that the U.S. “should meet their obligations toward this force that participated with them.”

“How can they stand by and watch?” he asked.

But this is not the first time the Kurds have asked that very question. In March

1975, the desperate Kurds begged the Central Intelligence Agency: "Our people's fate in unprecedented danger. Complete destruction hanging over our head. No explanation for all this. We appeal you and U.S. government intervene according to your promises."

The promise to which they were referring was a U.S. promise to support the Kurds if they would provide the troops for a covert action against Saddam Hussein – if they would be the pawns in the great powers' game.

In the 1970s, Iran and Iraq were quarrelling over a number of border disputes. In the hope of keeping the Iraqis preoccupied and busy, the Shah offered money and arms to the Kurds to fight Saddam Hussein. But the Kurds didn't trust the Shah and made their acceptance conditional upon an American guarantee that Iran would not cut the lifeline to the Kurdish uprising.

Iran expert Trita Parsi says the CIA and the State Department counseled against the covert action because of the inevitability of the Shah's betrayal of the Kurds. But Henry Kissinger took the opposing position, and, following a 1972 visit to Tehran by Kissinger and President Richard Nixon, the U.S. promised the Shah American support for the Kurds: the Americans promised to support the Kurds.

Nixon signed off on the covert operation on August 1, 1972; Kissinger made the arrangements for the covert war, and the CIA took charge of it. The support took the form of \$5 million and weapons, but by the following year, Kissinger had backed, and Nixon had approved, greater U.S. aid that would eventually reach over \$20 million dollars and more than 1,250 tons of weapons and munitions.

But by 1975, the U.S. backed Kurdish uprising was in trouble. The U.S. eventually came to the conclusion that the Kurds could only be saved by an Iranian military intervention. The Shah was providing much more money than the Americans, but he was not willing to commit his armed forces. He refused and, instead, began negotiating a border settlement with Saddam Hussein. The Shah received territory in exchange for ending support for the Kurds. According to investigative journalist Robert Fisk, it was Kissinger—one of the guarantors of the promise to support the Kurds—who hammered out this agreement between the Shah and Saddam and, so, abandoned the Kurds.

Financial aid and arms stop flowing to the Kurds, and Saddam slaughtered perhaps as many as 182,000 Kurds. Many more fled to Iran as refugees. That's when the first 1975 Kurdish appeal was made to America. Kurdish leader, Mullah Mustapha Brazani would personally appeal to Kissinger, one of the authors of American assurances, that "We feel ... the United States has a moral and political responsibility toward our people who have committed themselves to your country's

policy.”

Kissinger never answered, though, according to CIA expert John Prados, his station chief in Tehran had argued that he should and gave him options. Kissinger abandoned the Kurds with the famous reminder that “Covert action should not be confused with missionary work.”

Several years later, in the first Gulf War, the Kurds would be asked by the U.S. to rise up against Saddam Hussein a second time. This time, the request came from the CIA. And, again, the Kurds were abandoned by the Americans. And, again, thousands of them died in Saddam’s retaliation, and tens of thousands were forced to flee.

This betrayal of the Kurds followed a long history. The Kurds were first given their own land when a small piece of what had been Turkey was given to them in 1920. They quickly lost it back to Ataturk and the Turks, and the international community abandoned them. The Kurds found themselves in the vulnerable position they are now in, scattered across Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

From these events to the current situation in Syria runs an unbroken chain of America using and abandoning their Kurdish pawns. Leaked documents reveal American willingness to purchase Turkish cooperation at the expense of Kurdish interests and lives.

A leaked 2006 embassy cable declared that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice promised the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan “that the US would reinvigorate trilateral (US-Turkey-Iraq) discussions on the [Kurdish] issue.” The cable lists several “significant efforts the USG [US government] is undertaking to ameliorate the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party] threat.” The cable boasts that “Sharing of sensitive intelligence on PKK activities within Turkey has led to successful COIN [counter-insurgency] operations.” It also includes as significant efforts “surveillance flights over PKK camps in northern Iraq,” and “An intelligence fusion cell, which meets weekly in Ankara to pass information to the Turkish military on PKK activity.” In other words, the U.S. gave Turkey intelligence to use against the Kurds.

The following year, in 2007, President Bush “promised to provide Turkey with ‘actionable intelligence’ to use against the PKK” [Wikileaks CRS-RL34642]. The same cable says that the Turks have used that intelligence: that “Since that time, Turkish forces have launched targeted air and ground strikes against PKK camps and other facilities located in the mountains of northern Iraq.” It concludes with the line, “They have expressed satisfaction with their results.”

According to John Prados, as early as 1948, the CIA had said that “The mountain

tribes known as the Kurds are now and will continue to be a factor of some importance in any strategic estimate of Near East affairs.”

Seventy years later, the Kurds are still being disappointed by the meaning of American assurances regarding actions taken based on those estimates. It is not known how America will negotiate being caught in the middle of its Kurdish ally in the war in Syria and its NATO ally in Turkey, but history is not exactly whispering assurances in the Kurds’ ears.

Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history. This article originally appeared at Antiwar.com.

Former Ambassador Reflects on Current Events

Former British Ambassador Craig Murray discussed the current situation with Julian Assange, the alleged Russian election hack, Trump’s Israel embassy move and more in an interview with Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. Murray’s books include *Zionism is Bullshit*—censored on Facebook—and *Murder in Samarkand*. He is a self-proclaimed defender and strong supporter of the work of Julian Assange as one of the most significant “Publishers” of our time.

Murray was interviewed by Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein on January 25.

Randy Credico: The last time we spoke, Craig, you were involved in a libel suit which I believe had a positive outcome for you. Even as we spoke, you were in route to London to defend yourself from the suit brought against by a gentleman you called a liar, after he publicly called you an anti-Semite because of your criticism of Israel and the ongoing ethnic cleansing there against the Palestinians. I understand that the suit was dropped just as the case was getting underway. But it cost you a pretty penny before it was over.

Craig Murray: Unfortunately, while I didn’t lose the case, I still ended up having to pay my lawyers. Libel suits are incredibly expensive in the UK, which is why they are used by corporations and the wealthy to silence ordinary people.

My legal bills came to well over \$100,000. Lucky for me, there were over 5,000 individuals who subscribed to our defense fund and that paid the bill for me.

But it is frightening because ordinary people are terrified to write anything critical of the wealthy and powerful.

RC: I was there right after your suit ended. I was covering Stefania Maurizi's suit in the high court to get email transmissions from the Crown Prosecution Service to both Sweden and the US concerning Julian Assange. She made a great case but in the end they sided with the prosecution. Is the system totally rigged there, or is it libelous to say that?

CM: It is fair to say that the establishment stick together. In fact, I believe that the government and the judiciary are closer here than they are in the United States to some extent. There is quite a closed circle of the ruling class. They attend all the same schools and they are closely linked in various ways. So once you take on the establishment, you are taking on the entire establishment.

RC: So they are protecting the US government but they are protecting themselves as well. The UK was involved in a lot of the things that Assange exposed—the war logs and some of the cables. Is the motivation to keep him quiet so that the exposures don't continue?

CM: Yes, and the corporate press is part of the same nexus and control the public's access to judicial proceedings. Wikileaks very much threatens this control of government information. Wikileaks's motto is "we open governments" and that is very true.

Dennis Bernstein: I'd like to talk a little more about Julian Assange's situation. We know that the powers that be try to undermine the spirit as best they can. To date they have been unable to stop Julian from continuing this work for the people. We know he is facing health problems now. How do you assess his condition and what could happen at this point?

CM: I last met Julian in the embassy a little over two weeks ago. I am not a medical person but medical professionals now say he is in serious condition, both medical and psychological, from the effects of his confinement. He has a single room which is about twelve square feet and a smaller room where people from Wikileaks sometimes work with him. The entire Ecuadorian embassy in London is just an apartment.

Julian gets no daylight at all. He doesn't like to go near the windows because of the threats which have been made against him. He gets no outside exercise, which even the worse prison offenders are allowed for a short period every day

to get some fresh air and stretch their legs. This kind of confining existence is a real health danger. In addition, there is the indeterminate nature of the whole thing, which is bound to have a severe psychological effect, not having any idea when he is going to be let out.

But having said all that, I have not seen any diminution in his intellectual abilities. In fact, he seems to be even more honed in on the issues of the day. He is extremely well informed on political and social developments and an extremely shrewd analyst. I don't want people to worry about him in that way. But he looks pale and he is obviously not in a healthy state. The dangers of decline are definitely there.

DB: The current Ecuadorian government, which would really like to earn some good favor in the United States, could become a very dangerous entity to Julian Assange.

CM: In general, Ecuador has been fantastic in what they have done for him. Ecuador is a small country and like most countries in Latin America is vulnerable to pressure from the United States. The political situation there has changed and the left is not in the position it was five or six years ago. There is a heavy CIA presence there, both overt and covert. So I don't criticize the Ecuadorian government, they're in a very difficult position.

DB: Facebook has not taken kindly to your recent critique of Zionism. What did they say?

CM: An editor has very kindly taken on the task of collecting earlier articles of mine into a book. They include a speech I gave after one of the big Israeli attacks in Gaza. I actually gave the speech in front of a crowd of 350,000 people in Hyde Park. That's when I first used the phrase "Zionism is bullshit," which became the title of the book.

Facebook took down ads for the book, claiming that they objected to the profanity, which is kind of funny because it is a word that appears quite often on Facebook. Later they claimed that the book was banned because the title denigrated a religion. Of course, Zionism is not a religion but a political movement. Many religious Jews do not support Zionism. If I don't agree with a political position I should be able to say so as plainly as I wish.

DB: The current US administration plans to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Would that be in keeping with Zionist policy?

CM: Look, my own ancestors were primarily Celtic and we know that 3,000 years ago the Celtic people resided in places like present-day Switzerland. Just because 3,000 years ago some people believed that God gave Jerusalem

specifically to the Jewish people, that doesn't mean that you ignore the next 3,000 years and the place should become the capital of Israel based on biblical references. The idea that the rights of the Palestinian people can be ignored because of religious text written down thousands of years ago is absolutely ludicrous.

The Palestinians have had a dreadful time over the last ten years. Not only have they periodically suffered completely disproportionate military attacks but they continue to suffer the appropriation of their land and the destruction of their buildings and farms, with more and more Israeli settlements being built on Palestinian land, to the extent that a two-state solution is no longer viable because so much of what would be the Palestinian state is now Israeli settlements, containing hundreds of thousands of people.

To declare Jerusalem the capital of the Israeli state is going to be a major handicap to any future peace settlement. It is something that the entire international community has resisted doing. It really does set back progress on the Israel/Palestine issue, doing nothing for the cause of peace or for Israeli security. This is being done to gain domestic political advantage in the United States with the Christian Evangelical lobby.

RC: Julian Assange has now been granted citizenship as well as diplomatic status by the Ecuadorian government. But the British government refuses to recognize this diplomatic status.

CM: Now it gets a little technical. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, if you appoint an ambassador, that ambassador has to be approved in advance by the host country. If you appoint a diplomat to the embassy below the level of ambassador, you don't have to seek agreement in advance. All you have to do is notify. And Ecuador notified the British government of its decision to grant Assange diplomatic status.

Again, the Vienna Convention is absolutely clear that from the moment of notification that person enjoys diplomatic immunity. The host state doesn't have to accept the person, they can declare him or her persona non grata and the person then has to leave the country within a reasonable period of time. But they have diplomatic immunity from the moment of notification until they leave.

The whole point of diplomatic immunity is to prevent foreign states from effectively kidnapping your diplomats in order to extort from them your country's secrets. So the British government should have to allow Assange to leave the country and he should have immunity while he leaves, but they have stated that they would arrest him if he leaves the embassy.

The remedy would be for Ecuador to take the United Kingdom to the International Court of Justice to oblige the UK to follow international law in this regard.

Whether Ecuador is prepared to do that, I don't know. It would require significant legal resources and time and cost a certain amount of diplomatic capital.

Another option would be, were he to be arrested, his lawyers could take his case to the courts in the UK. But we have spoken already of the close ties between the British courts and the government and whether he could succeed is an open question. The fear is that immediately an extradition request would come in from the United States.

DB: The fact is, Julian Assange is a political prisoner who has made an extraordinary practice of monitoring centers of power. They are going to do whatever they can to bring him down. The only real way to save Assange is for the people to be made aware and for them to rise up and prevent the UK government from doing this because this person has performed a great public service on many fronts in many countries.

CM: You are absolutely right. He is being persecuted by governments because of the tremendous journalism he has published. It is ironic that at the moment Hollywood is bringing out a film called *The Post* about the Pentagon Papers and that is being celebrated at the same time that the entire establishment is out to get Julian Assange for publishing in exactly the way The Washington Post did.

Of course, The Washington Post has now given up on that and we no longer have a liberal media. The New York Times and The Washington Post are leading the calls for attacks on whistleblowers. Julian Assange exemplifies the only remaining form of free media outlet.

DB: You write in your recent piece "The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming", "The complete and unmitigated irrationality of the current epidemic of Russia-phobia does nothing to reduce its incredible virulence as it continues to infect the entire political and media class." That would include The Washington Post, wouldn't it?

CM: In fact, the articles that The Washington Post has been spewing out for a year now on Russiagate and the alleged collusion between WikiLeaks and Russia have been quite remarkable to behold. They appear to have given up any journalistic standards in terms of truthful reporting, in terms of allowing people a chance to reply to their allegations, and in terms of doing any real investigation of the facts. The New York Times is probably just as bad on this story. They have both been astonishing in their inaccuracy.

It is difficult to explain what is happening. The political and intelligence communities have seen WikiLeaks as an enemy ever since the Chelsea Manning revelations. And then the political establishment was very alarmed by the challenges to Hillary Clinton, the first of which was the challenge posed by Bernie Sanders. Then WikiLeaks got a hold of emails from the DNC and Podesta which indicated that the entire playing field was being quite deliberately tilted against Sanders to make sure that he didn't win. This, of course, added to Clinton's unpopularity. All through the campaign opinion polls showed that Clinton was the only person who could possibly lose to Donald Trump. But the establishment made sure that she got the nomination. Already during the campaign she and her people identified Russia as the scapegoat.

So we have had the coming together of these factors: the hatred of WikiLeaks by the intelligence community, the military's need for Russia as an enemy to justify the billions and billions in military spending, and the need of the so-called liberal left for a scapegoat for Hillary's defeat. So you have this kind of perfect storm that has led people to concoct this imaginary scenario where Russia installed the president of the United States in collusion with Julian Assange.

DB: So again, was this a hack or a leak?

CM: It was definitely not a hack, not by Russia or anybody else. It was a leak of information legally downloaded from their servers. I know this because I am quite closely associated with WikiLeaks. But WikiLeaks never reveal their sources because they are totally focused on source protection.

RC: Is there an economic motivation here? Is there a Russiagate industry that has developed?

CM: We shouldn't underestimate the NSA and their fantastic capabilities. People from inside the agency, such as William Binney and Edward Snowden, all say that if it were a hack the NSA would have the technical ability to trace that data as it passed through the Internet. They would be able to tell you the exact second the hack occurred and where it went. There is no such data, because it wasn't a hack.

People tend to rationalize doing what makes their employers happy or what they consider to be to their advantage in terms of their career. That is a kind of economic motive, but I think it is largely subconscious. People do what they do to get ahead.

Of course, people at the top have a very definite economic motive. They are trying to maintain corporate control and the control of the political class

through a process described by Noam Chomsky [and the late Edward Herman] as “manufacturing consent.” But I believe the foot soldiers subconsciously fall in with what they are supposed to do in order to keep their jobs.

RC: You just wrote a piece on Margaret Thatcher and her support for Apartheid in South Africa.

CM: It is interesting how the media airbrush history. One of the things which has been airbrushed out of Margaret Thatcher’s history is that she was a strong supporter of the Apartheid system. I have no doubt about this whatsoever because my first job as a foreign officer was at the South Africa desk as a political officer.

The entire two years I was there, we were trying to bring her to understand that Apartheid was evil and had to end. But this went against her strong personal instincts, which were to support Whites-only rule. She successfully opposed any sanctions against Apartheid South Africa. She refused to allow any of her government officials to talk to the ANC or to anybody representing Black people in South Africa.

I have been explaining this to people for many years but people have tended to doubt me because I was going against the accepted narrative. I was very gratified last week that Sir Patrick Wright, the head of the foreign service at that time, published his diaries from that time, where he makes absolutely plain that Thatcher supported Apartheid and that he considered her a racist. I am happy indeed that the truth is starting to get out there.

But the other point is that there are many people in senior positions in the conservative party now—including our minister of defense who just resigned—who at the time were also strong supporters of Apartheid.

DB: Meanwhile, as we all know, Apartheid is alive and well in Israel/Palestine. Let us pray that the kind of forces that rose up to end Apartheid in South Africa will also bring pressure to end the situation in Palestine.

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.

Assault on the Embassy: The Tet

Offensive Fifty Years Later

On January 31, 1968, Viet Cong forces attacked the U.S. Embassy in Saigon as part of the Tet Offensive, a turning point in the Vietnam War. On the eve of the 50th anniversary, veteran war correspondent Don North takes us back to that momentous event.

By Don North

It was the eve of battle. Ngo Van Giang, known as Captain Ba Den to the Viet Cong troops he led, had spent weeks smuggling arms and ammunition into Saigon under boxes of tomatoes. Ba Den was about to lead 15 sappers, a section of the J-9 Special Action Unit, against an unknown target. Only eight of the unit were actually trained experts in explosives. The other seven were clerks and cooks who signed up for the dangerous mission mainly to escape the rigors of life in their jungle camp near Dau Tieng, 30 miles northwest of Saigon.

On the morning of January 30, 1968, Ba Den secretly met with U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker's chauffeur, Nguyen Van De, an embassy driver who was in fact an agent for the Viet Cong. De drove Ba Den in circles around the Embassy compound in an American station wagon. De revealed that Ba Den's mission was to attack the heavily fortified Embassy. Learning the identity of his target, Ba Den was overwhelmed by the realization that he would probably not survive the attack. Pondering his likely death, and since it was the eve of Tet, Ba Den wandered into the Saigon market, had a few Ba Muoi Ba beers and bought a string of firecrackers to light as he had done for every Tet celebration since he was a child.

Ba Den and his team were about to play a small but critical role in what we now call the Tet Offensive, the coordinated attack by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops against dozens of cities, towns and military bases across South Vietnam. When the bloody fighting ended after 24 days, the Communist troops had been driven from every target and the U.S. declared a military victory. However, the attackers scored a significant political and psychological victory by demonstrating an ability to launch devastating and coordinated attacks seemingly everywhere at once, and by showing that a U.S.-South Vietnamese victory was nowhere in sight. The attack on the U.S. Embassy was a potent symbol of that success.

I've thought a good deal about that attack on the Embassy over the last 50 years. I was there as a television journalist – lying in the gutter outside the Embassy as automatic fire buzzed above my head. Here is what I knew then and what I know now.

Later that night of January 30, Ba Den joined the other members of the assault team at 59 Phan Than Gian Street, the home of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Phe, a veteran Communist agent who ran an auto repair shop next to her home, just four blocks from the Embassy. The 15 sappers unpacked their weapons and dressed in black pajamas with a red sash around one arm. They had trained to breach the Embassy's outer perimeter with explosives and attack with rifle fire, satchel charges and rocket propelled grenades. They were ordered to kill anyone who resisted but to take prisoner anyone who surrendered.

The Embassy attack was to be the centerpiece of a larger Saigon offensive, backed up by 11 battalions totalling 4,000 Viet Cong troops. The operation's other five objectives were the Presidential Palace, the national broadcasting studios, South Vietnamese Naval Headquarters, Vietnamese General Staff Headquarters at Ton Son Nut Airbase, and the Philippine Embassy. The goal was to hold these objectives for 48 hours until other Viet Cong battalions could enter the city and relieve them. North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front leaders expected (or hoped) that a nationwide uprising to overthrow the government of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu would take place.

Of all the targets, the U.S. Embassy was perhaps the most important. The \$2.6 million compound had been completed just three months earlier. The six-story Chancery building loomed over Saigon like an impregnable fortress. It was a constant reminder of the American presence, prestige and power. Other key military and political targets were slated for attack in South Vietnam, like Nha Trang, Buon Ma Thout and Bien Hoa, but most Americans couldn't even pronounce their names, let alone understand their importance. A successful attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, however, would instantly convey shock and horror on an American public already weary of the war, and could turn many of them against the war.

Public Relations Blitz

President Lyndon B. Johnson conducted a massive public relations blitz at the end of 1967 to convince Americans that the Vietnam War was nearing a conclusion. General William Westmoreland, the U.S. military commander in Vietnam, was ordered to support the President's progress campaign. In November 1967, Westmoreland told NBC's Meet the Press that the U.S. could win the war within two years. He then told the National Press Club, "We are making progress, the end begins to come into view." In his most memorable phrase, Westmoreland (derisively known as "Westy" to many members of the press corps) claimed to see "some light at the end of the tunnel."

The massive public relations campaign overwhelmed voices of other experienced American observers who foresaw disaster. General Edward Lansdale had been a

senior American advisor to the South Vietnamese government starting in the mid-1950s; he was an expert on unconventional warfare and still senior advisor to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. In October 1967, Landsdale wrote to U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, "Hanoi policy makers saw the defeat of French forces in Vietnam as having reached its decisive point through anti-war sentiment in France than on the field of battle in Vietnam. [The battle of] Dien Bien Phu was fought to shape opinion in Paris, a bit of drama rather than sound military strategy."

Landsdale warned that Hanoi was about to follow a similar plan to "bleed Americans" because it believed the American public was vulnerable to psychological manipulation in 1968. It was an accurate prediction; despite Landsdale's inability to exert influence on policy at that time, he had a better grasp on what was happening in Vietnam than Westmoreland or Bunker – or President Johnson.

Detoured to Khe Sanh

As an ABC News TV correspondent I was sent to the U.S. base at Khe Sanh, located in the northwest corner of South Vietnam, in the weeks before Tet. The base had been under siege by Communist forces and General Westmoreland was predicting a major offensive there, where the Communists would seek to repeat the French military loss at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Since 1968, a majority of U.S. military analysts have suggested the enemy attacks at Khe Sanh were part of a ruse to draw American military forces away from South Vietnam's population centers, leaving them open to successful attacks at Tet. Khe Sanh became a metaphor for Westmoreland's mismanagement of the war.

My cameraman and I were covering the ongoing battle at Khe Sanh. A massive attack on January 30 sent us diving into a trench for protection from incoming mortars and rockets; the effort saved our lives but broke the lens of our camera. We were forced to return to Saigon for a replacement. I thought we would miss the expected military push on Khe Sanh but flying back to Saigon on the C-130 milk run, it seemed like all of South Vietnam was under attack. As we took off from Da Nang, enemy rockets fell on the runway. Flying south along the coast, we could see almost all the seaside enclaves under attack – Hoi An, Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay. It was a clear night, and as we passed over the besieged cities, we could see fires burning and hear on the military radio frequencies the calls of besieged U.S. troops.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army battle plan for the Tet Offensive called for coordinated surprise attacks throughout the country, but their plans were seriously compromised by a misunderstanding concerning the attack date. The Communist forces in the Northern provinces mistakenly planned the attack for

January 30, whereas zero hour in the Southern provinces was understood to be January 31. As a result, I was in the unique position of watching the Tet Offensive unfold from the North to the South.

Convoy to the Embassy

At 2:30 AM, the Ba Den's sapper unit loaded into a taxi cab, a Peugeot truck and an Embassy car. Guiding them to the target was Nguyen Van De, the Embassy driver, a long-time employee who Embassy staff had nicknamed "Satchmo." Several of the sappers hid in his trunk. Driving with their lights out, the convoy approached the Embassy night gate on Mac Dinh Chi Street and fired their AK-47 assault rifles at two American sentries guarding the gate. Specialist 4 (SP4) Charles Daniel and Private First Class (PFC) William Sebast returned fire with their M-16 assault rifles, then ran through the steel gate and locked it. At 2:47 AM they transmitted "Signal 300" over the MP radio net to alert everyone that the Embassy was under attack. The sappers placed a 15 pound satchel charge against the eight foot high embassy wall, and the explosion created a hole three feet wide. The first two sappers crawled through the breach but were immediately killed by Daniel and Sebast's rifle fire.

Daniel shouted into his radio, "They're coming in! They're coming in! Help me! Help me!" as more sappers came through the hole. In an exchange of gunfire, both Daniel and Sebast were killed, the first two Americans killed in the battle for the Embassy.

The sappers made a concerted effort to break into the Chancery firing rocket propelled grenades through the heavy wooden doors and following up with hand grenades. Several U.S. Marines were wounded by shrapnel and fell behind the Chancery door. Few of the Marine or MP guards were armed with M-16's or other automatic weapons. One Marine fired a shotgun from the roof at the next wave of sappers entering through the hole in the wall. When the shotgun jammed, he continued to fire his .38 caliber revolver. Other American troops began to take up positions on nearby rooftops, giving them some control of the streets and the sappers inside the compound. Now trapped in the compound and being shot at from multiple directions, the attackers hunkered down behind large concrete flower pots on the Embassy lawn.

At about 3 AM, chief U.S. Embassy spokesman Barry Zorthian, at home a few blocks from the attack, started calling news bureaus; he had few details but told them the Embassy was under attack and there was heavy fire. ABC News bureau chief Dick Rosenbaum then called me around 3:30 and told me – just back from Khe Sanh – to find out what was happening. The ABC bureau, located at the Caravel Hotel, was only four blocks from the Embassy. We headed there in the ABC News jeep but did not get far. Just off Tu Do (now renamed Dong Khoi) Street, three blocks

from the embassy somebody opened up on us with automatic weapons. It was impossible to tell who it was – Viet Cong, South Vietnamese Army, Saigon police, or U.S. MP's. A couple of rounds pinged off the hood of the jeep. I killed the jeep's lights and reversed out of range. We returned to the ABC News bureau to await dawn.

At 4:20 AM, Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) issued an order instructing the 716th Military Police Battalion to retake the compound. When the MP officer in charge arrived at the scene, he concluded that U.S. forces had the Embassy surrounded and the sappers trapped inside its walls. He was unwilling to risk lives of his men in a dangerous night assault against an enemy he knew could not escape, so he ordered his men to settle in and wait for morning.

At about 5:00 AM, a U.S. Army helicopter carrying reinforcements from the 101st Airborne Division attempted to land on the Chancery roof. As the chopper hovered before touching down, the surviving sappers opened fire. Afraid of being shot down, the helicopter chief aborted the mission and flew quickly away from the building. Lieutenant General Frederick Weyand, the Commander of III Corps (one of the four major military sectors designated by MACV), was monitoring the Embassy fight and agreed there was nothing to be gained by risking another night helicopter landing into a hot landing zone. He ordered a halt to air operations until daylight.

At first light, my cameraman and I walked to the Embassy. As we approached, I heard heavy firing and saw green and red tracer bullets cut into the pink sky. Near the Embassy, we joined a group of U.S. MPs moving toward the Embassy front gate. I started my tape recorder for ABC Radio as the MPs loudly cursed the South Vietnamese troops for running away after the first shots. Lying flat in the gutter that morning with the MPs, we didn't know where the Viet Cong attackers were holed up or where the fire was coming from, but we knew it was the "big story."

Several MPs rushed past, one of them carrying a Viet Cong sapper piggy-back style. The sapper was wounded and bleeding. He wore black pajamas and, strangely, had an enormous red ruby ring on his finger. I interviewed the MPs and recorded their radio conversation with colleagues inside the Embassy gates. There was no doubt they believed the Viet Cong were in the Chancery building itself. Associated Press reporter Peter Arnett crawled off to find a phone and report the MPs' conversation to his office.

Just One Mag

Sporadic gunfire continued around the Embassy and one by one the sappers were either wounded or killed. I lay flat on the sidewalk in front of the Embassy as

bullets ricocheted around. I found I was lying next to a seriously wounded sapper wearing black pajamas and a red arm band and bleeding from multiple wounds. Years later after reading declassified interrogation reports of the three prisoners, I discovered the wounded sapper lying next to me was Captain Nguyen Van Giang, alias Ba Den, who had lit firecrackers in the Saigon market the night before his mission and was one of the first through the hole blasted in the wall. Giang spent the remainder of the war as one of three prisoners of the Embassy attack in the infamous French-built prison on Con Dao Island just off the Southeast coast of South Vietnam.

Around 7:00 AM, Army assault helicopters land thirty-six heavily armed paratroopers from the 101st Airborne on the Embassy roof. The troopers quickly started to clear the building from top floor down searching each office for possible Viet Cong infiltrators. On the ground, MPs from the 716th stormed the front gate. My cameraman and I followed them onto the lawn which was littered with the bodies of dead and dying Viet Cong. I stepped over the Great Seal of the United States which had been blasted off the Embassy wall. We rushed into the once elegant Embassy garden where the battle had raged. It was, as UPI's Kate Webb later described, "like a butcher shop in Eden."

We paused to assess our film supply. "Okay, Peter how much film have we got left," I shouted to my cameraman. "I've got one mag," he replied. "How many do you have?" I had no mags left. "We're on the biggest story of the war with only one can of film," I groaned. "So it's one take of everything including my stand-upper" – a TV reporter's closing remarks.

VC green tracer bullets still stitched the night sky as red tracers from the U.S. weapons arced down from the Embassy roof and from across the street. The MPs took three wounded sappers prisoner and marched them off for interrogation. Nguyen Van De, the Embassy driver who had aided the sappers, lay dead on the lawn along with another armed Embassy driver. Two other Embassy drivers died as well. Orders crackled over a field radio from an officer inside the Chancery. "This is Waco, roger. Can you get in the gate now? Take a force in there and clean out the Embassy, like now. There will be choppers on the roof and troops working down. Be careful not to hit our own people. Over."

Colonel "Jake" Jacobson, the CIA chief-of-station assigned to the Embassy occupied a small villa adjacent to the Embassy. He suddenly appeared at a window on the second floor. An MP threw him a gas mask and a .45 caliber Army pistol. Surviving sappers were believed to be on the first floor and would likely be driven upstairs by tear gas. The last VC still in action rushed up the stairs, firing blindly at Jacobson but missed. The colonel later told me, "We both saw each other at the same time. He missed me and I fired one shot at him point

blank with the .45, taking him down." The battle was over.

At 9:15 AM, the U.S. officially declared the Embassy grounds secure. Scattered about the grounds were the bodies of 12 of the original 15 sappers, two armed Embassy drivers who were considered double agents and two drivers killed by accident. Five Americans were dead, including four Army soldiers: Charles Daniel, Owen Mebust, William Sebast, Jonnie Thomas; and one U.S. Marine, James Marshall.

Westmoreland Briefs

At 9:20 AM, General Westmoreland strode through the gate in his carefully starched fatigues, flanked by MPs and Marines who had been fighting since 3 AM. Standing in the rubble, Westmoreland held a briefing for the press. "No enemy got in the Embassy building. It's a relatively small incident. A group of sappers blew a hole in the wall and crawled in. They were all killed." He cautioned us, "Don't be deceived by this incident." Westmoreland's relentless optimism struck most of us reporters as surreal, even delusional. Most of us there had seen much of the fighting. The General was still spinning that everything was just fine. In the meantime, thousands of U.S. and South Vietnamese troops were fighting hard to take back the four other Saigon targets the VC had occupied – as well as the City of Hue and other targets of the offensive around the country.

Also, contrary to Westmoreland's briefing, it was not correct that all of the 15 sappers were killed. Three were wounded but survived. Army photographers Don Hirst and Edgar Price, and Life Magazine's Dick Swanson took dramatic photos of the wounded sappers being led away by 716th Battalion MPs, before being turned over to the South Vietnamese – and never heard from again during the war. No one admitted that some sappers survived, and it was a closely guarded secret that at least two of the dead Embassy drivers were Viet Cong agents.

The Embassy siege showed the effectiveness of U.S. Marines and Military Police, non-tactical troops fighting as infantry without benefit of heavy weapons or communication to overcome an enemy.

A TV Report Stand-Upper

Using our last 30 feet of film, I recorded my "stand-upper."

"Since the Lunar New Year, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have proved they are capable of bold and impressive military moves that Americans here never dreamed could be achieved," I said. "But whatever turn the war now takes, the capture of the U.S. Embassy here for almost seven hours is a psychological victory that will rally and inspire the Viet Cong."

A rush to judgement? Perhaps, but I was on an hourly deadline and ABC expected the story as well as some perspective, even in the early hours of the offensive – a first rough draft of history. Still my instant analysis never made it onto ABC News. Worried about editorializing on a sensitive story, a senior producer in New York killed the on-camera close. Ironically, my closer ended up in the Simon Grinberg library of ABC out-takes and was later discovered by director Peter Davis and used in his film “Hearts and Minds.”

The rest of our story package fared better. The film from all three networks arrived on the same plane in Tokyo for processing and editing, causing a mad scramble to be the first film on the satellite for the evening newscasts in the U.S. Because we only had 400 feet to process and cut, ABC News made the satellite in time and the story led the evening news. NBC and CBS missed the satellite deadline and had to run catch-up specials later in the evening.

An Information Curtain Falls

Our group of 50 journalists in the Embassy compound were then escorted out and the gates were locked. An information curtain descended around the Embassy for the following weeks. No interviews were allowed with Marines or MP's who had fought the Embassy battle and won. Journalists were told the only comment on the Embassy battle would come from the State Department or White House, and that an investigation was under way and would be released in due course. That report – if there was ever such a report – has yet to be declassified. Without access to the stories of the American defenders of the Embassy, their heroism went largely unreported, thus increasing the public perception that the Tet Offensive had been a U.S. defeat instead of the military victory it actually was.

In March 1968, just two months after Tet, a Harris poll showed that the majority of Americans, 60 percent, regarded the Tet Offensive as a defeat for U.S. objectives in Vietnam. The news media was widely blamed for creating the antiwar sentiment. Research by a senior U.S. officer in Vietnam, General Douglas Kinnard, found 91 percent of U.S. Army generals expressed negative feelings about TV news coverage. However, General Kinnard concluded that the importance of the media in swaying public opinion was largely a myth. That myth was important to the U.S. Government to perpetuate, so officials could insist it was not the real war situation to which Americans reacted, but rather the media portrayal of that situation.

Embassy Demolished, Memorials Remain

The imposing U.S. Embassy that withstood the attack fifty years ago was demolished in 1998 and replaced with a modest one story Consulate. In a garden closed to the public is a small plaque in honor of the five American soldiers

who died defending the Embassy that day: Charles Daniel, James Marshall, Owen Mebust, William Sebast, and Jonnie Thomas. A few steps away, on the sidewalk outside the Consulate, is a gray and red marble monument engraved with the names of Viet Cong soldiers and agents who died there on January 31, 1968.

Three Surviving Sappers Imprisoned on Con Dao Island

The fate of the three surviving Viet Cong sappers was a closely held secret by the U.S. Embassy. Following a hot dispute between U.S. Army MPs and the South Vietnamese military as to who should have custody, the POWs were turned over to the South Vietnamese and imprisoned in the infamous old French prison on Con Dao island. U.S. Army interrogators questioned them and in 2002, the reports were declassified. If the three POWs were a fair indication of the 15 sappers who conducted the siege, it would seem they were not a highly trained elite force, but rather older soldiers of low rank, some holding down clerical and cooking duties for their units.

Ba Den, 43, was the senior survivor of the attack and among the first through the hole blown in the Embassy wall. He had been born in North Vietnam and migrated south to join a Viet Cong cadre in Tay Ninh.

A second sapper prisoner was Nguyen Van Sau, alias "Chuck," the third man through the wall hole. Shot in the face and buttocks, the 31 year-old Buddhist was captured by MPs at first light. Sau was born on a small farm near Cu Chi and was forced to join the VC when a recruiting raid entered his village in 1964 and seized 20 men. Sau's main complaint was that he didn't get enough to eat but remained with the VC as most of the young men from his village were also members and had endured the same hardships. With information divulged by Sau, Saigon police raided the garage where the sappers mounted their attack and arrested the owner and ten others linked to the group.

The third sapper, 44 year-old Sergeant Dang Van Son, alias "Tot," joined the Viet Minh in North Vietnam in 1947 and was sent down the Ho Chi Minh trail. He became cook for an infantry company in Tay Ninh. During the attack, Son was wounded in the head and leg, captured by the South Vietnamese and woke up in a Saigon hospital several days later.

Ba Den was released from prison in 1975 and returned to his village North of Saigon. There was no word of Dang Van Son or Nguyen Van Sau, who are believed to have died in Con Dao prison and are buried in the vast cemetery there.

Biet Dong Committee of Ho Chi Minh City

Now that the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive and the Embassy attack is here, Vietnamese who honor the dead according to traditional custom will

remember the estimated one hundred thousand Communist soldiers who died and renew their efforts to identify the burial grounds of their comrades. So it's surprising that even top North Vietnamese field commanders had little praise for the 15 sapper martyrs of the Embassy attack.

North Vietnamese General Tran Do, in communication with the Saigon command a few days after Tet, asked, "Why did those who planned the attack on the Embassy fail to consider the ease with which helicopters and troops could be landed on the roof?" However, their boldness and bravery against such overwhelming odds has made them heroes to be remembered in Vietnam. Although in recent years there has been U.S. cooperation in identifying burial grounds of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, there has been no recognition of a possible mass grave for the sappers killed at the Embassy.

Something Truly Stupid

Washington military analyst Anthony Cordesman has often observed, "One way to achieve decisive surprise in warfare is to do something truly stupid." As revealed in the interrogation reports of the sapper POWs, the planning and execution of the Embassy attack was "truly stupid" and carried out by poorly trained Viet Cong, but its effects marked a turning point of the war and earned a curious entry in the annals of military history.

Another Washington military analyst, Steven Metz, explains "counterinsurgency" and why Tet became a dramatic turning point in the war. "The essence of insurgency is the psychological. It is armed theatre. You have protagonists on the stage, but they are sending messages to a wider audience. Insurgency is not won killing insurgents, not won by seizing territory; it is won by altering the psychological factors that are most relevant."

In Vietnam, this "truly stupid" attack on the U.S. Embassy changed the course of the war. It may have been "a small incident" as General William Westmoreland claimed, but seen through the political and psychological prism of insurgency warfare, it may have indeed been the biggest incident of the war.

The War That Never Ends (for the U.S. Military High Command)

A preoccupation with the "win-ability" of the Vietnam War has persisted among U.S. military commanders who doggedly pursue the War on Terror, despite all indications of the disastrous reality of both conflicts, writes U.S. Army Major

Danny Sjursen for TomDispatch.

By Danny Sjursen

Vietnam: it's always there. Looming in the past, informing American futures.

A 50-year-old war, once labeled the longest in our history, is still alive and well and still being refought by one group of Americans: the military high command. And almost half a century later, they're still losing it and blaming others for doing so.

Of course, the U.S. military and Washington policymakers lost the war in Vietnam in the previous century and perhaps it's well that they did. The United States really had no business intervening in that anti-colonial civil war in the first place, supporting a South Vietnamese government of questionable legitimacy, and stifling promised nationwide elections on both sides of that country's artificial border. In doing so, Washington presented an easy villain for a North Vietnamese-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgency, a group known to Americans in those years as the Vietcong.

More than two decades of involvement and, at the war's peak, half a million American troops never altered the basic weakness of the U.S.-backed regime in Saigon. Despite millions of Asian deaths and 58,000 American ones, South Vietnam's military could not, in the end, hold the line without American support and finally collapsed under the weight of a conventional North Vietnamese invasion in April 1975.

There's just one thing. Though a majority of historians (known in academia as the "orthodox" school) subscribe to the basic contours of the above narrative, the vast majority of senior American military officers do not. Instead, they're still refighting the Vietnam War to a far cheerier outcome through the books they read, the scholarship they publish, and (most disturbingly) the policies they continue to pursue in the Greater Middle East.

The Big Re-Write

In 1986, future general, Iraq-Afghan War commander, and CIA director David Petraeus penned an [article](#) for the military journal *Parameters* that summarized his Princeton doctoral dissertation on the Vietnam War. It was a piece commensurate with then-Major Petraeus's impressive intellect, except for its disastrous conclusions on the lessons of that war. Though he did observe that Vietnam [had](#) "cost the military dearly" and that "the frustrations of Vietnam are deeply etched in the minds of those who lead the services," his real fear was that the war had left the military unprepared to wage what were then called

“low-intensity conflicts” and are now known as counterinsurgencies. His takeaway: what the country needed wasn’t less Vietnams but better-fought ones.

The next time, he concluded fatefully, the military should do a far better job of implementing counterinsurgency forces, equipment, tactics, and doctrine to win such wars.

Two decades later, when the next Vietnam-like quagmire did indeed present itself in Iraq, he and a whole generation of COINdinistas (like-minded officers devoted to his favored counterinsurgency approach to modern warfare) embraced those very conclusions to win the war on terror. The names of some of them – H.R. McMaster and James Mattis, for instance – should ring a bell or two these days. In Iraq and later in Afghanistan, Petraeus and his acolytes would get their chance to translate theory into practice. Americans – and much of the rest of the planet – still live with the results.

Like Petraeus, an entire generation of senior military leaders, commissioned in the years after the Vietnam War and now atop the defense behemoth, remain fixated on that ancient conflict. After all these decades, such “thinking” generals and “soldier-scholars” continue to draw all the wrong lessons from what, thanks in part to them, has now become America’s *second* longest war.

Rival Schools

Historian Gary Hess identifies two main schools of revisionist thinking. There are the “Clausewitzians” (named after the nineteenth century Prussian military theorist) who insist that Washington never sufficiently attacked the enemy’s true center of gravity in North Vietnam. Beneath the academic language, they essentially agree on one key thing: the U.S. military should have bombed the North into a parking lot.

The second school, including Petraeus, Hess labeled the “hearts-and-minders.”

As COINdinistas, they felt the war effort never focused clearly enough on isolating the Vietcong, protecting local villages in the South, building schools, and handing out candy – everything, in short, that might have won (in the phrase of that era) Vietnamese hearts and minds.

Both schools, however, agreed on something basic: that the U.S. military should have won in Vietnam.

The danger presented by either school is clear enough in the twenty-first century. Senior commanders, some now serving in key national security positions, fixated on Vietnam, have translated that conflict’s supposed lessons into what now passes for military strategy in Washington. The result has been an ever-expanding war on terror campaign waged ceaselessly from South Asia to

West Africa, which has essentially turned out to be perpetual war based on the can-do belief that counterinsurgency and advise-and-assist missions should have worked in Vietnam and can work now.

The Go-Big Option

The leading voice of the Clausewitzian school was U.S. Army Colonel and Korean War/Vietnam War vet Harry Summers, whose 1982 book, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, became an instant classic within the military.

It's easy enough to understand why. Summers argued that civilian policymakers – not the military rank-and-file – had lost the war by focusing hopelessly on the insurgency in South Vietnam rather than on the North Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. More troops, more aggressiveness, even full-scale invasions of communist safe havens in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, would have led to victory.

Summers had a deep emotional investment in his topic. Later, he would argue that the source of post-war pessimistic analyses of the conflict lay in “draft dodgers and war evaders still [struggling] with their consciences.” In his own work, Summers marginalized all Vietnamese actors (as would so many later military historians), failed to adequately deal with the potential consequences, nuclear or otherwise, of the sorts of escalation he advocated, and didn't even bother to ask whether Vietnam was a core national security interest of the United States.

Perhaps he would have done well to reconsider a famous post-war encounter he had with a North Vietnamese officer, a Colonel Tu, whom he assured that “you know you never beat us on the battlefield.”

“That may be so,” replied his former enemy, “but it is also irrelevant.”

Whatever its limitations, his work remains influential in military circles to this day. (I was assigned the book as a West Point cadet!)

A more sophisticated Clausewitzian analysis came from current National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster in a highly acclaimed 1997 book, *Dereliction of Duty*. He argued that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were derelict in failing to give President Lyndon Johnson an honest appraisal of what it would take to win, which meant that “the nation went to war without the benefit of effective military advice.”

He concluded that the war was lost not in the field or by the media or even on antiwar college campuses, but in Washington, D.C., through a failure of nerve by the Pentagon's generals, which led civilian officials to opt for a deficient strategy.

McMaster is a genuine scholar and a gifted writer, but he still suggested that the Joint Chiefs should have advocated for a more aggressive offensive strategy

– a full ground invasion of the North or unrelenting carpet-bombing of that country. In this sense, he was just another “go-big” Clausewitzian who, as historian Ronald Spector pointed out recently, ignored Vietnamese views and failed to acknowledge – an observation of historian Edward Miller – that “the Vietnam War was a Vietnamese war.”

COIN: A Small (Forever) War

Another Vietnam veteran, retired Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Krepinevich, fired the opening salvo for the hearts-and-minders. In *The Army and Vietnam*, published in 1986, he argued that the NLF, not the North Vietnamese Army, was the enemy’s chief center of gravity and that the American military’s failure to emphasize counterinsurgency principles over conventional concepts of war sealed its fate. While such arguments were, in reality, no more impressive than those of the Clausewitzians, they have remained popular with military audiences, as historian Dale Andrade points out, because they offer a “simple explanation for the defeat in Vietnam.”

Krepinevich would write an influential 2005 *Foreign Affairs* piece, “How to Win in Iraq,” in which he applied his Vietnam conclusions to a new strategy of prolonged counterinsurgency in the Middle East, quickly winning over the *New York Times*’s resident conservative columnist, David Brooks, and generating “discussion in the Pentagon, CIA, American Embassy in Baghdad, and the office of the vice president.”

In 1999, retired army officer and Vietnam veteran Lewis Sorley penned the definitive hearts-and-minds tract, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam*. Sorley boldly asserted that, by the spring of 1970, “the fighting wasn’t over, but the war was won.”

According to his comforting tale, the real explanation for failure lay with the “big-war” strategy of U.S. commander General William Westmoreland. The counterinsurgency strategy of his successor, General Creighton Abrams – Sorley’s knight in shining armor – was (or at least should have been) a war winner.

Critics noted that Sorley overemphasized the marginal differences between the two generals’ strategies and produced a remarkably counterfactual work. It didn’t matter, however. By 2005, just as the situation in Iraq, a country then locked in a sectarian civil war amid an American occupation, went from bad to worse, Sorley’s book found its way into the hands of the head of U.S. Central Command, General John Abizaid, and State Department counselor Philip Zelikow.

By then, according to the *Washington Post*’s David Ignatius, it could also “be found on the bookshelves of senior military officers in Baghdad.”

Another influential hearts-and-minds devotee was Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl.

(He even made it onto *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.) His *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* followed Krepinevich in claiming that “if [Creighton] Abrams had gotten the call to lead the American effort at the start of the war, America might very well have won it.” In 2006, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker “so liked [Nagl’s] book that he made it required reading for all four-star generals,” while the Iraq War commander of that moment, General George Casey, gave Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld a copy during a visit to Baghdad.

David Petraeus and current Secretary of Defense James Mattis, co-authors in 2006 of FM 3-24, the first (*New York Times*-reviewed) military field manual for counterinsurgency since Vietnam, must also be considered among the pantheon of hearts-and-minders. Nagl wrote a foreword for their manual, while Krepinevich provided a glowing back-cover endorsement.

Such revisionist interpretations would prove tragic in Iraq and Afghanistan, once they had filtered down to the entire officer corps.

Reading All the Wrong Books

In 2009, when former West Point history professor Colonel Gregory Daddis was deployed to Iraq as the command historian for the Multinational Corps – the military’s primary tactical headquarters – he noted that corps commander Lieutenant General Charles Jacoby had assigned a professional reading list to his principal subordinates. To his disappointment, Daddis also discovered that the only Vietnam War book included was Sorley’s *A Better War*. This should have surprised no one, since his argument – that American soldiers in Vietnam were denied an impending victory by civilian policymakers, a liberal media, and antiwar protestors – was still resonant among the officer corps in year six of the Iraq quagmire. It wasn’t the military’s fault!

Officers have long distributed professional reading lists for subordinates, intellectual guideposts to the complex challenges ahead. Indeed, there’s much to be admired in the concept, but also potential dangers in such lists as they inevitably influence the thinking of an entire generation of future leaders. In the case of Vietnam, the perils are obvious. The generals have been assigning and reading problematic books for years, works that were essentially meant to reinforce professional pride in the midst of a series of unsuccessful and unending wars.

Just after 9/11, for instance, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Richard Myers – who spoke at my West Point graduation – included Summers’s *On Strategy* on his list.

A few years later, then-Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker added McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty*. The trend continues today. Marine Corps Commandant Robert Neller has kept McMaster and added *Diplomacy* by Henry Kissinger (he of the illegal bombing of both Laos and Cambodia and war criminal fame). Current Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley kept Kissinger and added good old Lewis Sorley. To top it all off, Secretary of Defense Mattis has included yet another Kissinger book and, in a different list, Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*.

Just as important as which books made the lists is what's missing from them: none of these senior commanders include newer scholarship, novels, or journalistic accounts which might raise thorny, uncomfortable questions about whether the Vietnam War was winnable, necessary, or advisable, or incorporate local voices that might highlight the limits of American influence and power.

Serving in the Shadow of Vietnam

Most of the generals leading the war on terror just missed service in the Vietnam War. They graduated from various colleges or West Point in the years immediately following the withdrawal of most U.S. ground troops or thereafter: Petraeus in 1974, future Afghan War commander Stanley McChrystal in 1976, and present National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster in 1984. Secretary of Defense Mattis finished ROTC and graduated from Central Washington University in 1971, while Trump's Chief of Staff John Kelly enlisted at the tail end of the Vietnam War, receiving his commission in 1976.

In other words, the generation of officers now overseeing the still-spreading war on terror entered military service at the end of or after the tragic war in Southeast Asia. That meant they narrowly escaped combat duty in the bloodiest American conflict since World War II and so the professional credibility that went with it. They were mentored and taught by academy tactical officers, ROTC instructors, and commanders who had cut their teeth on that conflict. Vietnam literally dominated the discourse of their era – and it's never ended.

Petraeus, Mattis, McMaster, and the others entered service when military prestige had reached a nadir or was just rebounding. And those reading lists taught the young officers where to lay the blame for that – on civilians in Washington (or in the nation's streets) or on a military high command too weak to assert its authority effectively. They would serve in Vietnam's shadow, the shadow of defeat, and the conclusions they would draw from it would only lead to twenty-first-century disasters.

From Vietnam to the War on Terror to Generational War

All of this misremembering, all of those Vietnam “lessons” inform the U.S. military’s ongoing “surges” and “advise-and-assist” approaches to its wars in the Greater Middle East and Africa. Representatives of both Vietnam revisionist schools now guide the development of the Trump administration’s version of global strategy. President Trump’s in-house Clausewitzians clamor for – and receive – ever more delegated authority to do their damndest and what retired General (and Vietnam vet) Edward Meyer called for back in 1983: “a freer hand in waging war than they had in Vietnam.” In other words, more bombs, more troops, and carte blanche to escalate such conflicts to their hearts’ content.

Meanwhile, President Trump’s hearts-and-minds faction consists of officers who have spent three administrations expanding COIN-influenced missions to approximately 70% of the world’s nations. Furthermore, they’ve recently fought for and been granted a new “mini-surge” in Afghanistan intended to – in disturbingly Vietnam-esque language – “break the deadlock,” “reverse the decline,” and “end the stalemate” there. Never mind that neither 100,000 U.S. troops (when I was there in 2011) nor 16 full years of combat could, in the term of the trade, “stabilize” Afghanistan. The can-do, revisionist believers atop the national security state have convinced Trump that – despite his original instincts – 4,000 or 5,000 (or 6,000 or 7,000) more troops (and yet more drones, planes, and other equipment) will do the trick. This represents tragedy bordering on farce.

The hearts and minders and Clausewitzians atop the military establishment since 9/11 are never likely to stop citing their versions of the Vietnam War as the key to victory today; that is, they will never stop focusing on a war that was always unwinnable and never worth fighting. None of today’s acclaimed military personalities seems willing to consider that Washington couldn’t have won in Vietnam because, as former Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill McPeak (who flew 269 combat missions over that country) noted in the recent Ken Burns documentary series, “we were fighting on the wrong side.”

Today’s leaders don’t even pretend that the post-9/11 wars will ever end. In an interview last June, Petraeus – still considered a sagacious guru of the Defense establishment – disturbingly described the Afghan conflict as “generational.”

Eerily enough, to cite a Vietnam-era precedent, General Creighton Abrams predicted something similar. speaking to the White House as the war in Southeast Asia was winding down. Even as President Richard Nixon slowly withdrew U.S. forces, handing over their duties to the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) – a process known then as “Vietnamization” – the general warned that, despite ARVN improvements, continued U.S. support “would be required indefinitely to maintain an effective force.” Vietnam, too, had its “generational” side (until, of course, it didn’t).

That war and its ill-fated lessons will undoubtedly continue to influence U.S. commanders until a new set of myths, explaining away a new set of failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, take over, possibly thanks to books by veterans of these conflicts about how Washington could have won the war on terror.

It's not that our generals don't read. They do. They just doggedly continue to read the wrong books.

In 1986, General Petraeus ended his influential *Parameters* [article](#) with a quote from historian George Herring: "Each historical situation is unique and the use of analogy is at best misleading, at worst, dangerous." When it comes to Vietnam and a cohort of officers shaped in its shadow (and even now convinced it could have been won), "dangerous" hardly describes the results. They've helped bring us generational war and, for today's young soldiers, ceaseless tragedy.

[Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author, expressed in an unofficial capacity, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.]

Major Danny Sjursen is a U.S. Army strategist and former history instructor at West Point. He served tours with reconnaissance units in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has written a memoir and critical analysis of the Iraq War, [Ghost Riders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge](#). He lives with his wife and four sons in Lawrence, Kansas. Follow him on Twitter at [@SkepticalVet](#) and check out his new podcast [Fortress on a Hill](#). [Article originally published at [TomDispatch](#).]

Robert Parry's Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews

Robert Parry, editor and publisher of Consortiumnews.com, died peacefully Saturday evening. In this tribute, his son Nat Parry describes Robert's unwavering commitment to independent journalism.

By Nat Parry

It is with a heavy heart that we inform Consortiumnews readers that Editor Robert Parry has passed away. As regular readers know, Robert (or Bob, as he was known to friends and family) suffered a stroke in December, which – despite his own speculation that it may have been brought on by the stress of covering

Washington politics – was the result of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that he had been unknowingly living with for the past 4-5 years.

He unfortunately suffered two more debilitating strokes in recent weeks and after the last one, was moved to hospice care on Tuesday. He passed away peacefully Saturday evening. He was 68.

Those of us close to him wish to sincerely thank readers for the kind comments and words of support posted on recent articles regarding Bob's health issues. We read aloud many of these comments to him during his final days to let him know how much his work has meant to so many people and how much concern there was for his well-being.

I am sure that these kindnesses meant a lot to him. They also mean a lot to us as family members, as we all know how devoted he was to the mission of independent journalism and this website which has been publishing articles since the earliest days of the internet, launching all the way back in 1995.

With my dad, professional work has always been deeply personal, and his career as a journalist was thoroughly intertwined with his family life. I can recall kitchen table conversations in my early childhood that focused on the U.S.-backed wars in Central America and complaints about how his editors at The Associated Press were too timid to run articles of his that – no matter how well-documented – cast the Reagan administration in a bad light.

One of my earliest memories in fact was of my dad about to leave on assignment in the early 1980s to the war zones of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and the heartfelt good-bye that he wished to me and my siblings. He warned us that he was going to a very dangerous place and that there was a possibility that he might not come back.

I remember asking him why he had to go, why he couldn't just stay at home with us. He replied that it was important to go to these places and tell the truth about what was happening there. He mentioned that children my age were being killed in these wars and that somebody had to tell their stories. I remember asking, "Kids like me?" He replied, "Yes, kids just like you."

Bob was deeply impacted by the dirty wars of Central America in the 1980s and in many ways these conflicts – and the U.S. involvement in them – came to define the rest of his life and career. With grisly stories emerging from Nicaragua (thanks partly to journalists like him), Congress passed the Boland Amendments from 1982 to 1984, which placed limits on U.S. military assistance to the contras who were attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government through a variety of terrorist tactics.

The Reagan administration immediately began exploring ways to circumvent those legal restrictions, which led to a scheme to send secret arms shipments to the revolutionary and vehemently anti-American government of Iran and divert the profits to the contras. In 1985, Bob wrote the first stories describing this operation, which later became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

Contra-Cocaine and October Surprise

Parallel to the illegal arms shipments to Iran during those days was a cocaine trafficking operation by the Nicaraguan contras and a willingness by the Reagan administration and the CIA to turn a blind eye to these activities. This, despite the fact that cocaine was flooding into the United States while Ronald Reagan was proclaiming a “war on drugs,” and a crack cocaine epidemic was devastating communities across the country.

Bob and his colleague Brian Barger were the first journalists to report on this story in late 1985, which became known as the contra-cocaine scandal, and became the subject of a congressional investigation led by then-Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) in 1986.

Continuing to pursue leads relating to Iran-Contra during a period in the late 80s when most of Washington was moving on from the scandal, Bob discovered that there was more to the story than commonly understood. He learned that the roots of the illegal arm shipments to Iran stretched back further than previously known – all the way back to the 1980 presidential campaign.

That electoral contest between incumbent Jimmy Carter and challenger Ronald Reagan had come to be largely dominated by the hostage crisis in Iran, with 52 Americans being held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Iranian hostage crisis, along with the ailing economy, came to define a perception of an America in decline, with former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan promising a new start for the country, a restoration of its status as a “shining city on a hill.”

The hostages were released in Tehran moments after Reagan was sworn in as president in Washington on January 20, 1981. Despite suspicions for years that there had been some sort of quid pro quo between the Reagan campaign and the Iranians, it wasn't until Bob uncovered a trove of documents in a House office building basement in 1994 that the evidence became overwhelming that the Reagan campaign had interfered with the Carter administration's efforts to free the hostages prior to the 1980 election. Their release sooner – what Carter hoped would be his “October Surprise” – could have given him the boost needed to win.

Examining these documents and being already well-versed on this story – having

previously travelled three continents pursuing the investigation for a PBS *Frontline* documentary – Bob became increasingly convinced that the Reagan campaign had in fact sabotaged Carter’s hostage negotiations, possibly committing an act of treason in an effort to make sure that 52 American citizens continued to be held in a harrowing hostage situation until after Reagan secured the election.

Needless to say, this was an inconvenient story at a time – in the mid-1990s – when the national media had long since moved on from the Reagan scandals and were obsessing over new scandals, mostly related to President Bill Clinton’s sex life and failed real estate deals. Washington also wasn’t particularly interested in challenging the Reagan legacy, which at that time was beginning to solidify into a kind of mythology, with campaigns underway to name buildings and airports after the former president.

At times, Bob had doubts about his career decisions and the stories he was pursuing. As he wrote in *Trick or Treason*, a book outlining his investigation into the October Surprise Mystery, this search for historical truth can be painful and seemingly thankless.

“Many times,” he wrote, “I had regretted accepting *Frontline*’s assignment in 1990. I faulted myself for risking my future in mainstream journalism. After all, that is where the decent-paying jobs are. I had jeopardized my ability to support my four children out of an old-fashioned sense of duty, a regard for an unwritten code that expects reporters to take almost any assignment.”

Nevertheless, Bob continued his efforts to tell the full story behind both the Iran-Contra scandal and the origins of the Reagan-Bush era, ultimately leading to two things: him being pushed out of the mainstream media, and the launching of Consortiumnews.com.

I remember when he started the website, together with my older brother Sam, back in 1995. At the time, in spite of talk we were all hearing about something called “the information superhighway” and “electronic mail,” I had never visited a website and didn’t even know how to get “on line.” My dad called me in Richmond, where I was a sophomore at Virginia Commonwealth University, and told me I should check out this new “Internet site” he and Sam had just launched.

He explained over the phone how to open a browser and instructed me how to type in the URL, starting, he said, with “http,” then a colon and two forward slashes, then “www,” then “dot,” then this long address with one or two more forward slashes if I recall. (It wasn’t until years later that the website got its own domain and a simpler address.)

I went to the computer lab at the university and asked for some assistance on how to get online, dutifully typed in the URL, and opened this website – the first one I had ever visited. It was interesting, but a bit hard to read on the computer screen, so I printed out some articles to read back in my dorm room.

I quickly became a fan of “The Consortium,” as it was called back then, and continued reading articles on the October Surprise Mystery as Bob and Sam posted them on this new and exciting tool called “the Internet.” Sam had to learn HTML coding from scratch to launch this online news service, billed as “the Internet’s First Investigative ‘Zine.” For his efforts, Sam was honored with the Consortium for Independent Journalism’s first Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

X-Files and Contra-Crack

At some point along the way, Bob decided that in addition to the website, where he was not only posting original articles but also providing the source documents that he had uncovered in the House office building basement, he would also take a stab at traditional publishing. He compiled the “October Surprise X-Files” into a booklet and self-published it in January 1996.

He was also publishing a newsletter to complement the website, knowing that at that time, there were still plenty of people who didn’t know how to turn a computer on, much less navigate the World Wide Web. I transferred from Virginia Commonwealth University to George Mason University in the DC suburbs and started working part-time with my dad and Sam on the newsletter and website.

We worked together on the content, editing and laying it out with graphics often culled from books at our local library. We built a subscriber base through networking and purchasing mailing lists from progressive magazines. Every two weeks we would get a thousand copies printed from Sir Speedy and would spend Friday evening collating these newsletters and sending them out to our subscribers.

The launching of the website and newsletter, and later an even-more ambitious project called *I.F. Magazine*, happened to coincide with the publication in 1996 of Gary Webb’s “Dark Alliance” series at the *San Jose Mercury-News*. Webb’s series reopened the contra-cocaine controversy with a detailed examination of the drug trafficking networks in Nicaragua and Los Angeles that had helped to spread highly addictive crack cocaine across the United States.

The African-American community, in particular, was rightly outraged over this story, which offered confirmation of many long-standing suspicions that the government was complicit in the drug trade devastating their communities.

African Americans had been deeply and disproportionately affected by the crack epidemic, both in terms of the direct impact of the drug and the draconian drug laws and mandatory minimum sentences that came to define the government's approach to "the war on drugs."

For a moment in the summer of 1996, it appeared that the renewed interest in the contra-cocaine story might offer an opportunity to revisit the crimes and misdeeds of the Reagan-Bush era, but those hopes were dashed when the "the Big Media" decided to double down on its earlier failures to cover this story properly.

Big Papers Pile On

The *Los Angeles Times* launched the attack on Gary Webb and his reporting at the *San Jose Mercury-News*, followed by equally dismissive stories at the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. The piling on from these newspapers eventually led *Mercury-News* editor Jerry Ceppos to denounce Webb's reporting and offer a mea culpa for publishing the articles.

The onslaught of hostile reporting from the big papers failed to address the basic premises of Webb's series and did not debunk the underlying allegations of contra-cocaine smuggling or the fact that much of this cocaine ended up on American streets in the form of crack. Instead, it raised doubts by poking holes in certain details and casting the story as a "conspiracy theory." Some of the reporting attempted to debunk claims that Webb never actually made – such as the idea that the contra-cocaine trafficking was part of a government plot to intentionally decimate the African-American community.

Gary Webb and Bob were in close contact during those days. Bob offered him professional and personal support, having spent his time also on the receiving end of attacks by journalistic colleagues and editors who rejected certain stories – no matter how factual – as fanciful conspiracy theories. Articles at The Consortium website and newsletter, as well as *I.F. Magazine*, offered details on the historical context for the "Dark Alliance" series and pushed back against the mainstream media's onslaught of hostile and disingenuous reporting.

Bob also published the book *Lost History* which provided extensive details on the background for the "Dark Alliance" series, explaining that far from a baseless "conspiracy theory," the facts and evidence strongly supported the conclusion that the Reagan-Bush administrations had colluded with drug traffickers to fund their illegal war against Nicaragua.

But sadly, the damage to Gary Webb was done. With his professional and personal life in tatters because of his courageous reporting on the contra-cocaine story,

he committed suicide in 2004 at the age of 49. Speaking about this suicide later on *Democracy Now*, Bob noted how painful it is to be ridiculed and unfairly criticized by colleagues, as his friend had experienced.

“There’s a special pain when your colleagues in your profession turn on you, especially when you’ve done something that they should admire and should understand,” he said. “To do all that work and then have the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* attack you and try to destroy your life, there’s a special pain in that.”

In consultation with his family, Bob and the Board of Directors for the Consortium for Independent Journalism launched the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush

The presidency of George W. Bush was surreal for many of us, and no one more so than my dad.

In covering Washington politics for decades, Bob had traced many stories to “Dubya’s” father, George H.W. Bush, who had been implicated in a variety of questionable activities, including the October Surprise Mystery and Iran-Contra. He had also launched a war against Iraq in 1991 that seemed to be motivated, at least in part, to help kick “the Vietnam Syndrome,” i.e. the reluctance that the American people had felt since the Vietnam War to support military action abroad.

As Bob noted in his 1992 book *Fooling America*, after U.S. forces routed the Iraqi military in 1991, President Bush’s first public comment about the victory expressed his delight that it would finally put to rest the American reflex against committing troops to far-off conflicts. “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” he exulted.

The fact that Bush-41’s son could run for president largely on name recognition confirmed to Bob the failure of the mainstream media to cover important stories properly and the need to continue building an independent media infrastructure. This conviction solidified through Campaign 2000 and the election’s ultimate outcome, when Bush assumed the White House as the first popular-vote loser in more than a century.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court had halted the counting of votes in Florida, thus preventing an accurate determination of the rightful winner, most of the national media moved on from the story after Bush was sworn in on Jan. 20, 2001. Consortiumnews.com continued to examine the documentary record, however, and ultimately concluded that Al Gore would have been declared the

winner of that election if all the legally cast ballots were counted.

At Consortiumnews, there was an unwritten editorial policy that the title "President" should never precede George W. Bush's name, based on our view that he was not legitimately elected. But beyond those editorial decisions, we also understood the gravity of the fact that had Election 2000 been allowed to play out with all votes counted, many of the disasters of the Bush years – notably the 9/11 tragedy and the Iraq War, as well as decisions to withdraw from international agreements on arms control and climate change – might have been averted.

As all of us who lived through the post-9/11 era will recall, it was a challenging time all around, especially if you were someone critical of George W. Bush. The atmosphere in that period did not allow for much dissent. Those who stood up against the juggernaut for war – such as Phil Donahue at MSNBC, Chris Hedges at the *New York Times*, or even the Dixie Chicks – had their careers damaged and found themselves on the receiving end of death threats and hate mail.

While Bob's magazine and newsletter projects had been discontinued, the website was still publishing articles, providing a home for dissenting voices that questioned the case for invading Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003. Around this time, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern and some of his colleagues founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and a long-running relationship with Consortiumnews was established. Several former intelligence veterans began contributing to the website, motivated by the same independent spirit of truth-telling that compelled Bob to invest so much in this project.

At a time when almost the entire mainstream media was going along with the Bush administration's dubious case for war, this and a few other like-minded websites pushed back with well-researched articles calling into question the rationale. Although at times it might have felt as though we were just voices in the wilderness, a major groundswell of opposition to war emerged in the country, with historic marches of hundreds of thousands taking place to reject Bush's push for war.

Of course, these antiwar voices were ultimately vindicated by the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the fact that the war and occupation proved to be a far costlier and deadlier enterprise than we had been told that it would be. Earlier assurances that it would be a "cakewalk" proved as false as the WMD claims, but as had been so often the case in Washington, there was little to no accountability from the mainstream media, the think tanks or government officials for being so spectacularly wrong.

In an effort to document the true history of that era, Bob, Sam and I co-wrote the book *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, which was published in late 2007. The book traced the work of Consortiumnews, juxtaposing it against the backdrop of mainstream media coverage during the Bush era, in an effort to not only correct the record, but also demonstrate that not all of us got things so wrong.

We felt it was important to remind readers – as well as future historians – that some of us knew and reported in real time the mistakes that were being made on everything from withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol to invading Iraq to implementing a policy of torture to bungling the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Obama Era

By the Obama presidency, Consortiumnews.com had become a home to a growing number of writers who brought new perspectives to the website's content. While for years, the writing staff had been limited primarily to Bob, Sam and me, suddenly, Consortiumnews was receiving contributions from journalists, activists and former intelligence analysts who offered a wide range of expertise – on international law, economics, human rights, foreign policy, national security, and even religion and philosophy.

One recurring theme of articles at the website during the Obama era was the enduring effect of unchallenged narratives, how they shaped national politics and dictated government policy. Bob observed that even a supposedly left-of-center president like Obama seemed beholden to the false narratives and national mythologies dating back to the Reagan era. He pointed out that this could be at least partially attributed to the failure to establish a strong foundation for independent journalism.

In a 2010 piece called "Obama's Fear of the Reagan Narrative," Bob noted that Obama had defended his deal with Republicans on tax cuts for the rich because there was such a strong lingering effect of Reagan's messaging from 30 years earlier. "He felt handcuffed by the Right's ability to rally Americans on behalf of Reagan's 'government-is-the-problem' message," Bob wrote.

He traced Obama's complaints about his powerlessness in the face of this dynamic to the reluctance of American progressives to invest sufficiently in media and think tanks, as conservatives had been doing for decades in waging their "the war of ideas." As he had been arguing since the early 1990s, Robert insisted that the limits that had been placed on Obama – whether real or perceived – continued to demonstrate the power of propaganda and the need for greater investment in alternative media.

He also observed that much of the nuttiness surrounding the so-called Tea Party movement resulted from fundamental misunderstandings of American history and constitutional principles. “Democrats and progressives should be under no illusion about the new flood of know-nothingism that is about to inundate the United States in the guise of a return to ‘first principles’ and a deep respect for the U.S. Constitution,” Bob warned.

He pointed out that despite the Tea Partiers’ claimed reverence for the Constitution, they actually had very little understanding of the document, as revealed by their ahistorical claims that federal taxes are unconstitutional. In fact, as Bob observed, the Constitution represented “a major power grab by the federal government, when compared to the loosely drawn Articles of Confederation, which lacked federal taxing authority and other national powers.”

Motivated by a desire to correct falsified historical narratives spanning more than two centuries, Bob published his sixth and final book, *America’s Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes to Obama*, in 2012.

Along with revenues from book sales, growing donations from readers enabled Bob to not only pay writers but also to hire an assistant, Chelsea Gilmour, who began working for Consortiumnews in 2014. In addition to providing invaluable administrative support, Chelsea also performed duties including research, writing and fact-checking.

Political Realignment and the New McCarthyism

Although at the beginning of the Obama era – and indeed since the 1980s – the name Robert Parry had been closely associated with exposing wrongdoing by Republicans, and hence had a strong following among Democratic Party loyalists, by the end of Obama’s presidency there seemed to be a realignment taking place among some of Consortiumnews.com’s readership, which reflected more generally the shifting politics of the country.

In particular, the U.S. media’s approach to Russia and related issues, such as the violent ouster in 2014 of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, became “virtually 100 percent propaganda,” Bob said.

He noted that the full story was never told when it came to issues such as the Sergei Magnitsky case, which led to the first round of U.S. sanctions against Russia, nor the inconvenient facts related to the Euromaidan protests that led to Yanukovich’s ouster – including the reality of strong neo-Nazi influence in those protests – nor the subsequent conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

Bob's stories on Ukraine were widely cited and disseminated, and he became an important voice in presenting a fuller picture of the conflict than was possible by reading and watching only mainstream news outlets. Bob was featured prominently in Oliver Stone's 2016 documentary "Ukraine on Fire," where he explained how U.S.-funded political NGOs and media companies have worked with the CIA and foreign policy establishment since the 1980s to promote the U.S. geopolitical agenda.

Bob regretted that, increasingly, "the American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the 'other side of the story.'" Indeed, he said that to even suggest that there might be another side to the story is enough to get someone branded as an apologist for Vladimir Putin or a "Kremlin stooge."

This culminated in late 2016 in the blacklisting of Consortiumnews.com on a dubious website called "PropOrNot," which was claiming to serve as a watchdog against undue "Russian influence" in the United States. The PropOrNot blacklist, including Consortiumnews and about 200 other websites deemed "Russian propaganda," was elevated by the *Washington Post* as a credible source, despite the fact that the neo-McCarthyites who published the list hid behind a cloak of anonymity.

"The *Post*'s article by Craig Timberg," Bob wrote on Nov. 27, 2016, "described PropOrNot simply as 'a nonpartisan collection of researchers with foreign policy, military and technology backgrounds [who] planned to release its own findings Friday showing the startling reach and effectiveness of Russian propaganda campaigns.'"

As Bob explained in an article called "Washington Post's Fake News Guilt," the paper granted PropOrNot anonymity "to smear journalists who don't march in lockstep with official pronouncements from the State Department or some other impeccable fount of never-to-be-questioned truth."

The *Post* even provided an unattributed quote from the head of the shadowy website. "The way that this propaganda apparatus supported [Donald] Trump was equivalent to some massive amount of a media buy," the anonymous smear merchant said. The *Post* claimed that the PropOrNot "executive director" had spoken on the condition of anonymity "to avoid being targeted by Russia's legions of skilled hackers."

To be clear, neither Consortiumnews nor Robert Parry ever "supported Trump," as the above anonymous quote claims. Something interesting, however, did seem to be happening in terms of Consortiumnews' readership in the early days of the Trump presidency, as could be gleaned from some of the comments left on articles and

social media activity.

It did appear for some time at least that a good number of Trump supporters were reading Consortiumnews, which could probably attributed to the fact that the website was one of the few outlets pushing back against both the “New Cold War” with Russia and the related story of “Russiagate,” which Bob didn’t even like referring to as a “scandal.” (As an editor, he preferred to use the word “controversy” on the website, because as far as he was concerned, the allegations against Trump and his supposed “collusion” with Russia did not rise to the level of actual scandals such as Watergate or Iran-Contra.)

In his view, the perhaps understandable hatred of Trump felt by many Americans – both inside and outside the Beltway – had led to an abandonment of old-fashioned rules of journalism and standards of fairness, which should be applied even to someone like Donald Trump.

“On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump ‘Resistance,’” Bob wrote in his final article for Consortiumnews.

“The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster,” he said. “Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.”

He marveled that even senior editors in the mainstream media treated the unproven Russiagate allegations as flat fact.

“No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government’s institutions,” Bob wrote. “Anti-Trump ‘progressives’ were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.”

An Untimely End and the Future of Consortiumnews

My dad’s untimely passing has come as a shock to us all, especially since up until a month ago, there was no indication whatsoever that he was sick in any way. He took good care of himself, never smoked, got regular check-ups, exercised, and ate well. The unexpected health issues starting with a mild stroke Christmas Eve and culminating with his admission into hospice care several days ago offer a stark reminder that nothing should be taken for granted.

And as many Consortiumnews readers have eloquently pointed out in comments left on recent articles regarding Bob's health, it also reminds us that his brand of journalism is needed today more than ever.

"We need free will thinkers like you who value the truth based on the evidence and look past the group think in Washington to report on the real reasons for our government's and our media's actions which attempt to deceive us all," wrote, for example, "FreeThinker."

"Common sense and integrity are the hallmarks of Robert Parry's journalism. May you get better soon for you are needed more now than ever before," wrote "T.J."

"We need a new generation of reporters, journalists, writers, and someone always being tenacious to follow up on the story," added "Tina."

As someone who has been involved with this website since its inception – as a writer, an editor and a reader – I concur with these sentiments. Readers should rest assured that despite my dad's death, every effort will be made to ensure that the website will continue going strong.

Indeed, I think that everyone involved with this project wants to uphold the same commitment to truth-telling without fear or favor that inspired Bob and his heroes like George Seldes, I.F. Stone, and Thomas Paine.

That commitment can be seen in my dad's pursuit of stories such as those mentioned above, but also so many others – including his investigations into the financial relationship of the influential *Washington Times* with the Unification Church cult of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the truth behind the Nixon campaign's alleged efforts to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson's Paris peace talks with Vietnamese leaders in 1968, the reality of the chemical attack in Syria in 2013, and even detailed examinations of the evidence behind the so-called "Deflategate" controversy that he felt unfairly branded his favorite football team, the New England Patriots, as cheaters.

Reviewing these journalistic achievements, it becomes clear that there are few stories that have slipped under Consortiumnews.com's radar, and that the historical record is far more complete thanks to this website and Bob's old-fashioned approach to journalism.

But besides this deeply held commitment to independent journalism, it should also be recalled that, ultimately, Bob was motivated by a concern over the future of life on Earth. As someone who grew up at the height of the Cold War, he understood the dangers of allowing tensions and hysteria to spiral out of control, especially in a world such as ours with enough nuclear weapons to wipe out all life on the planet many times over.

As the United States continues down the path of a New Cold War, my dad would be pleased to know that he has such committed contributors who will enable the site to remain the indispensable home for independent journalism that it has become, and continue to push back on false narratives that threaten our very survival.

Thank you all for your support.

In lieu of flowers, Bob's family asks you to please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Consortium for Independent Journalism.
