

# The Bushes' 'Death Squads'

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

## How George W. Bush Learned From His Father

By Robert Parry

*Special to Consortium News*



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

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

As a centerpiece of this tougher strategy to pacify Iraq, Bush is contemplating the adoption of the brutal practices that were used to suppress leftist peasant uprisings in Central America in the 1980s. The Pentagon is "intensively

debating” a new policy for Iraq called the “Salvador option,” [Newsweek](#) magazine reported on Jan. 9.

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

### **Central America Veterans**

The magazine also noted that a number of Bush administration officials were leading figures in the Central American operations of the 1980s, such as John Negroponte, who was then U.S. Ambassador to Honduras and is now U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

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

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

against hundreds of men, women and children in and around the town of El Mozote in 1981.

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

[For details about how these strategies worked and the role of George H.W. Bush, see Robert Parry’s [\*Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq.\*](#)]

## **More Pain**

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

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

Newsweek quoted one military source as saying, “The Sunni

population is paying no price for the support it is giving the terrorists. ... From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.”

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

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

### **Iraqi Dynamic**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## TV World

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

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

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

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

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

Bush also came to believe in the wisdom of his “gut”

judgments. After his widely praised ouster of Afghanistan's Taliban government in late 2001, Bush set his sights on invading Iraq. Like a hot gambler in Las Vegas doubling his bets, Bush's instincts were on a roll.

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

Bush could acknowledge his mistakes and seek international help in extricating U.S. forces from Iraq. But Bush abhors admitting errors, even small ones. Plus, Bush's belligerent tone hasn't created much incentive for other countries to bail him out.

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

### **Pinochet Option**

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

Like the policy that George W. Bush is now considering, Pinochet even sponsored his own international "death squad" – known as Operation Condor – that hunted down political

opponents around the world. One of those attacks in September 1976 blew up a car carrying Chilean dissident Orlando Letelier as he drove through Washington D.C. with two American associates. Letelier and co-worker Ronni Moffitt were killed.

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

[For more on George H.W. Bush's protection of Pinochet, see Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

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

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

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



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

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

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## The U.S. is Meddling in Venezuelan Election

As Venezuelans go to the polls Sunday, the U.S. is working to disrupt the re-election of Nicolas Maduro and rollback leftwing governments in the region, reports Roger D. Harris.

By **Roger D. Harris** *Special to Consortium News*



Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is the frontrunner in the presidential elections that will take place on Sunday. If past pronouncements and practice by the United States are any indication, every effort will be made to oust an avowed socialist from the the U.S. “backyard.”

This week, the leftist president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, [tweeted](#): “Before the elections they (U.S. and allies) will carry out violent actions supported by the

media and after the elections they will try a military invasion with Armed Forces from neighboring countries.”

U.S. antipathy towards the Venezuelan government started with the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, followed by a brief and unsuccessful U.S.-backed coup in 2002. Chávez made the magnanimous, but politically imprudent, gesture of pardoning the *golpistas*, who are still trying to achieve by extra-parliamentary means what they have been unable to realize democratically. After Chávez died in 2013, the Venezuelans elected Maduro to carry on what has become known as the Bolivarian Revolution.

### **The Phantom Menace**

In 2015 then U.S. President Barack Obama declared “a national emergency” because of a supposed Venezuelan threat to the U.S. The U.S. has military bases to the west of Venezuela in Colombia and to the east in the Dutch colonial islands. The Fourth Fleet patrols Venezuela’s Caribbean coast. Yet somehow in the twisted logic of imperialism, the phantom of Venezuela posed a menacing, “extraordinary threat” to the U.S.

Each year Obama renewed and deepened sanctions against Venezuela under the National Emergencies Act. Taking no chances that his successor might not be sufficiently hostile to Venezuela, Obama prematurely renewed the sanctions his last year in office even though the sanctions would not have expired until two months into Trump’s tenure.

The fear was that presumptive U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson might try to normalize U.S. -Venezuelan relations to negotiate an oil deal between Venezuela and his former employer Exxon. As it turns out, the Democrats need not have feared Trump going soft on regime change.

Last August, Donald Trump publicly raised the “military option” to overthrow Venezuela’s democratically-elected government. Then David Smilde of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) counseled for regime change, not by military means, but by “deepening the current sanctions” to “save Venezuela.” The somewhat liberal, inside-the-beltway NGO argued against a direct military invasion because the Venezuelan military would resist, not because such an act is the gravest violation of international law.

Meanwhile the sanctions have taken a punishing toll on the Venezuelan people, even causing death. Sanctions are designed, in Richard Nixon’s blood-curdling words, to “make the economy scream” so that the people will abandon their democratically elected government for one vetted by the U.S.

In January, Trump’s first State of the Union address called for regime change of

leftist governments in Latin America, boasting, "My government has imposed harsh sanctions on the communist and socialist dictatorships of Cuba and Venezuela." Hearing these stirring words, both Democrats and Republicans burst out in thunderous applause.

"Dictatorships," as the term is wielded by the U.S. government and mainstream media, should be understood as countries that try to govern in the interests of their own peoples rather than privileging the dictates of the U.S. State Department and the prerogatives of international capital.

### **Attack of the Clones**

In addition to summoning Venezuela's sycophantic domestic opposition, who support sanctions against their own people, the U.S. has gone on the offensive using the regional Lima Group to destabilize Venezuela. The group was established last August in Lima, the capital of Peru, as a block to oppose Venezuela.

The eighth Summit of the Americas was held in Lima in April under the lofty slogan of "democratic governance against corruption." Unfortunately for the imperialists, the president of the host country was unable to greet the other U.S. clones. A few days earlier he had been forced to resign because of corruption. Venezuelan President Maduro was barred from attending.

Along with Peru and the U.S. ' ever faithful junior partner Canada, other members of the Lima Group are:

- Mexico, a prime participant of the U.S. -sponsored War on Drugs, is plagued with drug cartel violence. The frontrunner for the July presidential election is left-of-center Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who is widely believed to have won the last two elections only to have them stolen from him.
- Panama's government is a direct descendent of the one installed on a U.S. warship when the U.S. invaded Panama in 1989. Recall the triggering incident that unleashed U.S. bombs and 26,000 troops into Panama against a defense force of 3,000: a GI in civilian clothes was fatally shot running a military checkpoint and another GI and his wife were assaulted. What similarly grave affront to the global hegemon might precipitate a comparable military response for Venezuela? Panama imposed sanctions against Venezuela in a spat in April, accusing Venezuela of money laundering. Panama is a regional money laundering center for the illicit drug trade (some alleged through a Trump-owned hotel).

- Argentina elected Mauricio Macri president in 2015. He immediately sold the country out to the vulture funds and the IMF while imposing severe austerity measures on working people. The economy has tanked, reversing the gains of the previous left-leaning presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández. Military and diplomatic deference to the U.S. has become the order of the day. Macri has negotiated installation of two U.S. military bases in Argentina, first with Obama and now with Trump.
- Brazil deposed its left-leaning, democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff in a 2016 parliamentary coup. Her successor, the unelected Michel Temer, has imposed austerity measures and cooperated with the U.S. in joint military exercises along the Brazilian border with Venezuela. Temer suffers from single digit popularity ratings and is barred from running for public office due to a corruption conviction. Former left-leaning president “Lula” da Silva is the frontrunner in October’s presidential election but was imprisoned in April by Temer’s government.
- Chile was the victim of the U.S. -backed coup, which overthrew the elected left-leaning government of Salvador Allende in 1973. A reign of terror followed with the extreme rightwing government of Gen. Augusto Pinochet killing thousands. An economic and diplomatic destabilization campaign coordinated by Washington set the stage for the coup. The Chilean regime-change scenario could be the model for Venezuela. The rightwing opposition in Venezuela torched a maternity hospital with mothers and babies inside and even poured gasoline on suspected Chávez supporters, burning them alive.
- Colombia is the U.S. ’ closest ally in the region, the recipient of the most U.S. military aid, and the source of the greatest amount of illicit drugs afflicting the U.S. . The Colombian government has flaunted its recent peace accords with the FARC and continues to be a world leader with 7 million internally displaced persons and political assassinations of trade union leaders, human rights workers, and journalists. In cooperation with the U.S. , Colombia has been provocatively massing troops along its border with Venezuela.
- Costa Rica is a neoliberal state that has been a staunch silent partner of U.S. imperialism ever since it served as a base for the Contra war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

- Guatemala is a major source of undocumented immigrants fleeing violence into the relative safety of the U.S. . Femicide is rampant as is criminal impunity, all legacies of the U.S. -backed dirty war of genocide from the 1960s through the '80s, which claimed some 200,000 Mayan lives.
- Honduras' left-leaning President Zelaya was deposed in a U.S. -backed coup in 2009. In the aftermath of rightwing repression and domestic violence, Honduras earned the title of murder capital of the world. The current rightwing president was reelected last November in an election so blatantly fraudulent that even the Organization of American States (OAS) failed to endorse the results.
- Paraguay is the site of the first of the rightwing parliamentary coups in the region when left-leaning President Fernando Lugo was deposed in 2012.

Such is the nature of the rightwing states allied against Venezuela in contemporary Latin America. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of this right tide is the willingness of Brazil and Argentina to allow U.S. military installations in their border areas as well as conducting joint U.S. -led military exercises with contingents from Panama, Colombia and other countries.

Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua are Venezuela's few remaining regional allies, all of which have been subject to U.S. -backed regime-change schemes. Most recently, the Nicaraguan government undertook modest measures to increase workers' and employers' contributions but lower benefits. It led to violent demonstrations. Some sources hostile to the Ortega government labelled the protests as "made in the U.S. A." In the face of such protests, the government rescinded the changes on April 23.

### **The Empire Strikes Back**

In early April, the U.S. Southern Command conducted a series of military exercises, dubbed "Fused Response," just 10 miles off the Venezuelan coast, simulating an invasion.

Later that month, Juan Cruz, Special Assistant to President Trump and Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, was asked whether the U.S. government supports a military coup in Venezuela. Speaking for the White House and dripping with imperial arrogance, he responded affirmatively:

"If you look at the history of Venezuela, there's never been a seminal movement in Venezuela's history, politics, that did not involve the military. And so it would be naïve for us to think that a solution in Venezuela wouldn't in some

fashion include a very strong nod – at a minimum – strong nod from the military, a whisper in the ear, a coaxing or a nudging, or something a lot stronger than that.”

Across the Atlantic on May 3, the European Parliament demanded Venezuela suspend presidential elections. Four days later, U.S. Vice President Pence called on the OAS to expel Venezuela. Adding injury to insult, the U.S. announced yet another round of sanctions. Then the next day, U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley joined the chorus calling on President Maduro to cancel the presidential election and resign.

Far more blatant and frightening is the *Plan to Overthrow the Venezuelan Dictatorship – Masterstroke*, dated February 23, 2018. *Masterstroke* was leaked on the website [Voltaire.net.org](http://Voltaire.net.org) and picked up by Stella Calloni in the reliable and respected [Resumen Latinoamericano](http://Resumen Latinoamericano). Although *Masterstroke* is unverified, the contents as reported by Calloni are entirely consistent with U.S. policy and pronouncements:

“The document signed by the head of the U.S. Southern Command demands making the Maduro government unsustainable by forcing him to give up, negotiate or escape. This Plan to end in very short terms the so-called ‘dictatorship’ of Venezuela calls for, ‘Increase internal instability to critical levels, intensifying the decapitalization of the country, the escape of foreign capital and the deterioration of the national currency, through the application of new inflationary measures that increase this deterioration.’”

That is, blame the Venezuelan government for the conditions imposed upon it by its enemies.

*Masterstroke* calls for, “Continuing to harden the condition within the (Venezuelan) Armed Forces to carry out a coup d’état, before the end of 2018, if this crisis does not cause the dictatorship to collapse or if the dictator (Maduro) does not decide to step aside.”

Failing an internal coup, *Masterstroke* plans an international military invasion: “Uniting Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Panama to contribute a good number of troops, make use of their geographic proximity...”

## **A New Hope**

With the urging of the Pope and under the auspices of the government of the Dominican Republic, the Maduro government and elements of the opposition agreed to sit down to negotiate last January in the hopes of ending the cycle of violence and the deterioration of living conditions in Venezuela.

By early February they had come to a tentative agreement to hold elections. The Maduro government initially opposed a UN election observation team as a violation of national sovereignty, but then accepted it as a concession to the opposition. The opposition in turn would work to end the unilateral sanctions by the U.S. , Canada, and the EU, which are so severely crippling the daily life of ordinary Venezuelans. Two years of adroit diplomacy by the Maduro government with the less extreme elements of the opposition were bearing fruit.

The agreement had been crafted and a meeting was called for the government and the opposition to sign on. The government came to the final meeting, but not the opposition. The opposition as good clones of Washington had gotten a call from their handlers to bail.

In a damned-if-you-do/damned-if-you-don't scenario, the U.S. first accused Venezuela of not scheduling presidential elections. Then elections were scheduled, but too early for the U.S. . Then the date of the elections was moved to April and then extended to May. No matter what, the U.S. would not abide by any elections in Venezuela. *Ipsa factoelections* are considered fraudulent by U.S. if the people might vote for the wrong candidate.

*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*(MUD), the coalition of Venezuelan opposition groups allied with and partially funded by the U.S., are accordingly boycotting Sunday's election and are putting pressure on Henri Falcón to withdraw his candidacy. Falcón is Maduro's main competition in the election. MUD has already concluded that the election is fraudulent and are doing all they can to discourage voting.

CNBC, reflecting the Washington consensus, expects the U.S. to directly target the Venezuelan oil industry immediately after the election in what they describe as "a huge sucker punch to Maduro's socialist administration, which is depending almost entirely on crude sales to try and decelerate a deepening economic crisis."

Ever hopeful and always militant, Maduro launched the new Petro cryptocurrency and revalued the country's traditional currency, the Bolivar, in March. The Petro is collateralized on Venezuela's vast mineral resources: the largest petroleum reserves in the world and large reserves of gold and other precious metals. The U.S. immediately accused Venezuela of sinisterly trying to circumvent the sanctions...which is precisely the intent of the Petro and other economic reforms, some of which are promised for after the presidential election.

## **The Force Awakens**

Latin America has been considered the U.S. empire's proprietary backyard since the proclamation of the Monroe Document in 1823, reaffirmed by John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in 1961, and asserted by today's open military posturing by President Trump.

The so-called Pink Tide of left-leaning governments spearheaded by Venezuela in the early part of this century served as a counter-hegemonic force. By any objective estimation that force has been ebbing but can awaken.

Before Chávez, all of Latin America suffered under neoliberal regimes except Cuba. If Maduro is overthrown, a major obstacle to re-establishing this hemispheric wide neoliberalism would be gone.

The future of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution is pivotal to the future of the counter-hegemonic project, which is why it is the empire's prime target in the Western Hemisphere. If the Venezuelan government falls, all Latin American progressive movements could suffer immensely: AMLO's campaign in Mexico, the resistance in Honduras and Argentina, maybe the complete end of the peace accords in Colombia, a left alternative to Lenin Moreno in Ecuador, the Sandinista social programs in Nicaragua, the struggle for Lula's presidency in Brazil, and even Morales and the indigenous movements in Bolivia.

As U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger said in 1970: "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its people. The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves."

**Roger D. Harris is the immediate past president of the 32-year-old, anti-imperialist human rights organization, the Task Force on the Americas. He will be observing the Venezuela presidential election on a delegation with Venezuela Analysis and the Intrepid News Fund.**

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## The Time is Now for Universal Jurisdiction

The time is right to revive the concept of "universal jurisdiction" – the idea that a person, whatever their nationality, can be called to account before the court of any civilized country for grave international crimes, argues Inder Comar.

**By Inder Comar**





In hindsight, it is almost too extraordinary: the leader of a Western-friendly government responsible for the deaths of thousands, and the torture of tens of thousands, arrested and brought to account for his crimes before a court and a judge.

But this is exactly what happened in 1998, when Judge Baltasar Garzon, a Spanish magistrate, issued an arrest warrant for the former dictator of Chile, Augusto Pinochet, while Pinochet was in the United Kingdom seeking medical treatment.

What happened next was a series of hearings that became known as The Pinochet Case, and which ended with a stunning victory for human rights: Britain's House of Lords deciding in 1999 that the arrest of Pinochet could proceed on the basis that his alleged international crimes violated human rights norms.

Pinochet received a reprieve from then British Home Secretary Jack Straw, who decided that Pinochet was too ill to stand trial, and permitted Pinochet to leave and go back to Chile.

But the moment could not be undone: an authoritarian leader who had committed terrible crimes was forced to account for them—somewhere.

Fast-forward two years to the events of 9/11.

### **The Excuse of Fighting Terrorism**

Governments around the world, including the American government, have openly and earnestly used the excuse of terrorism to tear down an international human rights mandate that was growing of its own accord. It had produced an unthinkable amount of accountability over Pinochet—a former head of state who had been sponsored and defended by powerful Western governments despite his record of torture and murder.

In the so-called War on Terror, the global prohibition against torture, codified in the Convention Against Torture, was dismantled in favor of renditions, black sites, and cruel and inhuman treatment against people who were never accused of any crime, or someone like Khalid al Masri, a German national, who was taken into captivity and tortured (al Masri was, among other things, drugged and sodomized), but then let go because they had been kidnapped by the CIA by mistake. The European Court of Human Rights confirmed these findings in 2012.

Similarly, the global prohibition against indefinite detention, codified since at least Magna Carta, was discarded in favor of the legal black hole at Guantanamo Bay. Western governments did not just attack critical human rights—they abandoned them in their entirety. And not a single government leader

has been called to account for the destruction of these inalienable human rights protections.

The time is right to revive the concept of “universal jurisdiction” – the idea that a person, whatever their nationality, can be called to account before the court of any civilized country for grave international crimes.

### **Enemies of Civilization**

The Romans had an expression for those who had committed terrible offenses: *hostis humani generis*, or “enemies of civilization.” Modern law talks of pirates the same way, and most countries (including the U.S.) permit a type of universal jurisdiction over those who commit piracy.

But it is up to today’s lawyers and judges to extend this concept beyond pirates—to torturers, illegal aggressors, and war criminals, wherever they may be located.

Impunity over international crimes must be abolished if we are ever to live in a civilized, peaceful world. A world where every leader, of every nation, remains afraid of having to defend their international actions with a lawyer, before a judge.

If The Pinochet Case seems buried in the past, there is a reason for that. The powerful want the world to forget that not too long ago, a brave judge, empowered by brave victims, found a legal doctrine that was compelling enough to force courts in the Western world to hold a once-favored dictator to account for his crimes.

It opened the imagination to a world in which law could produce accountability over international crimes – and where law could theoretically prevent such crimes from taking place in the future. Every day people bore witness to a court investigating the conduct of a Western-backed dictator. And there was a real possibility of that dictator going to jail.

We should not forget The Pinochet Case, or the idea of universal jurisdiction. Lawyers and judges can act as agents of profound social change.

Think of the way the world would change if a brave set of victims, lawyers and judges opened investigations into drone warfare, the Iraq War, or the destruction of Yemen.

Think of the way the world would change if those victims, lawyers and judges could show how law could act as a civilizing, pacifying force—not simply a tool to be held against the weak, but a positive force for good that could hold and

sustain civilization itself.

Judge Baltasar Garzon was removed from his judgeship in 2010, and today, he acts as a legal advisor to Julian Assange. Pinochet, upon his return to Chile, was eventually stripped of his immunity and charged with a variety of crimes. Pinochet died soon after his indictments, and before he could feel the scrutiny that comes from honest, civilizing law.

But it is not too late for others. It is not too late for law to command the powerful, wherever they may be, instead of the powerful commanding the law.

*This article first appeared on Inder Comar's [blog](#)*

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## The Earlier 9/11 Acts of Terror

**From the Archive:** Americans feel a special sadness about the terrible loss of life on Sept. 11, 2001, but the 9/11 date has other meanings in other countries, reflecting a U.S. hypocrisy on terrorism, wrote Jonathan Marshall in 2014.

By Jonathan Marshall (Originally published on Sept. 10, 2014)

Americans collectively woke up to the threat of domestic terrorism on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. Nearly 3,000 people died in the fiery destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City, the attack on the Pentagon and related airplane hijackings.

Twenty-eight years earlier, Chileans had their own deadly wake-up call on Sept. 11, 1973, when coup plotters overthrew the democratic government of Salvador Allende after blasting the presidential palace with bombs and heavy artillery. The military junta went on to kill more than 3,000 people, imprison and torture tens of thousands of political victims, and send tens of thousands more into exile.

Though largely forgotten today, blowback from the U.S.-backed Chilean coup came

to haunt North Americans in the form of deadly terrorist attacks, including a number falling in September and even on the forbidding date of Sept. 11 in years predating the al-Qaeda atrocity. In those cases, the perpetrators were not Islamic militants, nor were they angry Marxists intent on avenging Washington's complicity in the Chilean military's crimes. Instead, the killers were right-wing extremists bent on carrying their cause to U.S. soil.

The most shocking such case of blowback terrorism was the car bombing of former Chilean government minister Orlando Letelier and a young colleague on the streets of Washington D.C. on Sept. 26, 1976, just past the third anniversary of the coup.

Until 2001, it was the worst act of international terrorism committed in the United States. FBI investigators eventually determined that the remote-controlled bomb had been set off by members of the fascist Cuban Nationalist Movement (CNM), directed by an American-born agent of the Chilean secret police.

### **Attacks at the UN**

Few Americans remember the Letelier murder, but how many ever knew of the related creation of one of America's longest-running terrorist organizations on Sept. 11, 1974? How many know of that group's brazen murder of a Cuban diplomat, the first case of terrorist violence against a United Nations diplomat, on the streets of New York on Sept. 11, 1980? Or of the same group's coordinated attacks against the Mexican consulates in New York City and Miami, and the Miami office of a noted magazine, all on Sept. 11, 1981?

The terror group's name was Omega 7. Its founder was a fanatical anti-Castro Cuban exile named Eduardo Arocena, who used the nom-de-guerre "Omar" to take credit for the group's two assassinations and more than 30 bombings over a span of almost nine years as the group eluded police and FBI investigators.

One Justice Department official called Arocena "probably the most dedicated patriot in the Cuban field that the law enforcement community has ever experienced in seven years of bombings and murders." (Imagine a U.S. official calling Osama Bin Laden "the most dedicated patriot in the Islamist field that the law enforcement community has ever experienced.")

As the FBI reported in 1993, "The main areas of operation for the Omega 7 were the New York, New Jersey, and Miami, Florida, areas. Its primary targets were representatives of the Cuban Government or any individual, organization, facility, or business that dealt with or supported in any way, the communist government of Fidel Castro.

"The majority of Omega 7 attacks were bombings, shootings, and assassinations.

Its terrorist attacks were usually well-planned and flawlessly executed. Many of the Omega 7 members were veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion who were trained in demolition, intelligence, and commando techniques. Their expertise, combined with the financial resources available to them through the exiled Cuban community, gave the Omega 7 an almost unlimited potential for terrorist activity."

### **Not a Stereotype**

Short and pudgy, with a fondness for three-piece suits and classical music, Arocena did not fit any usual stereotype of a terrorist mastermind, but he committed his adult life to violence. "I am obsessed by Communism, which has held my country prisoner," he explained years later.

Arocena was born in Cuba in 1943. He left school when Fidel Castro took power in 1959. After a stint loading sugar at his hometown port of Caibarien, followed by national success as a welter-weight wrestler, Arocena secretly began fighting Communism. As he would testify years later, he joined a clandestine group to "burn cane fields, burn down industrial development places, to keep our eyes on the regime. . . . We carried out intelligence work, which [was] then passed on to foreign agencies."

Fearing capture, he stowed away on a ship bound for Morocco in 1965 and made his way to New Jersey the next year. Safe on American soil, he quickly found that his passion for fighting Castro was shared by tens of thousands of fellow exiles and at least some Washington officials. In early 1969, with hundreds of compatriots, he received training by unnamed "American agents" in demolitions techniques at camp in the Florida Everglades. To his bitter regret, the group was disbanded after the promised invasion of Cuba came to nothing.

Eager for action, he grew close to members of the radical CNM, founded by the fascist ideologue Felipe Rivero in 1960. After joining the CIA's ill-fated landing at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, Rivero went his own way. In 1964 he called for a worldwide campaign of terrorism against Cuban targets, which the group initiated with a bazooka attack against the United Nations building, where Ernesto "Che" Guevara was giving a speech. Years later, the CNM was among the first and most ardent anti-Castro Cuban groups to ally with the Chilean military regime and its secret police after the Sept. 11, 1973 coup.

### **Founding a Terror Cell**

Celebration of the Chilean coup likely explains Arocena's decision to found his own terrorist group, Omega 7, on its one-year anniversary. Omega 7 drew support from the CNM to the point where authorities for many years believed,

incorrectly, that the two organizations were identical.

Omega 7 committed its first act of terrorism on Feb. 1, 1975, setting off a bomb at the Venezuelan consulate on 51<sup>st</sup> Street in New York City to protest that government's recent resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba. In June 1976, it set off a bomb at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations.

Then, on Sept. 16, 1976, the group bombed a Soviet cargo ship docked in Port Elizabeth, New Jersey, where Arocena worked as a longshoreman. Arocena himself swam out to plant the bomb on the ship's hull with magnets. He built the device with help from the CNM's Chilean-trained demolition expert Virgilio Paz. Only days later, Paz would travel from Union City to Washington to help carry out the Chilean regime's plot to assassinate Orlando Letelier. The Omega 7 job explains why the Chilean agent in charge of the Letelier mission would report that his assignment had to wait several days because "the CNM was engaged in some other operation which required their immediate attention."

Many other acts of terror would follow. One day after Christmas in 1977, Omega 7 bombed the Venezuelan Mission to the United Nations, to protest Venezuela's imprisonment of Cuban exile Orlando Bosch on charges of blowing up 73 passengers aboard a Cubana Airlines jet the previous year. The next year, Omega 7 bombed the Cuban Mission to the U.N. for the third and fourth times, the Mexican Consulate in New York, and Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center, to protest a performance by a Cuban orchestra.

In 1979, among other attacks, it bombed the Cuban Mission a fifth and sixth time (injuring two policemen), set off high explosives at the Soviet Mission to the U.N. (injuring four policemen and two mission employees), tried to assassinate Fidel Castro during his visit to the U.N. General Assembly in October, and murdered moderate exile Eulalio Jose Negrin in front of his son with a silenced MAC-10 machine gun to punish his "traitorous" parleys with Havana that led to the release of 3,000 political prisoners. The group also tried to plant a suitcase bomb on a TWA flight from New York to Los Angeles, but it exploded prematurely before being loaded.

### **Hard to Crack**

With the attack on the Soviet mission, the FBI finally moved Omega 7 to its highest priority target list. The tight-knit organization proved impossible to crack, however. In March 1980, only a fluke accident saved Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations from being incinerated when his car bumped another and a powerful remote-controlled bomb fell off its gas tank to the ground. Arocena had built the bomb using military-grade explosives supplied to the CNM by the Chilean secret police.

An attache with the Cuban Mission, Felix Garcia, was not so lucky. On Sept. 11, 1980, the seventh anniversary of the Chilean coup and the sixth anniversary of Omega 7's founding, the group murdered him while he was driving to work from his apartment in Queens. Arocena's partner Pedro Remon cut Garcia down with a burst from a MAC-10. Arocena drove the hit car.

As the Cuban newspaper Granma described the reaction, "UN diplomats were in uproar. For the first time ever, terrorists had used violence against the legitimate representative of a UN member country. . . . Three times on the following day, UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim expressed his horror at the crime. He communicated with the U.S. representative at the United Nations, demanding that full measures be taken to guarantee the safety of all the Cuban personnel in New York, and insisted that the tragic event be thoroughly investigated. . . .

"Secretary of State Ed Muskie called it a reprehensible act and asked for all the relevant federal agencies as well as the New York police department to cooperate in the investigation. . . . Donald McHenry, Washington's ambassador to the UN called the crime a blot on the United States. Nevertheless, both Muskie and McHenry refrained from specifically condemning the anti-Cuban terrorism . . .

"At the UN, Cuban ambassador Raul Roa Kouri affirmed with total clarity: 'these groups of professional killers have various locations in the country that hosts our international organization. Their members and leaders make public statements to New York's Spanish-language press and hold public meetings on the streets, crudely boasting of their criminal intentions.'"

## **The Unraveling**

The Sept. 11, 1980 murder of Cuba's diplomat began the undoing of Omega 7. A joint FBI-New York Police Department terrorism task force eventually tracked a rental car ticketed across from the Cuban Mission that day to Arocena. Toll records also connected Arocena in the period of the murder to his key compatriots in Omega 7, giving investigators their first clear glimpse of the organization's membership.

Omega 7 was far from spent, however. One year after its assassination of Garcia, the organization unleashed a wave of new attacks. On Sept. 11, 1981, it fire-bombed the Miami offices of *Replica* magazine, which had called for normalizing relations between Havana and Washington. It also bombed the Mexican consulates in Miami and New York that day to protest that government's warm relations with Cuba, causing more than \$2 million in damage to the Miami building alone.

Where did Omega 7 get the resources to pull off so many meticulous operations? An FBI report in 1993 noted: "Although current information is incomplete, it appears that some Cuban exile businessmen in the Union City, New Jersey, area clandestinely funded Omega 7 and other Cuban anti-Castro groups. The businessmen established a network which would collect money in the form of 'taxes' from all segments of the Cuban community who were able to contribute and then divide the money between the various groups they supported. . . . Current reporting, although fragmented, suggests that the businessmen, who may still be active in funding anti-Castro groups, were involved in the flow of over \$100,000 to the various groups."

Additionally, the FBI learned that Arocena and Omega 7 received about \$150,000 from a major marijuana trafficker who asked the organization to collect money owed him by other Cuban exiles and business associates in the drug trade. (Arocena agreed to murder one such associate who had stolen 40,000 pounds of marijuana, but dropped the assignment when he learned that his target was in jail.) Omega 7 members also received legal defense funds from at least two drug-connected Cuban exiles.

A grand jury investigation of Omega 7 from 1979 to 1982 went nowhere, but an ideological split in Omega 7's ranks finally gave the FBI a huge break. Fearing for his life at the hands of Pedro Rem<sup>3</sup>n and other disaffected associates, Arocena began talking with surprising candor to Special Agent Larry Wack about the history and operations of the organization. Arocena then went underground in Miami but continued their dialog through calls from pay phones. Their talks, all recorded, built an impeccable case against the man who called himself "Omar" and his terrorist associates.

### **Belated Roundup**

On Oct. 2, 1982, federal agents finally arrested three key members of Omega 7 in New Jersey and Arocena's chief triggerman turned nemesis, Rem<sup>3</sup>n, in Miami. They were charged with transporting explosives used in the attempted assassination of the Cuban ambassador in March 1980.

Not until July 22, 1983, was Arocena finally arrested in Miami, with an arsenal of machine guns, pistols, rifles, knives, disguises, and a remote-control transmitter. A jury would find him guilty the following year on 25 charges of murder, conspiracy to murder, transporting explosives, possession of bombs and perjury. He received a sentence of life plus 35 additional years. A year later, a Miami judge added another 20 years to his sentence after a separate conviction for bombing seven businesses and consulates in that city from 1979 to 1983.

Arocena's sentence was a rare exception to the mild fate of most Cuban exile



terrorists. The Miami Herald's Juan Tamayo noted in 1998, "Amid reports that Cuban exile leaders financed bombings in Havana, conspirators, cops and prosecutors agree that anti-Castro plotting in South Florida is not only common but almost tolerated."

"Other than an occasional federal gun charge," two reporters for Salon observed in 2008, "Nothing much seems to happen to most of these would-be revolutionaries. They are allowed to train nearly unimpeded despite making explicit plans to violate the 70-year-old U.S. Neutrality Act and overthrow a sovereign country's government. Though separate anti-terror laws passed in 1994 and 1996 would seem to apply directly to their activities, no one has ever been charged for anti-Cuban terrorism under those laws. And 9/11 [2001] seems to have changed nothing. . . ."

"The federal government has even failed to extradite to other countries militants who are credibly accused of acts of murder. Among the most notorious is Luis Posada Carriles, wanted for bombing a Cuban jet in 1976 and Havana hotels in 1997. It is, perhaps, a testament to the power of South Florida's crucial Cuban-American voting bloc – and the political allegiances of the current president [George W. Bush]."

Fitting this mold was the fate of Arocena's chief partner in crime, Remon, who pleaded guilty and received a sentence of only 10 years (less than many Guantanamo inmates have served without a conviction). After his release, he teamed up with Posada, who had been trained in demolition by the CIA and carried on its payroll for many years.

Despite evidence of his role in the 1976 Cubana Airlines bombing and his admitted campaign to bomb hotels and restaurants in Cuba in 1997, Posada told a New York Times reporter in 1998 that American authorities never attempted to question him. "As you can see," he said, "the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. don't bother me, and I am neutral with them."

### **Tolerating Foreign Attacks**

Why did Posada fare so much better than Arocena? His close connection to the CIA undoubtedly helped. Just as important, he played by the rules, terrorizing Cuba from abroad, not at home. The FBI's Larry Wack explained to Arocena that his only crime was committing terrorism *inside* the United States:

"Whatever you people have going outside the United States in Communist countries, we decided amongst us a long time ago that you were not going to tell us about it. And we were not gonna push the issue because it did not concern any, anything inside the United States. . . . Because that is out of our

jurisdiction, we told you we were not going to try to interfere with anything that you guys were doing out of the country, and we have stuck to that.”

Wack’s view of official U.S. policy was confirmed just a few years after Panamanian police arrested Posada, along with Omega 7’s Pedro Remon and the CNM’s Guillermo Novo, in 2000 for plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro during a visit to that country. Pardoned in 2004, Remon and Novo returned as free men to the United States, with less hassle than some hapless traveler who ticks off an airport security officer. Posada also returned, and after a battle over his immigration status, not terrorism, he, too, retired to Miami. (Orlando Bosch, now dead, had a street named after him in Miami, where he was treated as a hero.)

As we pause on this 9/11 to remind ourselves of the horrible killing of innocents committed by a gang of extremists 13 years ago, we should reserve some anger for policymakers and law enforcement officers who discredit the cause of justice by ignoring or even protecting other terrorists in our midst depending on their politics. These more obscure bombers and assassins may have called themselves freedom fighters, but their crimes were as evil, and deserve the same punishment, as the mass murders of Sept. 11, 2001.

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## Pinochet’s Mad Scientist

**From the Archive:** Much like the 9/11 attacks, the Cold War plunged the U.S. government into the “dark side,” especially in Latin America where the CIA colluded with torturers and assassins, leading to grisly murders and enduring mysteries, as Samuel Blixen described in 1999.

By Samuel Blixen (First published on Jan. 13, 1999 and updated in 2006)

On Nov. 15, 1992, a terrified scientist – trapped inside a white bungalow in the Uruguayan beach town of Parque del Plata – broke a window to escape. Chubby, in

his mid-40s, the man struggled through the opening. Once outside, furtively and slowly, he picked his way through the town's streets to the local police station.

"I am a Chilean citizen," the scientist told the police. He pulled a folded photostatic copy of his identification papers concealed in his right shoe. "I have been abducted by the armies of Uruguay and my country," he claimed.

The scientist, ruffled with a graying beard, said he feared for his life. He insisted that his murder had been ordered by Gen. Augusto Pinochet, then the chief of Chile's army who had ruled as a dictator from 1973 to 1990.

The motive for the execution order was the man's anticipated testimony at a politically sensitive trial in Chile, a case that could have sent reverberations all the way to Washington, D.C., potentially embarrassing the man who in November 1992 still sat in the White House, President George H.W. Bush.

The scientist had worked as an accomplice in a terror campaign that included the bombing deaths of Chilean dissident Orlando Letelier and an American co-worker Ronni Moffitt as they drove to work in Washington in 1976. That terrorist attack in America's capital had occurred when George H.W. Bush was CIA director, despite prior warnings to the CIA about the plot.

### **'Unbalanced' Chilean**

The police in Parque del Plata, a beach town about 30 kilometers from Uruguay's capital Montevideo, weren't sure what to make of the man's convoluted tale.

An Uruguayan army officer had alerted them earlier that an "unbalanced" Chilean prisoner was on the loose. The scientist, who had escaped from a house owned by a Uruguayan army officer, apparently was that man.

But the issue was quickly taken out of the hands of local authorities. A half an hour after the man's arrival, armed and uniformed Uruguayan army troops burst into the police precinct station and seized control. At their head was the district police chief, a retired army colonel named Ramon Rivas.

Rivas ordered that the Chilean scientist be turned over to the soldiers. The police were told that two Uruguayan army officers would then escort the scientist out of Uruguay to Brazil. Faced with soldiers brandishing rifles, the police relented. The scientist was led away.

From that moment, the scientist's fate became a complex kidnap-murder mystery, with improbable twists and turns, an apparent disinformation trick, raw political power, a grisly discovery and, finally, forensic science.

The disappearance of the scientist, a biochemist named Eugenio Berrios, also had relevance to later legal battles seeking to hold Pinochet accountable for thousands of human rights cases during his reign as Chile's dictator and for an international terror campaign that hunted down opponents of the dictatorships in Chile and other South American countries in the 1970s.

The case also underscored the enduring power of right-wing military officers within the fragile democracies of South America – and the difficulty of bringing Pinochet to justice in Chile.

### **Poison Gas**

The mystery of Eugenio Berrios starts in 1974 when he began doing scientific research for Chile's feared intelligence service, DINA.

Berrios worked closely with an American-born DINA agent, Michael Townley, in a clandestine unit known by the name "Quetropilla." The base of operations was a sprawling, multi-level house – registered to Townley but purchased by DINA – in Lo Currro, a wooded, middle-class neighborhood of Santiago, Chile.

One of Berrios's assignments was the development of sarin gas that could be packaged in spray cans for use in assassinations. DINA officials thought the nerve gas could create lethal symptoms that might be confused with natural causes while giving time for the assailants to escape.

The need for sophisticated murder devices grew more important for Pinochet's intelligence teams when they turned their sights on political enemies living abroad in 1975.

In September 1975, DINA chief Manuel Contreras launched an international assassination project called Operation Condor, named after the powerful vulture that traverses the Andes mountains from Colombia to the Strait of Magellan. The theory behind Condor was that enemies of South American military dictatorships should be hunted down wherever they sought refuge, whether in the nations of participating governments or elsewhere.

In October 1975, after soliciting \$600,000 in special funds from Pinochet, Contreras chaired the organizational meeting of Operation Condor with military intelligence chiefs from Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. After the meeting, the intelligence services stepped up their trans-national coordination. More than 100 Chileans were rounded up and returned to Chile for execution. Others were gunned down where they were found.

According to later testimony by DINA agent Townley, Berrios made a major contribution to the cause in April 1976 by recreating sarin, a poisonous nerve

gas first invented by the Nazis during World War II.

Townley said the original plan for assassinating Orlando Letelier – who had been foreign minister under Chile's leftist elected government of Salvador Allende, who was overthrown and killed in Pinochet's 1973 coup – was to use a female operative to seduce the debonair former diplomat and then administer a liquid form of sarin concealed in a Chanel perfume bottle. But Berrios also supplied the operation with explosive devices in case the nerve gas proved unworkable.

In September 1976, Townley entered the United States on an official Chilean passport with a false name. He contacted anti-Castro Cubans and recruited their help in hunting down Letelier, a vocal critic of Pinochet. When the Cubans refused to participate unless the Chileans had a direct role in the assassination, Townley switched from poison to a car bomb.

The assassins traveled to Washington where the exiled Letelier lived and worked at a left-of-center think tank, the Institute for Policy Studies. They concealed the bomb under Letelier's car and followed Letelier as he and two American associates drove to the IPS offices on Sept. 21, 1976.

As the car proceeded past the ornate buildings of Embassy Row on Massachusetts Avenue, the assassins detonated the bomb. Letelier and one American, Ronni Moffitt, died in the blast. Moffitt's husband was wounded.

### **Bush's CIA**

Despite official requests, George Bush's CIA provided little help unraveling the mystery. Only later would authorities discover that the CIA director's office received a warning about the Townley operation but failed to stop it. [For details, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Still, the FBI and federal prosecutors managed to uncover Operation Condor and break the Letelier case. Extradited to the United States, Townley agreed to plead guilty, serve a short prison sentence and enter a federal witness protection program.

But progress in bringing to justice the architects of the terror campaign was much slower, given Pinochet's continued hold on power through 1990. Long-term U.S. pressure, however, finally led to criminal charges in Chile against former DINA chief Contreras.

Berrios, who continued to work on assassination schemes even after Townley's arrest, emerged as a prospective witness. In October 1991, a Chilean judge called Berrios to testify. The move sent chills through the Chilean military establishment.

It became important for DINA to get Berrios beyond the reach of the Chilean court. That month, Capt. Carlos Herrera Jiminez, a former intelligence officer, escorted Berrios from Santiago on a clandestine trip through the Andes to Argentina.

To hide Berrios, the old Condor network quickly reasserted itself. From Buenos Aires, Uruguayan counterintelligence chief, Lt. Col. Thomas Casella, coordinated Berrios's move to Uruguay. There, Berrios and Herrera holed up in a Montevideo apartment rented by Casella, who frequently had trained with the Chilean military.

But complications continued to arise. In February 1992, while on a trip to Buenos Aires, Capt. Herrera was arrested on an Interpol warrant connecting him to another assassination plot. That forced other Chilean agents to take charge of Berrios in Uruguay. Berrios was becoming a burden – as well as a risk – to Chile's intelligence services.

Gen. Emilio Timmerman, a military officer at the Chilean embassy in Montevideo, assumed the Berrios duty. But Timmerman complained to an embassy cultural attaché, Emilio Rojas, that "it is costing us too much money." Timmerman, who later became second-in-command of the Chilean army, also was growing nervous. Timmerman ordered Rojas to keep his mouth shut about Berrios's whereabouts, the cultural attaché said later.

By November 1992, Berrios realized that his Chilean superiors might want him silenced – as the safest and cheapest alternative to a long exile. He apparently overheard his captors discussing Pinochet's orders for them to eliminate the scientist.

## **A Disappearance**

So, on Nov. 15, 1992, Berrios climbed through the broken window of the white bungalow and fled to the precinct station at Parque del Plata. He begged the police to protect him, but the escape was cut short by the intervention of Uruguayan troops. Berrios disappeared.

Exactly what happened next remains a mystery. Senior Uruguayan officials only learned about the November 1992 police confrontation the next June from an anonymous caller.

The discovery of the abduction touched off a political crisis inside the Uruguayan government where the army still wielded great power. Uruguayan President Luis Alberto Lacalle was in Great Britain when the story broke. He immediately ducked out of a reception at the Uruguayan embassy in London and flew back to Montevideo.

There, Lacalle met with 14 of the 16 generals heading the armed forces. After four hours of tough negotiations and threats from 12 generals, Lacalle backed down to avoid a new military challenge to the civilian government. The president relented on his initial inclination to impose severe sanctions against the intelligence services. Lacalle did fire the police chief, Rivas, but agreed only to transfer the head of military intelligence, Mario Aguerrondo.

As for Berrios's fate, Col. Casella, who had supplied an apartment for hiding Berrios, reported that Berrios had gone to Brazil. The colonel assured the government that he had talked to Berrios by phone at the end of November 1992, weeks after his disappearance.

There were public doubts that Berrios was still alive. But another assurance about Berrios's well-being surfaced in Europe. The Uruguayan consulate in Milan received an anonymous letter supposedly signed by Berrios and a photo of him holding a recent issue of the Milan newspaper, *Il Messaggero*.

President Lacalle, seeking political peace with Uruguay's military, announced that "Berrios is not in Uruguay. He is somewhere else." That made the Berrios mystery "a Chilean matter" again, the Uruguayan president declared.

At the end of the crisis, Uruguay's foreign minister Sergio Abreu met with the Chilean ambassador and bluntly admitted that Lacalle had no choice but to "doblar el pescuezo" – "let it go." If President Lacalle pursued sanctions against powerful figures in the military, the 12 generals had threatened another military coup, the foreign minister said. Chile's ambassador cabled that news back to Santiago, according to a cable that I later obtained.

For Uruguay, the Berrios case was closed – or so the authorities thought.

### **Grisly Discovery**

The Berrios case resurfaced, quite literally, in April 1995 when two fishermen found a man's decomposed body partially buried at a beach in El Pinar, another resort town about 25 kilometers from Montevideo. The body had broken bones suggesting torture, was wrapped in wire, and had two .45-calibre bullet holes in the back of the neck and head.

Forensic doctors used new research techniques to reconstruct the victim's face. The face looked remarkably like Berrios. DNA tests were ordered on the remains with comparisons made against genetic samples from Berrios's relatives. In early 1996, forensic specialists concluded, with near certainty, that the dead man was Berrios. They also placed the date of his death as the first half of March 1993, just four months after his abduction.

The findings contradicted the June 1993 photograph – which presumably had been composed using computer graphics to insert a current issue of the Italian newspaper into the photo. But the timing of Berrios’s death added yet another side to the mystery.

In March 1993, Pinochet had made a personal visit to Uruguay accompanied by 12 bodyguards and with Col. Casella joining his entourage. In Uruguay, there were suspicions that Pinochet might have used the visit to confront Berrios one more time about his knowledge and then eliminate him.

But few observers in either Uruguay or Chile believe that those civilian governments were strong enough – or determined enough – to follow the Berrios case and others to clear answers. The nations of Operation Condor remained in the grip of the vulture’s powerful claws.

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## The Tale of Two Assassination Plots

**Exclusive:** President Barack Obama vows to punish Iran for a dubious assassination plot against the Saudi ambassador, but an actual murder of a diplomat in Washington in 1976 carried out by right-wing allies in Chile was followed by three decades of obstruction, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

With Official Washington abuzz over a bizarre U.S. accusation that Iran’s Quds spy agency plotted to assassinate the Saudi ambassador, it might be worth recalling how American authorities responded to an actual terror bombing in Washington 35 years ago that killed a former Chilean foreign minister and an American co-worker.

Because that 1976 assassination was carried out by an allied intelligence agency, Chile’s DINA, against a perceived “leftist,” Orlando Letelier, the CIA then run by George H.W. Bush hid evidence of Chile’s guilt and circulated false cover stories of Chile’s innocence that were picked up by the major U.S. news media.



Shortly after Letelier and a female co-worker, Ronni Moffitt, were killed by a bomb planted under his car, Bush's CIA leaked a false report clearing Chile's military dictatorship, misinformation that was spread through Newsweek magazine, the New York Times and other U.S. news outlets.

The CIA disseminated the exonerating report despite later admissions that the CIA was aware in 1976 that Chile was participating in Operation Condor, a cross-border campaign targeting political dissidents, and despite the CIA's own suspicions that the Chilean junta was behind Letelier's murder, the first terrorist bombing of its type in Washington D.C.'s history.

In a report to Congress in September 2000, the CIA officially admitted for the first time that the mastermind of the terrorist attack, Chilean intelligence chief Manuel Contreras, was a paid asset of the CIA. The CIA also acknowledged publicly that it consulted Contreras in October 1976 about the Letelier assassination.

The report added that the CIA was aware of the alleged Chilean government role in the Letelier-Moffitt murders at the time and included that suspicion in an internal cable. "CIA's first intelligence report containing this allegation was dated 6 October 1976," a little more than two weeks after the bombing on Sept. 21, 1976, the CIA disclosed.

Nevertheless, the CIA then under CIA Director George H.W. Bush leaked for public consumption an assessment clearing DINA, which was then run by Contreras.

Relying on the word of Bush's CIA, Newsweek reported that "the Chilean secret police were not involved" in the Letelier assassination. "The [Central Intelligence] agency reached its decision because the bomb was too crude to be the work of experts and because the murder, coming while Chile's rulers were wooing U.S. support, could only damage the Santiago regime." [Newsweek, Oct. 11, 1976]

Bush, who became vice president in 1981 and president in 1989, has never explained his role in putting out the false cover story that diverted attention away from the real terrorists. Nor has Bush explained what he knew about the Chilean intelligence operation in the weeks before Letelier and Moffitt were killed.

### **A Newsweek Story**

As a Newsweek correspondent in 1988, when Bush was running for president, I prepared a detailed story about Bush's handling of the Letelier assassination. The draft story included the first account from U.S. intelligence sources that Contreras was a CIA asset in the mid-1970s. I also learned that the CIA had

consulted Contreras about the Letelier assassination, information that the CIA then would not confirm.

The sources told me that the CIA sent its Santiago station chief, Wiley Gilstrap, to talk with Contreras after the bombing. Gilstrap then cabled back to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, Contreras's self-serving assurances that the Chilean government was not involved.

Contreras told Gilstrap that the most likely killers were communists who wanted to make a martyr out of Letelier, a deception that Bush's CIA and right-wing media allies used to muddy the investigative waters in fall 1976.

In 1988, my story draft also described how Bush's CIA had been forewarned in 1976 about DINA's secret plans to send agents, including DINA's assassin Michael Townley, into the United States on false passports.

Upon learning of this strange mission at the time, the U.S. ambassador to Paraguay, George Landau, cabled Bush about Chile's claim that Townley and another agent were traveling to CIA headquarters for a meeting with Bush's deputy, Vernon Walters. Landau also forwarded copies of the false passports to the CIA.

Walters cabled back that he was unaware of any scheduled appointment with these Chilean agents. Landau immediately canceled the visas, but Townley simply altered his plans and continued on his way to the United States.

The CIA has never explained what action it took, if any, after receiving Landau's warning. A natural follow-up would have been to contact DINA and ask what was afoot or whether a message about the trip had been misdirected.

"It is quite beyond belief that the CIA is so lax in its counterespionage functions that it would simply have ignored a clandestine operation by a foreign intelligence service in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere in the United States," wrote John Dinges and Saul Landau in their 1980 book, *Assassination on Embassy Row*. "It is equally implausible that Bush, Walters, Landau and other officials were unaware of the chain of international assassinations that had been attributed to DINA."

### **No New Light**

The CIA report in 2000 shed no new light on why the CIA and other U.S. officials reacted so benignly to such a clearly sinister threat as Townley's secret mission.

"One thing is clear," Dinges and Landau wrote in their book, "DINA chief Manuel

Contreras would have called off the assassination mission if the CIA or State Department had expressed their displeasure to the Chilean government. An intelligence officer familiar with the case said that any warning would have been sufficient to cause the assassination to be scuttled. Whatever Walters and Bush did if anything the DINA mission proceeded.”

With no apparent effort by the CIA to block his mission, Townley arrived in the United States and enlisted some right-wing Cuban-Americans in the Letelier plot. He then went to Washington to plant the bomb under Letelier’s car.

On Sept. 21, 1976, two of Townley’s Cuban-American associates detonated the bomb by remote control as Letelier drove his car down Massachusetts Avenue with Ronni Moffitt and her husband, Michael, as passengers. (Michael Moffitt was the only one to survive the bombing.)

Within hours, Letelier’s associates had accused the Pinochet regime, citing its hatred of Letelier and its record for brutality. The Chilean government, however, heatedly denied any responsibility.

That night, at a dinner at the Jordanian Embassy, Senator James Abourezk, a South Dakota Democrat, spotted Bush and approached the CIA director. Abourezk said he was a friend of Letelier’s and beseeched Bush to get the CIA “to find the bastards who killed him.”

Abourezk said Bush responded: “I’ll see what I can do. We are not without assets in Chile.” A problem, however, was that one of the CIA’s best-placed assets DINA chief Contreras was part of the assassination.

Despite Bush’s promise of the CIA’s full cooperation in tracking down the Letelier-Moffitt killers, the CIA did the opposite, planting the false exoneration and withholding evidence that would have implicated the Chilean junta.

“Nothing the agency gave us helped us to break this case,” federal prosecutor Eugene Propper told me in a 1988 interview as I was drafting my article for Newsweek.

The CIA’s non-cooperation included never volunteering Ambassador Landau’s cable about the suspicious DINA mission nor copies of the fake passports containing a photo of Townley, the chief assassin. Nor did Bush’s CIA divulge its knowledge of the existence of Operation Condor.

Two years later, FBI agents in Washington and Latin America broke the case after discovering Operation Condor on their own and tracking the Letelier assassination back to Townley and his accomplices in the United States.

In 1988, as then-Vice President George H.W. Bush was running for president and citing his CIA experience as an important part of his government experience, I submitted questions to him asking about his actions in the days before and after the Letelier bombing. Bush's chief of staff, Craig Fuller, wrote back, saying Bush "will have no comment on the specific issues raised in your letter."

As it turned out, the Bush campaign had little to fear from my discoveries. When I submitted my story draft with its exclusive account of Contreras's role as a CIA asset Newsweek's editors refused to run the story.

Washington bureau chief Evan Thomas told me that executive editor Maynard Parker's response to my article was to accuse me of being "out to get Bush." According to longtime Newsweek's staffers, Parker was regarded as having very close ties to the CIA and to Henry Kissinger who was Secretary of State in 1976.

After my Newsweek story was spiked, it took 12 more years before the CIA admitted that it had paid Contreras as an intelligence asset and consulted with him about the Letelier assassination.

### **Victim, Not Accomplice**

Still, the CIA report issued in 2000 sought to portray the spy agency as more victim than accomplice. According to the report, the CIA was internally critical of Contreras's human rights abuses and skeptical about his credibility. The CIA said its skepticism predated the spy agency's contact with him about the Letelier-Moffitt murders.

"The relationship, while correct, was not cordial and smooth, particularly as evidence of Contreras' role in human rights abuses emerged," the CIA reported. "In December 1974, the CIA concluded that Contreras was not going to improve his human rights performance.

"By April 1975, intelligence reporting showed that Contreras was the principal obstacle to a reasonable human rights policy within the Junta, but an interagency committee [within Gerald Ford's administration] directed the CIA to continue its relationship with Contreras." (The reference to an "interagency" group suggests that Kissinger's State Department would have had a role in the decision.)

The CIA report added that "a one-time payment was given to Contreras" in 1975, a time frame when the CIA was first hearing about Operation Condor, a cross-border program run by South America's military dictatorships to hunt down dissidents living in other countries. The report added:

"CIA sought from Contreras information regarding evidence that emerged in 1975

of a formal Southern Cone cooperative intelligence effort 'Operation Condor' building on informal cooperation in tracking and, in at least a few cases, killing political opponents.

"By October 1976, there was sufficient information that the CIA decided to approach Contreras on the matter. Contreras confirmed Condor's existence as an intelligence-sharing network but denied that it had a role in extra-judicial killings."

Also, in October 1976, the CIA said it "worked out" how it would assist the FBI in its investigation of the Letelier assassination, which had occurred the previous month. The spy agency's report offered no details of what it did, however. The report added only that Contreras was already a murder suspect by fall 1976.

"At that time, Contreras' possible role in the Letelier assassination became an issue," the CIA's report said. "By the end of 1976, contacts with Contreras were very infrequent."

Even though the CIA came to recognize the likelihood that DINA was behind the Letelier assassination, there never was any indication that Bush's CIA sought to correct the false impression created by its leaks to the news media asserting DINA's innocence.

### **The Carter Break**

After Bush left the CIA with Jimmy Carter's inauguration in 1977, the spy agency distanced itself from Contreras, the CIA report said. "During 1977, CIA met with Contreras about half a dozen times; three of those contacts were to request information on the Letelier assassination," the CIA report said.

"On 3 November 1977, Contreras was transferred to a function unrelated to intelligence so the CIA severed all contact with him," the report added. "After a short struggle to retain power, Contreras resigned from the Army in 1978. In the interim, CIA gathered specific, detailed intelligence reporting concerning Contreras' involvement in ordering the Letelier assassination."

Though the CIA report contained the first official admission of a relationship with Contreras, it shed no light on the actions of Bush and his deputy, Walters, in the days before and after the Letelier assassination. It also offered no explanation why Bush's CIA planted false information in the American press clearing Chile's military dictatorship.

While summarizing its relationship with Chile's military dictatorship, the CIA in 2000 refused to release documents from a quarter century earlier on the

grounds that the disclosures might jeopardize the CIA's "sources and methods." The refusal came despite President Bill Clinton's specific order to release as much information as possible.

The CIA may have been playing for time. With CIA headquarters renamed the George Bush Center for Intelligence and with veterans of the Reagan-Bush years still dominating the CIA's hierarchy, the spy agency might have expected that the election of Bush's son, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, would free it from more demands to open up its records.

Immediately after taking office on Jan. 20, 2001, President George W. Bush signed an executive order sparing presidential records from his father's administration and Ronald Reagan's from being cleared for public release.

Later, after the 9/11 attacks, Bush expanded his order to allow ex-presidents and their descendants the power to withhold records forever. That executive order remained in place until Barack Obama took office in 2009 and rescinded Bush's plan for dynastic control of White House documents.

The Bush Family's reputation also benefitted from years of foot-dragging regarding the prosecution of Contreras and his boss, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, for a variety of crimes, including torture of dissidents, drug trafficking, money-laundering, illicit arms shipments and international terrorism such as the Letelier bombing in Washington.

When Pinochet faced perhaps his greatest risk of prosecution in 1998 when he was detained in London pending extradition to Spain on charges of murdering Spanish citizens former President George H.W. Bush protested Pinochet's arrest, calling it "a travesty of justice" and joining Kissinger in a successful appeal to the British courts to let Pinochet go home to Chile.

Once Pinochet was returned to Chile, the wily ex-dictator employed a legal strategy of political obstruction and assertions of ill health to avert prosecution. Until his death on Dec. 10, 2006, he retained influential friends both inside the Chilean power structure and in key foreign capitals, especially Washington.

## **A Long History**

Pinochet's years in the service of U.S. foreign policy dated back to the early 1970s when Richard Nixon's administration with Kissinger as national security adviser wanted to destroy Chile's democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende.

The CIA launched a covert operation to "destabilize" Allende's government, with

the CIA-sponsored chaos ending in a bloody coup on Sept. 11, 1973. Gen. Pinochet seized power and Allende died from a gunshot wound (reportedly self-inflicted) as Pinochet's forces stormed the Presidential Palace.

Thousands of Allende's supporters including Americans and other foreigners were rounded up and executed. Many also were tortured.

With Pinochet in control, the CIA turned its attention to helping him overcome the negative publicity that his violent coup had engendered around the world. One "secret" CIA memo, written in early 1974 and later declassified, described the success of "the Santiago Station's propaganda project." The memo said:

"Prior to the coup the project's media outlets maintained a steady barrage of anti-government criticism, exploiting every possible point of friction between the government and the democratic opposition, and emphasizing the problems and conflicts that were developing between the government and the armed forces.

"Since the coup, these media outlets have supported the new military government. They have tried to present the Junta in the most positive light." [See Peter Kornbluh's *The Pinochet File*]

Despite the CIA's P.R. advice, Pinochet and his military subordinates insisted on dressing up and acting like a casting agent's idea of Fascist bullies. The dour Pinochet was known for his fondness for wearing a military cloak that made him resemble a well-dressed Nazi SS officer.

Pinochet and the other right-wing military dictators who dominated South America in the mid-1970s also had their own priorities, one of which was the elimination of political opponents who were living in exile in other countries.

Though many of these dissidents weren't associated with violent revolutionary movements, the anticommunist doctrine then in vogue among the region's right-wing military made few distinctions between armed militants and political activists.

By 1974, Chilean intelligence was collaborating with freelancing anti-Castro Cuban extremists and other South American security forces to eliminate any and all threats to right-wing military power.

The first prominent victim of these cross-border assassinations was former Chilean Gen. Carlos Prats, who was living in Argentina and was viewed as a potential rival to Pinochet because Prats had opposed Pinochet's coup that shattered Chile's long history as a constitutional democracy.

Learning that Prats was writing his memoirs, Pinochet's secret police chief

Manuel Contreras dispatched Michael Townley, an assassin trained in explosives, to Argentina. Townley planted a bomb under Prats's car, detonating it on Sept. 30, 1974, killing Prats at the door and incinerating Prats's wife who was trapped inside the car.

On Oct. 6, 1975, another Pinochet/Contreras assassin approached Chilean Christian Democratic leader Bernardo Leighton who was walking with his wife on a street in Rome. The gunman shot both Leighton and his wife, severely wounding both of them.

### **Operation Condor**

In November 1975, the loose-knit collaboration among the Southern Cone dictatorships took on a more formal structure during a covert intelligence meeting in Santiago. Delegates from the security forces of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia committed themselves to a regional strategy against "subversives."

In recognition of Chile's leadership, the conference named the project after Chile's national bird, the giant vulture that traverses the Andes Mountains. The project was called "Operation Condor."

The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency confidentially informed Washington that the operation had three phases and that the "third and reportedly very secret phase of 'Operation Condor' involves the formation of special teams from member countries who are to carry out operations to include assassinations."

The Condor accord formally took effect on Jan. 30, 1976, the same day George H.W. Bush was sworn in as CIA director.

In Bush's first few months, right-wing violence across the Southern Cone of South America surged. On March 24, 1976, the Argentine military staged a coup, ousting the ineffectual President Isabel Peron and escalating a brutal internal security campaign against both violent and non-violent opponents on the Left.

The Argentine security forces became especially well-known for grisly methods of torture and the practice of "disappearing" political dissidents who would be snatched from the streets or from their homes, undergo torture and never be seen again. Like Pinochet, the new Argentine dictators saw themselves on a mission to save Western Civilization from the clutches of leftist thought.

They took pride in the "scientific" nature of their repression. They were clinical practitioners of anticommunism refining torture techniques, erasing the sanctuary of international borders and collaborating with right-wing terrorists and organized-crime elements to destroy leftist movements.



Later Argentine government investigations discovered that its military intelligence officers advanced Nazi-like methods of torture by testing the limits of how much pain a human being could endure before dying. Torture methods included experiments with electric shocks, drowning, asphyxiation and sexual perversions, such as forcing mice into a woman's vagina.

The totalitarian nature of the anticommunism gripping much of South America revealed itself in one particularly bizarre Argentine practice, which was used when pregnant women were captured as suspected subversives.

The women were kept alive long enough to bring the babies to full term. The women then were subjected to forced labor or Caesarian section. The newborns were given to military families to be raised in the ideology of anticommunism while the new mothers were executed.

Many were taken to an airport near Buenos Aires, stripped naked, shackled to other prisoners and put on a plane. As the plane flew over the Rio Plata or out over the Atlantic Ocean, the prisoners were shoved through a cargo door, sausage-like, into the water to drown. All told, the Argentine war against subversion would claim an estimated 30,000 lives.

### **Picking Up the Pace**

The 1976 Argentine *coup d'état* allowed the pace of cross-border executions under Operation Condor to quicken.

On May 21, gunmen killed two Uruguayan congressmen on a street in Buenos Aires. On June 4, former Bolivian President Juan Jose Torres was slain also in Buenos Aires. On June 11, armed men kidnapped and tortured 23 Chilean refugees and one Uruguayan who were under United Nations protection.

Despite protests from human rights groups, Pinochet and his fellow dictators felt immune from pressure because of their powerful friends in Washington. Pinochet's sense of impunity led him to contemplate silencing one of his most eloquent critics, Chile's former Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier, who lived in the U.S. capital.

Earlier in their government careers, when Letelier was briefly defense minister in Allende's government, Pinochet had been his subordinate. After the coup, Pinochet imprisoned Letelier at a desolate concentration camp on Dawson Island, but international pressure won Letelier release a year later.

Soon, Pinochet was chafing under Letelier's rough criticism of the regime's human rights record. Letelier was doubly infuriating to Pinochet because Letelier was regarded as a man of intellect and charm, even impressing CIA

officers who observed him as “a personable, socially pleasant man” and “a reasonable, mature democrat,” according to biographical sketches.

By summer 1976, George H.W. Bush’s CIA was hearing a lot about Operation Condor from South American sources who had attended a second organizational conference of Southern Cone intelligence services.

These CIA sources reported that the military regimes were preparing “to engage in ‘executive action’ outside the territory of member countries.” In intelligence circles, “executive action” is a euphemism for assassination.

Meanwhile, Pinochet and intelligence chief Manuel Contreras were putting in motion their most audacious assassination plan yet: to eliminate Orlando Letelier in his safe haven in Washington, D.C., the attack carried out on Sept. 21, 1976.

Though U.S. prosecutors eventually grasped the criminal nature of the Pinochet government, the wheels of justice turned slowly. Before the prosecutors could climb the chain of command in Chile, the Republicans had returned to power in 1981, with George H.W. Bush serving as vice president and acting as a top foreign policy adviser to President Ronald Reagan.

Despite the mounting evidence of Pinochet’s guilt in a terrorist act on U.S. soil, the dictator was lifted from his pariah status of the Carter years to regain a position as a favored ally under Bush and Reagan.

When help was needed on sensitive projects, the Reagan administration often turned to Pinochet. For instance, in 1982, after Reagan decided to tilt Iraq’s way during the Iran-Iraq War, one of Pinochet’s favored arms dealers, Carlos Cardoen, manufactured and shipped controversial weapons to Saddam Hussein’s army.

Regarding these Iraqi arms shipments, former National Security Council aide Howard Teicher swore out an affidavit in 1995 detailing Reagan’s 1982 decision and describing the secret roles of CIA Director William Casey and his deputy, Robert Gates, in shepherding the military equipment to Iraq.

Teicher said the secret arming of Iraq was approved by Reagan as part of a National Security Decision Directive. Under it, Casey and Gates “authorized, approved and assisted” delivery of cluster bombs and other materiel to Iraq, Teicher said.

Teicher’s affidavit corroborated earlier public statements by former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe and Iranian-born businessman Richard Babayan, who claimed first-hand knowledge of Gates’s central role in the secret

Iraq operations.

In his 1992 book *Profits of War*, Ben-Menashe wrote that Israeli Mossad director Nachum Admoni approached Gates in 1985 seeking help in shutting down unconventional weapons, especially chemicals, moving through the Chilean arms pipeline to Iraq.

Ben-Menashe wrote that Gates attended a meeting in Chile in 1986 with Cardoen present at which Gates tried to calm down the Israelis by assuring them that U.S. policy was simply to ensure a channel of conventional weapons for Iraq.

Though Gates denied Ben-Menashe's and Babayan's allegations in 1991 when Gates underwent confirmation hearings to be CIA director he has never been asked to publicly respond to Teicher's affidavit which was filed in a Miami court case in 1995.

### **Investigative Disinterest**

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee were aware of the discrepancies between the Teicher and Gates accounts when Gates appeared at a Dec. 5, 2006, confirmation hearing to be Secretary of Defense, but no one asked Gates to respond to Teicher's sworn statement.

Other potential avenues for understanding Pinochet's covert role in supporting anticommunist strategies in the Reagan-Bush era also opened in 2006, as former DINA chief Contreras turned on his old boss.

In a court document filed in early July 2006, Contreras implicated Pinochet and one of his sons in a scheme to manufacture and smuggle cocaine to Europe and the United States, explaining one source of Pinochet's \$28 million fortune.

Contreras alleged that the cocaine was processed with Pinochet's approval at an Army chemical plant south of Santiago during the 1980s and that Pinochet's son Marco Antonio arranged the shipments of the processed cocaine. [NYT, July 11, 2006]

At the time of this alleged cocaine smuggling, Pinochet was a close ally of the Reagan administration, providing help on a variety of sensitive intelligence projects, including shipping military equipment to Nicaraguan Contra rebels who also were implicated in cocaine smuggling to the United States. [For details on the contra-cocaine scandal, see Robert Parry's *Lost History*.]

Contreras said Eugenio Berrios, a chemist for Chile's secret police, oversaw the drug manufacturing. Berrios also was accused of producing poisons for Pinochet to use in murdering political enemies. Berrios disappeared in 1992. [For details

on the Berrios mystery, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Pinochet's Mad Scientist.](#)"

As this drip-drip-drip of evidence accumulated implicating Pinochet and his American allies in serious crimes and international intrigue, it fell to the second generation of George Bush presidents to put a finger in the dike.

Near the end of the Clinton presidency in 2000, an FBI team reviewed new evidence that had become available in the Letelier case and recommended the indictment of Pinochet. But the final decision was left to the incoming Bush-43 administration and George W. Bush, like his father, chose to protect Pinochet. In doing so, the younger George Bush also protected his father's reputation and the legacy of the Bush Family.

Freed from Washington's legal pressure, Pinochet was able to fend off intermittent attempts in Chile to bring him to justice during the last half dozen years of his life.

"Every day it is clearer that Pinochet ordered my brother's death," human rights lawyer Fabiola Letelier told the New York Times on the 30th anniversary of the Letelier-Moffitt assassinations. "But for a proper and complete investigation to take place we need access to the appropriate records and evidence." [NYT, Sept. 21, 2006]

Ultimately, Pinochet escaped a formal judgment of guilt for his many crimes, dying on the afternoon of Dec. 10, 2006, at the Military Hospital of Santiago from complications resulting from a heart attack.

The negligence (or complicity) of the CIA and other branches of the U.S. government in enabling and then shielding the well-connected perpetrators of the Letelier assassination stands in stark contrast to the over-the-top outrage aimed at Iran regarding bizarre allegations that its Quds intelligence agency plotted with an Iranian-American car salesman and a Mexican drug cartel to kill Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the United States, Adel A. al-Jubeir.

Though no direct evidence publicly implicates the Iranian government itself in the plot (and the car salesman's "cartel" contact was really a paid informant of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration), President Barack Obama and other top U.S. officials have vowed to retaliate with even more punitive actions against Iran.

It also appears that the CIA under its new director, retired Gen. David Petraeus, played a key role in convincing officials in the Obama administration to take the strange plot seriously.

Petraeus, who as commander of U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan blamed Iran

for U.S. military reversals in those two countries, now appears in position to get his new agency to push these anti-Iranian accusations more aggressively. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Petraeus's CIA Fuels Iran Murder Plot.](#)"]

Petraeus also has built his sterling Washington reputation partly on his close ties to prominent neoconservatives, such as Frederick Kagan and Max Boot, even enlisting them to help sell his desires for "surge" escalations in Iraq and Afghanistan. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Neocons, Likud Conquer DC Again.](#)"]

The top aim of today's neocon agenda is to support Israel's eagerness to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities with the United States either taking part directly or at least providing support. As CIA director, Petraeus finds himself in a perfect position to generate the necessary "intelligence" to bolster that neocon goal.

At minimum, the contrasting reactions from Official Washington to an actual assassination (carried out by a supposed ally in 1976) and an imaginary one (supposedly conceived by a despised adversary today) speak to the endless hypocrisy that underlies America's "war on terror."

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](#). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

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