

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

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

## Sequel to 'British Betrayal' of WWI

**By As'ad AbuKhalil**

*Special to Consortium News*



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

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

H.W. Bush was adept at changing ideologies to suit the venue. The man who emerged from the "moderate" wing of the East Coast Republican Party became the political heir of

President Ronald Reagan, who wooed the Religious Right and made abortion a litmus test for all Supreme Court nominees.

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

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

### **Wealthy Arab Friends**

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

Bush's footprints in the region begin with his oil-business years in Texas. At that point, in the 1950s, oil companies often served as a chief lobbying force for Gulf regimes against the Israeli lobby. This was not due to any humanitarian concern for the plight of the Palestinian people. It was due to the usual financial motivation. The

Israel lobby opposed closer ties between the U.S. and all Arab countries, which compelled oil businesses to defend their Gulf suppliers. Since the Israeli lobby opposed U.S. arms sales to Middle East regimes, it had other big-business opponents as well.

Later in his life, Bush also dealt with the Middle East as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and as director of the CIA. (The deputy chief of Saudi intelligence during Bush's time at the CIA, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, was one of the few foreign dignitaries invited to attend the funeral).

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

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

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

As president, Bush was branded an anti-Semite in 1991 for

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

### **Serious About Settlements**

This was the only time the U.S. government treated the settlements and the Israeli role in the peace process as a serious matter. The Obama administration did voice mild protestations about the settlements, which violate international law. But after Bush, the settlements never again caused any serious irritation to U.S.-Israeli relations.

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

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

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

### **Rallying Against Iraq**

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

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

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

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

The “peace process” under Bush was just as it had been under his predecessors and successors. It amounted to empty promises of U.S. rewards for Arab participation in the war on Iraq. It was a repeat of the “British betrayal” of World War I, when, in exchange for help fighting against the Ottoman Empire, Arabs thought they would earn independence.

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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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## Bush-41's October Surprise Denials

"Deny everything," British traitor Kim Philby said as a way for the powerful can bluff past their crimes, something George H.W. Bush knew when he denied charges of his own near treason in the October Surprise case, wrote Robert Parry on 4/6/2016.

**By Robert Parry**

*Special to Consortium News*



A recently discovered lecture by the late British traitor Kim Philby contains a lesson that may help explain how George H.W. Bush could bluff and bluster his way past mounting evidence that he and other Republicans conspired in 1980 to block release of 52

U.S. hostages in Iran and thus ensure Ronald Reagan's election, an alleged gambit that bordered on treason itself.

In a speech in East Berlin in 1981 – [just aired by the BBC](#) – the Soviet double-agent Philby explained that for someone like himself born into what he called “the ruling class of the British Empire,” it was easy to simply “deny everything.” When evidence was presented against him, he simply had to keep his nerve and assert that it was all bogus. With his powerful connections, he knew that few would dare challenge him.

“Because I was born into the British governing class, because I knew a lot of people of an influential standing, I knew that they [his colleagues in Britain's MI-6 spy agency] would never get too tough with me,” Philby told members of East Germany's Stasi. “They'd never try to beat me up or knock me around, because if they had been proved wrong afterwards, I could have made a tremendous scandal.”

That's why growing evidence and deepening suspicions of Philby's treachery slid by while he continued spying for the Soviet Union. He finally disappeared in January 1961 and popped up several months later in Moscow, where he lived until his death in 1988.

Though the circumstances are obviously quite different, Philby's recognition that his patrician birth and his powerful connections gave him extraordinary protections could apply to George H.W. Bush and his forceful denials of any role in the Iran-Contra scandal – he falsely claimed to be “out of the loop” – and also the October Surprise issue, whether the Reagan-Bush dealings with Iran began in 1980 with the obstruction of President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 U.S. Embassy hostages seized by Iranian radicals on Nov. 4, 1979.

Carter's failure to secure the hostages' release before the U.S. election, which fell exactly one year later, doomed his reelection chances and cleared the way for Reagan and the Republicans to gain



control of both the White House and the Senate. The hostages were only released after Reagan was sworn in as President on Jan. 20, 1981, and as Bush became Vice President.

We now know that soon after the Reagan-Bush inauguration, clandestine U.S.-approved arms shipments were making their way to Iran through Israel. An Argentine plane carrying one of the shipments crashed in July 1981 but the incriminating circumstances were covered up by Reagan's State Department, according to then-Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis, who traced the origins of the arms deal back to the 1980 campaign.

This hard-to-believe reality – that the tough-guy Reagan-Bush administration was secretly shipping weapons to Iran after Tehran's mullahs had humiliated the United States with the hostage crisis – remained a topic for only occasional Washington rumors until November 1986 when a Beirut newspaper published the first article describing another clandestine shipment. That story soon expanded into the Iran-Contra Affair because some of the arm sales profits were diverted to the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

For Bush, the emergence of this damaging scandal, which could have denied him his own shot at the White House, was time to test out his ability to "deny everything." So, he denied knowing that the White House had been secretly running a Contra resupply operation in defiance of Congress, even though his office and top aides were in the middle of everything. Regarding the Iran arms deals, Bush insisted publicly he was "out of the loop."

Behind closed doors where he ran the risk of perjury charges, Bush was more forthcoming. For instance, in non-public testimony to the FBI and the Iran-Contra prosecutor, "Bush acknowledged that he was regularly informed of events connected with the Iran arms sales." [See Special Prosecutor's Final Iran-Contra Report, p. 473]

But Bush's public "out of the loop" storyline, more or less, held up going into the 1988 presidential election. The one time when he

was directly challenged with detailed Iran-Contra questions was in a live, on-air confrontation with CBS News anchor Dan Rather on Jan. 25, 1988.

Instead of engaging in a straightforward discussion, Bush went on the offensive, lashing out at Rather for allegedly ambushing him with unexpected questions. Bush also recalled an embarrassing episode when Rather left his anchor chair vacant not anticipating the end of a tennis match which was preempting the news.

“How would you like it if I judged your career by those seven minutes when you walked off the set in New York?” Bush asked testily. “How would you like that?”

Fitting with Philby’s observation, Bush’s bluster won the day. Much of the elite U.S. media, including *Newsweek* where I was working at the time, sided with Bush and slammed Rather for his sometimes forceful questioning of the patrician Bush.

Having put Rather in his place and having put the Iran-Contra issue to rest – at least as far as the 1988 campaign was concerned – Bush went on to win the presidency. But the history still threatened to catch up with him.

### **October Surprise Mystery**

The October Surprise case of 1980 was something of a prequel to the Iran-Contra Affair. It preceded the Iran-Contra events but surfaced publicly in the aftermath of the Iran-Contra disclosures. This earlier phase slowly came to light when it became clear that the U.S.-approved arms sales to Iran did not begin in 1985, as the official Iran-Contra story claimed, but years earlier, very soon after Reagan and Bush took office.

Also, in the wake of the Iran-Contra Affair, more and more witnesses surfaced describing this earlier phase of the scandal, eventually totaling about two dozen, including former Assistant Secretary of State Veliotos; former senior Iranian officials, such

as President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr and Defense Minister Ahmad Madani; and intelligence operatives, such as Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe and a CIA-Iranian agent Jamshid Hashemi. Many of these witnesses were cited in a PBS documentary that I co-wrote in April 1991, entitled "The Election Held Hostage."

After the documentary aired – and amid growing public interest – pressure built on Congress to open a new inquiry into this prequel, but President Bush made clear that his reaction would be to "deny everything."

On May 3, 1991, at a White House press availability, Bush was asked about reports that he had traveled to Paris in October 1980 to personally seal the deal on having the 52 hostages released only after the election – as Israeli intelligence officer Ben-Menashe had described.

"Was I ever in Paris in October 1980?" a clearly annoyed Bush responded, repeating the question through pursed lips. "Definitely, definitely, no."

Bush returned to the October Surprise topic five days later, his anger still clearly visible: "I can only say categorically that the allegations about me are grossly untrue, factually incorrect, bald-faced lies."

Yet, despite Bush's anger – and despite "debunking" attacks on the October Surprise story from the neoconservative *New Republic* and my then-former employers at *Newsweek* – the House and Senate each started investigations, albeit somewhat half-heartedly and with inadequate resources.

Still, the congressional October Surprise inquiries sent Bush's White House into panic mode. The President, who was expecting to coast to reelection in 1992, saw the October Surprise issue – along with the continued Iran-Contra investigation by special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh – as threats to his retention of power.

By fall 1991, the Bush administration was pulling together documents from various federal agencies that might be relevant to the October Surprise inquiry. The idea was to concentrate the records in the hands of a few trusted officials in Washington. As part of that process, the White House was informed that there appeared to be confirmation of a key October Surprise allegation.

In a "memorandum for record" dated Nov. 4, 1991, Associate White House Counsel Paul Beach Jr. wrote that one document that had been unearthed was a record of Reagan's campaign director William J. Casey traveling to Madrid, Spain, a potentially key corroboration of Jamshid Hashemi's claim that Casey had met with senior Iranian emissary Mehdi Karrubi in Madrid in late July and again in mid-August 1980.

The U.S. Embassy in Madrid's confirmation of Casey's trip had gone to State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson, who was responsible for assembling the State Department documents, according to the memo. Williamson passed on word to Beach, who wrote that Williamson said that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown."

The significance of this confirmation of Casey's trip to Madrid can hardly be overstated. The influential October Surprise debunking stories – ballyhooed on the covers of *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* – hinged on their joint misreading of some attendance records at a London historical conference which they claimed proved Casey was there and thus could not have traveled to Madrid. That meant, according to the two magazines, that the CIA's Iranian agent Jamshid Hashemi was lying about arranging Casey's two meetings with Karrubi in Madrid.

In their double-barreled shoot-down of the October Surprise story, *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* created a Washington "group think," which held that the October Surprise case was just a baseless

“conspiracy theory.” But the two magazines were wrong.

I already knew that their analyses of the London attendance records were inaccurate. They also failed to interview key participants at the conference, including historian Robert Dallek who had looked for Casey and confirmed to me that Casey had skipped the key morning session on July 28, 1980.

But 1991 was pre-Internet, so it was next to impossible to counter the false reporting of Newsweek and The New Republic, especially given the powerful conventional wisdom that had taken shape against the October Surprise story.

Not wanting to shake that “group think,” Bush’s White House withheld news of the Williamson-Beach discovery of evidence of Casey’s trip to Madrid. That information was neither shared with the public nor the congressional investigators. Instead, a well-designed cover-up was organized and implemented.

### **The Cover-up Takes Shape**

On Nov. 6, 1991, two days after the Beach memo, Beach’s boss, White House Counsel C. Boyden Gray, convened an inter-agency strategy session and explained the need to contain the congressional investigation into the October Surprise case. The explicit goal was to ensure the scandal would not hurt President Bush’s reelection hopes in 1992.

At the meeting, Gray laid out how to thwart the October Surprise inquiry, which was seen as a dangerous expansion of the Iran-Contra investigation where some of prosecutor Walsh’s investigators also were coming to suspect that the origins of the Reagan-Bush contacts with Iran traced back to the 1980 campaign.

The prospect that the two sets of allegations would merge into a single narrative represented a grave threat to George H.W. Bush’s political future. As assistant White House counsel Ronald vonLembke, put it, the White House goal in 1991 was to “kill/spike

this story.” To achieve that result, the Republicans coordinated the counter-offensive through Gray’s office under the supervision of associate counsel Janet Rehnquist, the daughter of the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

Gray explained the stakes at the White House strategy session. “Whatever form they ultimately take, the House and Senate ‘October Surprise’ investigations, like Iran-Contra, will involve interagency concerns and be of special interest to the President,” Gray declared, according to minutes. [Emphasis in original.]

Among “touchstones” cited by Gray were “No Surprises to the White House, and Maintain Ability to Respond to Leaks in Real Time. This is Partisan.” White House “talking points” on the October Surprise investigation urged restricting the inquiry to 1979-80 and imposing strict time limits for issuing any findings, the document said.

In other words, just as the Reagan administration had insisted on walling off the Iran-Contra investigation to a period from 1984-86, the Bush administration wanted to seal off the October Surprise investigation to 1979-80. That would ensure that the public would not see the two seemingly separate scandals as one truly ugly affair.

Meanwhile, as Bush’s White House frustrated the congressional inquiries with foot-dragging, slow-rolling and other obstructions, President Bush would occasionally lash out with invective against the October Surprise suspicions.

In late spring 1992, Bush raised the October Surprise issue at two news conferences, bringing the topic up himself. On June 4, 1992, Bush snapped at a reporter who asked whether an independent counsel was needed to investigate the administration’s pre-Persian Gulf War courtship of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein.

“I wonder whether they’re going to use the same prosecutors that are trying out there to see whether I was in Paris in 1980,” the clearly peeved President responded. “I mean, where are we going

with the taxpayers' money in this political year? I was not in Paris, and we did nothing illegal or wrong here" on Iraq.

At another news conference at the world environmental summit in Brazil, Bush brought up the October Surprise case again, calling the congressional inquiries "a witchhunt" and demanding that Congress clear him of having traveled to Paris.

Taking their cue from the President, House Republicans threatened to block continued funding for the inquiry unless the Democrats agreed that Bush had not gone to Paris. Although Bush's alibi for the key weekend of Oct. 18-19, 1980, was shaky, with details from his Secret Service logs withheld and with supposedly corroborating witnesses contradicting each other, the Democrats agreed to give Bush what he wanted.

After letting Bush off the hook on Paris, the inquiry stumbled along inconclusively with the White House withholding key documents and keeping some key witnesses, such as Bush's former national security adviser Donald Gregg, out of reach.

Perhaps more importantly, the Casey-Madrid information from Beach's memo was never shared with Congress, according to House Task Force Chairman Lee Hamilton, who I interviewed about the missing material in 2013.

Whatever interest Congress had in the October Surprise case faded even more after Bush lost the 1992 election to Bill Clinton. There was a palpable sense around Official Washington that it would be wrong to pile on the defeated President. The thinking was that Bush (and Reagan) should be allowed to ride off into the sunset with their legacies intact.

So, even as more incriminating evidence arrived at the House task force in December 1992 and in January 1993 – including testimony from French intelligence chief Alexander deMarenches's biographer confirming the Paris meeting and a report from Russia's duma revealing that Soviet intelligence had monitored the Republican-

Iranian contacts in 1980 – it was all cast aside. The task force simply decided there was “no credible evidence” to support the October Surprise allegations.

### **Trusting the Suspect**

Beyond the disinclination of Hamilton and his investigators to aggressively pursue important leads, they operated with the naïve notion that President Bush, who was a prime suspect in the October Surprise case, would compile and turn over evidence that would prove his guilt and seal his political fate. Power at that level simply doesn't work that way.

After discovering the Beach memo, I emailed a copy to Hamilton and discussed it with him by phone. The retired Indiana Democratic congressman responded that his task force was never informed that the White House had confirmation of Casey's trip to Madrid.

“We found no evidence to confirm Casey's trip to Madrid,” Hamilton told me. “The [Bush-41] White House did not notify us that he did make the trip. Should they have passed that on to us? They should have because they knew we were interested in that.”

Asked if knowledge that Casey had traveled to Madrid might have changed the task force's dismissive October Surprise conclusion, Hamilton said yes, because the question of the Madrid trip was key to the task force's investigation.

“If the White House knew that Casey was there, they certainly should have shared it with us,” Hamilton said. Hamilton added that “you have to rely on people” in authority to comply with information requests.

Therein, of course, lay the failure of the October Surprise investigation. Hamilton and his team were counting on President Bush and his team to bring all the evidence together in one place and then share it with Congress, when they were more likely to burn it.



Indeed, by having Bush's White House gather together all the hard evidence that might have proved that Bush and Reagan engaged in an operation that bordered on treason, Hamilton's investigation may have made it impossible for the historical mystery ever to be solved. There is a good chance that whatever documentary evidence there might have been doesn't exist anymore.

After discovering the Beach memo, I contacted both Beach and Williamson, who insisted that they had no memory of the Casey-to-Madrid records. I also talked with Boyden Gray, who told me that he had no involvement in the October Surprise inquiry, although I had the minutes to the Nov. 6, 1991 meeting where he rallied Bush's team to contain the investigation.

I also filed a Freedom of Information Act request to have the records of the U.S. Embassy in Madrid searched for the relevant cable or other documents regarding Casey's trip, but the State Department said nothing could be found.

So, the question becomes: Did Bush's loyal team collect all the raw documents in one place, not so they could be delivered to Congress, but rather so they could be removed from the historical record permanently, thus buttressing for all time the angry denials of George H.W. Bush?

Surely, someone as skilled in using power and influence as former President Bush (the elder) would need no advice from Kim Philby about how to use privilege and connections to shield one's guilt. That, after all, is the sort of thing that comes naturally to those who are born to the right families, attend the right schools and belong to the right secret societies.

George H.W. Bush came from the bosom of the American ruling class at a time when it was rising to become the most intimidating force on earth. He was the grandson of a powerful Wall Street banker, the son of an influential senator, and a director of the Central Intelligence Agency. (Along the way, he attended Yale and belonged

to Skull and Bones.)

Indeed, Poppy Bush could probably have given Kim Philby lessons on how to brush off suspicions and cover up wrongdoing. Still, Philby's insight into how the powerful and well-connected can frustrate the investigations and questions of lesser citizens is worth recalling: "Deny everything."

*[To watch a video interview with Robert Parry discussing this article, [click here](#).]*

**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 Bushes: Fathers and Sons ( With Apologies to Turgenev)

In a story worthy of the great Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev, in the Bushes' case the sins of the son were

visited upon the father, who neglected an opportunity to stop them from happening, as Ray McGovern explains.

**By Ray McGovern**

*Special to Consortium News*



Picture the late George H. W. Bush being welcomed with open arms last night by three of the Gang of Six white-collar criminals he pardoned on Christmas Eve, 1992, just before he left office. Waiting for him were former Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger, plus swashbuckling, CIA covert action chieftains “Dewey” Clarridge and Clair George – all of them charged (and George convicted) of perjury.

What a celebration is in store when the other three of the gang eventually join them. They are Robert McFarlane, the CIA’s Alan Fiers, and former Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams – all of whom had already pleaded guilty to withholding information from Congress before Bush Sr. let them off the hook.

It caused an outcry in some circles, as *The New York Times* [reported](#): “Bush Pardons 6 in Iran Affair, Aborting a Weinberger Trial; Prosecutor Assails ‘Cover-Up.’”



Cover-up indeed. George H. W. Bush was up to his neck in the crimes of Iran-Contra, and so was his protege,

Bobby Gates. Gates was so demonstrably involved that he had zero chance of being confirmed as CIA director the first time it was tried. In 1991, Bush had to move mountains to get him confirmed. Gates knew where the bodies were buried, so to speak, and could be counted on to keep them six feet under. (I learned all this well after I spent four years, from 1981 to 1985, for the CIA briefing then-Vice President Bush with The President's Daily Brief.)

### Lessons for Today

At risk of stating the obvious, is it not clear that, by the time the Supreme Court made Bush Jr. president, CIA operatives had long since internalized the idea they could literally get away with murder? It is not widely known, but several of the detainees in CIA custody following 9/11 died under torture. This came despite the lawyerly advice of Jonathan Fredman, Esq, chief counsel to CIA's

Counterterrorist Center on torture guidelines.

On October 2, 2002 Fredman briefed interrogators at Guantanamo to resolve questions they had about unfamiliar interrogation techniques, like water-boarding. With creepy nonchalance, Fredman claimed (falsely) that “the language of the [torture] statutes is written vaguely,” and summed up the legalities in this way: “It is basically subject to perception. If the detainee dies, you’re doing it wrong.”

Needless to say, the Nicaraguan Contras, whom Bush Senior and his favorite CIA, now-pardoned, covert action operatives supported, paid no heed to such niceties in the violence facilitated by the crimes of Iran-Contra.

We are not supposed to blame sons for the sins of the father. And vice versa, we should also be careful not to blame fathers for the sins of sons. Nevertheless, it’s difficult to give Bush 1 total absolution in this case, as I found out after I wrote Bh Sr. suggesting that junior had fallen in with bad companions and that the consequences would likely be serious.

### **Writing to Bush**

George H. W. Bush and I had a longstanding professional and, later, cordial relationship. For many years after he stopped being president, we stayed in touch – mostly by letter. On January 11, 2003, as the invasion of Iraq was gaining momentum, I wrote a letter to the elder Bush asking him to speak “privately to your son George about the crazies advising him on Iraq,” adding “I am aghast at the cavalier way in which the [Richard] Perles of the Pentagon are promoting the use of nuclear weapons as an acceptable option

against Iraq.”

My letter continued: “That such people have the President’s ear is downright scary. I think he needs to know why you exercised such care to keep such folks at arms length. (And, as you may know, they are exerting unrelenting pressure on CIA analysts to come up with the ‘right’ answers. You know how that goes!)”

His reassuring answer—not to worry about any influence the “crazies” might have on his son was a great disappointment.

The elder Bush may not have been fully conscious of it, but he was whistling in the dark, having long since decided to leave to surrogates like former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and former Secretary of State James Baker the task of highlighting publicly the criminal folly of attacking Iraq.

Or the father may have tried privately; who knows. It was, in my view, a tragedy that he did not speak out publicly. He would have been very well aware that this was the only thing that would have had a chance of stopping his son from committing what the Nuremberg Tribunal defined as “the supreme international crime.”

Junior is the poster child for the crying need in this country for basic instruction on parenting. See what “Mission Accomplished” looks like in the Middle East today.

After the invasion, Bush Sr. somewhat came to his senses, blaming his sons’ “iron-ass advisers”—namely Messrs. Cheney and Rumsfeld—for the disaster.

It didn’t get Senior off the hook. A lot of damage W. caused

can be attributed – pure and simple – to poor parenting.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He worked for the senior Bush when he was director of the CIA and then briefed him mornings, one-on-one, with the *President's Daily Brief* during the first Reagan administration. In Jan. 2003, Ray co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs) and still serves on its Steering Group.

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## Taking a Bush Secret to the Grave

The National Archives approved Robert Parry's appeal on a 30-year-old secret: the address where George H.W. Bush supposedly went on an October 1980 weekend – when several witnesses put Bush in Paris meeting with Iranians, Parry reported on 9/27 2011.

**By Robert Parry**

*Special to Consortium News*





A three-decade-old mystery has finally been solved who was George H.W. Bush's unidentified "alibi witness" on Oct. 19, 1980, when other witnesses allege the then-Republican vice presidential candidate took a secret flight to Paris for meetings with Iranians. But the mystery's answer only raises new questions.

After 20 years of rejecting requests from various investigators for the identity of the "alibi witness," the U.S. government finally released enough information from Secret Service files in response to an appeal that I filed with the National Archives to ascertain the person's identity.

The person who perhaps could have verified where Bush was or wasn't on that day was Richard A. Moore, a Bush family friend best known for his role in the Watergate scandal as a special counsel to President Richard Nixon. In 1973, Moore was Nixon's point man in attacking the credibility of fired White House counsel John Dean after Dean turned whistleblower.

In 1980, Moore, who somehow managed to escape indictment for his Watergate role, and his wife, Jane Swift Moore, were living in an exclusive tree-lined neighborhood in Northwest Washington about one mile from the home of George H.W. and Barbara Bush.

According to Secret Service records that I found in the files of Bush's White House counsel C. Boyden Gray – and which have now been more fully released – Bush's Secret Service detail left the Bush family home at 4429 Lowell St.



N.W. at 1:35 p.m. on Oct. 19, 1980, and arrived at "Moore Residence, 4917 Rockwood Pkwy." at 1:40 p.m.

By checking Washington D.C. real estate records, I discovered that Richard A. Moore owned the house at 4917 Rockwood Parkway in 1980.

If George H.W. Bush actually made the visit to Moore's house with his wife Barbara Bush on that afternoon – rather than Barbara possibly going alone – that would make Bush's alleged trip to Paris virtually impossible. So it would have seemed to be in Bush's interests to release this information to investigators and have them interview Moore, if Moore would confirm that Bush dropped by that day.

In the early 1990s, Moore also was Bush's ambassador to Ireland and thus presumably inclined to help both his boss and his friend. However, when investigators were trying to determine whether Bush had traveled to Paris – and were looking for evidence to prove that he hadn't – the Bush administration whited-out Moore's address before releasing redacted versions of the Secret Service records.

Moore died on Jan. 27, 1995. So, if George H.W. Bush's purpose in delaying release of Moore's identity was to ensure that no one could check with Moore about Bush's alibi for Oct. 19, 1980, Bush achieved his goal.

Though most of us who were examining this mystery two decades ago gave great weight to the Secret Service records seeming to place Bush in Washington, not Paris, there was the question of whether Bush, a former CIA director, might have convinced some friendly Secret Service supervisor to cook up some alibi to cover the flight to Paris.

Those suspicions deepened with the Bush administration's continued refusal to provide seemingly innocuous information, like Moore's address.

### **Justifying a Secret**

In 1991-92, President George H.W. Bush's administration continued to insist on keeping the "Moore Residence" destination secret even after Congress authorized an investigation into the so-called October Surprise case: whether Republicans in 1980 had contacted Iranians behind President Jimmy Carter's back to frustrate his efforts to free 52 American hostages.

Carter's failure to gain release of the hostages made him look weak and inept, setting the stage for Ronald Reagan's landslide victory, an election which dramatically changed the course of the nation. The Iranians released the American hostages immediately after Reagan was sworn in on Jan. 20, 1981, further making Reagan appear to be an imposing world figure.

Though there were early rumors about a secret Republican deal with Iran, the October Surprise mystery didn't gain much traction until the exposure of secret Iran-Contra arms shipments approved by Reagan to Iran in 1985-86. Suddenly, the notion that Reagan and his Vice President George H.W. Bush would lie about covert dealings with Iran didn't seem so preposterous.

Essentially, the October Surprise question was whether Reagan's secret contacts with Iran dated back to Campaign 1980, as a growing number of witnesses – from inside the governments of Iran, Israel, France and the United States –

were alleging.

However, when Congress finally agreed to look into the October Surprise case in 1991-92, Republicans were determined to circle the wagons around the then-sitting President George H.W. Bush, who was facing a tough reelection fight against Democrat Bill Clinton.

Rather than welcome any truth-seeking, the Republicans and their media allies went on the attack claiming that the October Surprise case was a baseless "conspiracy theory."

At the time, the Republicans also suggested several reasons why the alibi witness for Oct. 19, 1980, should remain secret. One was that Bush might have been off on a romantic rendezvous and that Democrats simply wanted to pry into the visit as a way to neutralize accounts of Bill Clinton's womanizing.

However, that "tryst" rationale fell apart when I obtained the Secret Service records for Barbara Bush and they showed her on the same trip, with the destination again whited-out.

Then, there was the suggestion that the unidentified Bush family friends were very private people who shouldn't be dragged into the middle of a political controversy. (As it turned out, the Moores were very much public figures, both having worked in the Nixon White House and Richard A. Moore serving as U.S. ambassador to Ireland during the first Bush administration.)

In 1992, as Bush's team continued to stonewall the identity of Bush's "alibi witness," Bush angrily demanded at two news conferences that Congress specifically clear him of the

allegations that he had taken a secret trip to Paris in 1980.

Bowing to those pressures in June 1992, Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, chairman of the House investigative task force, agreed to a curious bargain in which he and a few senior investigators were shown the destination of Bush's supposed afternoon trip on Oct. 19, 1980, but with the proviso that they never interview anyone who was there or disclose any names.

So, without verifying Bush's alibi, the House task force cleared Bush of going to Paris. When I asked Hamilton about this strange agreement this week, in the wake of the National Archives' release of the "Moore Residence" document, he responded through a spokesman that he was "not able to provide any answers" because he no longer has his official records.

### **Moore's Silence**

Though the Oct. 19, 1980, visit could have involved either Moore or his wife or both, the "alibi witness" being kept secret in 1992 had to be Moore, since his wife, Jane Swift Moore, died in 1985.

When I contacted one of Moore's sons, Richard A. Moore Jr., he told me that he didn't think that any of the family's five children were still living in the Rockwood Parkway house in 1980. Nor did he think there would likely be any photographs of the visit since the Bushes were "almost neighbors," often popping in.

But the question remains: If Richard A. Moore could have

confirmed that Bush was definitely in Washington on Oct. 19, 1980, not on a secret mission to Paris, why wasn't he questioned? Why was the Bush administration so determined to block the House task force from interviewing Moore?

Moore owed a huge debt to Bush, who had lifted Moore from his Watergate-tainted purgatory in 1989 by appointing him to be U.S. Ambassador to Ireland. Moore would seem to be a friendly witness who would happily want to cover for Bush, if possible.

Which is why Moore's silence in 1992 only adds to the mystery. Moore served in Dublin until June 1992, departing the same month as the battle over withholding his identity was playing out in Washington.

Given Moore's close call with a criminal prosecution for his role in the Watergate cover-up he was often in meetings where all the other participants ended up going to jail he understandably might have been very leery about lying to Congress even to protect another U.S. president and a personal friend, if Bush indeed had snuck off to Paris.

Another document released to me under my appeal to the National Archives raises further suspicions about Bush's whereabouts on that Sunday. Undated handwritten notes that I found in the files of one of White House counsel Gray's assistants, Ronald Von Lembke, indicate that some of the Secret Service records for Oct. 19, 1980, were missing.

For that date, the notes say, "\*N0 Residence Report. \*0000 [midnight] - 0800 missing. 0800-1600 okay. \*1600-2400 missing." Stars were used to highlight the references to missing material.

Written in the margin, next to the time references is the name "Potter Stewart," the late Supreme Court Justice who was another Bush family friend. The reference suggests that the White House counsel's office was checking on how to bolster Bush's alibi for Oct. 19, 1980.

The same notes include a check mark next to the name "Buck Tanis," suggesting that the author of the notes had contacted Secret Service supervisor Leonard "Buck" Tanis, who was a Bush favorite from his Secret Service detail. Tanis was one of the supervisors for Bush's Secret Service detail in October 1980.

Tanis was also the only Secret Service agent on Bush's detail for Oct. 19, 1980, who claimed to recall another dubious part of Bush's alibi mentioned in the Secret Service reports, a morning trip to the Chevy Chase Country Club.

When the redacted Secret Service records were first released in the early 1990s, Bush's supposed Chevy Chase visit was cited as slam-dunk evidence that Bush couldn't have gone to Paris.

Relying on Republican sources, friendly journalists reported that Bush had been playing tennis that morning at the club. But the tennis alibi collapsed when it was discovered that rain had prevented tennis that morning.

Then, Tanis came forward with another story, that George H.W. and Barbara Bush had brunch at the club with Justice and Mrs. Potter Stewart. By 1992, however, Justice Stewart was dead and Republicans said Mrs. Stewart was in poor health, suffering senility and couldn't be interviewed.

So, another Bush alibi couldn't be checked out and Tanis's recollection would have to stand unchallenged.

However, I learned that reports of Mrs. Stewart's physical and mental decline were greatly exaggerated. She was going out with a retired CIA official whom I knew. When I called her, she was quite lucid and told me that she and her husband never had brunch with the Bushes at the Chevy Chase club.

Using the Freedom of Information Act, I also obtained redacted reports from Barbara Bush's Secret Service detail and they showed her going to the C&O jogging path that morning, not to the Chevy Chase club.

When I passed on this information to congressional investigators, they interviewed Tanis again and he backed away from his story of the brunch. He joined the other Secret Service agents in saying he had no specific recollection of Bush's travels that day.

The newly released handwritten notes suggest that, at minimum, an official from Bush's counsel's office discussed the Potter Stewart alibi with Tanis, thus raising questions about whether Tanis's initial testimony about the alleged brunch was tainted.

### **Bush's Curious Actions**

With Tanis and his brunch alibi discredited, investigative attention in 1992 turned to the afternoon trip on Oct. 19, 1980. But there again Bush's alibi proved curious, especially with his "alibi witness," who we now know was Ambassador to Ireland Richard A. Moore, kept away from the

congressional task force.

All this strange behavior piqued the suspicions of House Foreign Affairs Committee chief counsel R. Spencer Oliver. In a six-page memo, Oliver urged a closer look at Bush's whereabouts and questioned why the Secret Service was concealing the name of the alibi witness for the afternoon trip.

"Why did the Secret Service refuse to cooperate on a matter which could have conclusively cleared George Bush of these serious allegations?" Oliver asked. "Was the White House involved in this refusal? Did they order it?"

Oliver also noted Bush's odd behavior in raising the October Surprise issue on his own at two news conferences.

"It can be fairly said that President Bush's recent outbursts about the October Surprise inquiries and [about] his whereabouts in mid-October of 1980 are disingenuous at best," wrote Oliver, "since the administration has refused to make available the documents and the witnesses that could finally and conclusively clear Mr. Bush."

From the newly released White House documents, it is clear that Oliver's suspicions were well-founded regarding the involvement of Bush's White House staff in the decision to conceal the name of his supposed afternoon host.

Keeping the tough-minded Oliver off the October Surprise investigation also became a high priority for the Republicans. At a midway point in the inquiry when some Democratic task force members asked Oliver to represent them as a staff investigator, Republicans threatened a boycott



unless Oliver was barred.

In another gesture of bipartisanship, Hamilton gave the Republicans the power to veto Oliver's participation. Denied one of the few Democratic investigators with both the savvy and courage to pursue a serious inquiry, the Democratic members of the task force retreated. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Inside the October Surprise Cover-up](#)" or [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

### **The Case for the Trip**

All this Republican resistance to the October Surprise investigation also must be viewed against the backdrop of significant evidence that Bush did go to Paris and that the Reagan campaign did undercut Carter's efforts to free the hostages.

Though some of those suspicions dated back almost to the time the hostages were freed on Jan. 20, 1981, other allegations emerged as the Iran-Contra investigation progressed in the late 1980s. That led PBS "Frontline" to recruit me in 1990 to examine whether the October Surprise case had been a prequel to the Iran-Contra Affair.

That Frontline documentary, which aired in April 1991, coincided with a New York Times op-ed by former National Security Council aide Gary Sick, giving new momentum and new credibility to the October Surprise allegations.

As the October Surprise controversy heated up with the Republicans and Bush allies in the news media waging a fierce counteroffensive Frontline asked me to stay on the story, which led to another discovery that bolstered the

Bush-to-Paris claims.

Because of the April 1991 documentary, David Henderson, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer, recalled a conversation that he had had with a journalist on Oct. 18, 1980, about Bush flying to Paris that night to meet with Iranians regarding the American hostages.

Henderson couldn't remember the reporter's name but he passed the information on to Sen. Alan Cranston, D-California, whose staff forwarded the letter to me. By cross-checking some other information, we determined that the journalist was John Maclean of *The Chicago Tribune*, the son of author Norman Maclean who wrote the novel, *A River Runs Through It*.

Though John Maclean was not eager to talk with me, he finally agreed and confirmed what Henderson had written in his letter. Maclean said a well-placed Republican source told him in mid-October 1980 about Bush taking a secret trip to Paris to meet with Iranians on the U.S. hostage issue.

After hearing this news from his source, Maclean passed on the information to Henderson when the two met at Henderson's Washington home to discuss another matter.

For his part, Maclean never wrote about the Bush-to-Paris leak because, he told me, a Reagan campaign spokesman officially denied it. As the years passed, the memory of the leak faded for both Henderson and Maclean, until the October Surprise story bubbled to the surface in 1991.

The significance of the Maclean-Henderson conversation was that it was a piece of information locked in time untainted

by later claims and counter-claims about the October Surprise dispute.

One could not accuse Maclean of concocting the Bush-to-Paris allegation for some ulterior motive, since he hadn't used it in 1980, nor had he volunteered it a decade later. He only confirmed it and did so reluctantly.

### **French Intelligence**

And, there was other support for the allegations Republican-Iranian meeting in Paris.

David Andelman, the biographer for Count Alexandre deMarenches, then head of France's Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionage (SDECE), testified to congressional investigators that deMarenches told him that he had helped the Reagan-Bush campaign arrange meetings with Iranians on the hostage issue in summer and fall of 1980, with one meeting in Paris in October.

Andelman said deMarenches insisted that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoir because the story could damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush.

The allegations of a Paris meeting also received support from several other sources, including pilot Heinrich Rupp, who said he flew Casey (then Ronald Reagan's campaign chief and later CIA director) from Washington's National Airport to Paris on a flight that left very late on a rainy night in mid-October 1980.

Rupp said that after arriving at LeBourget airport outside Paris, he saw a man resembling Bush on the tarmac.

The night of Oct. 18 indeed was rainy in the Washington area. And, sign-in sheets at the Reagan-Bush headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, placed Casey within a five-minute drive of National Airport late that evening.

There were other bits and pieces of corroboration about the Paris meetings.

A French arms dealer, Nicholas Ignatiew, told me in 1990 that he had checked with his government contacts and was told that Republicans did meet with Iranians in Paris in mid-October 1980.

A well-connected French investigative reporter Claude Angeli said his sources inside the French secret service confirmed that the service provided "cover" for a meeting between Republicans and Iranians in France on the weekend of Oct. 18-19. German journalist Martin Kilian had received a similar account from a top aide to intelligence chief deMarenches.

As early as 1987, Iran's ex-President Bani-Sadr had made his own claims about a Paris meeting, and Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe testified that he was present outside the Paris meeting and saw Bush, Casey and other Americans in attendance.

Finally, the Russian government sent a report to the House task force, saying that Soviet-era intelligence files contained information about Republicans holding a series of meetings with Iranians in Europe, including one in Paris in October 1980.

"William Casey, in 1980, met three times with

representatives of the Iranian leadership," the Russian report said. "The meetings took place in Madrid and Paris."

At the Paris meeting in October 1980, "former CIA Director George Bush also took part," the report said. "The representatives of Ronald Reagan and the Iranian leadership discussed the question of possibly delaying the release of 52 hostages from the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran."

Requested by Hamilton, who was in charge of the lackadaisical congressional inquiry into the October Surprise mystery in 1992, the Russian report arrived via the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in January 1993. But Hamilton's task force had already decided to dismiss the October Surprise allegations as lacking solid evidence.

The Russian report was kept hidden until I discovered it after gaining access to the task force's raw files. Though the report was addressed to Hamilton, he told me last year that he had not seen the report until I sent him a copy shortly before our interview.

Lawrence Barcella, the task force's chief counsel, acknowledged to me that he might not have shown Hamilton the report and may have simply filed it away in boxes of task force records.

### **Casey in Spain**

I also discovered in the files at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas, another document that supported allegations that Casey had traveled to Madrid, as Iranian businessman Jamshid Hashemi had claimed. Hashemi testified under oath that Casey met with

Iranian emissary Mehdi Karrubi in Madrid, Spain, in late July 1980 to discuss delaying the release of the American hostages until after the presidential election so as not to help President Carter.

Searching through the archived files at the Bush library, I found a "memorandum for record" dated Nov. 4, 1991, by associate White House counsel Chester Paul Beach Jr.

Beach reported on a conversation with State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson who said that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown."

However, the House task force was apparently never told about this confirmation of Casey's presence in Madrid and proceeded to reject the Madrid allegations by citing a particularly bizarre alibi for Casey's whereabouts on the last weekend in July 1980.

The task force placed Casey at the exclusive all-male retreat at the Bohemian Grove in California although the documentary evidence clearly showed that Casey attended the Grove on the first weekend of August, not the last weekend of July. [For details, see Secrecy & Privilege. For more on Casey's alleged travels, see Consortiumnews.com's "October Surprise Evidence Surfaces."] ]

### **Stranger Than Fiction**

Another stranger-than-fiction twist in this story is the new revelation that a figure from the Watergate cover-up was

Bush's "alibi witness," although the witness apparently could not be counted on to support Bush's October Surprise alibi.

Though Richard A. Moore was not one of the household names from the Watergate cover-up, a review of literature on the scandal reveals that he was a trusted aide to President Nixon and helped formulate both legal and public-relations strategies to fend off the Watergate investigations.

In *The Haldeman Diaries*, White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman describes Nixon frequently sending his top aides to consult with Moore about developments in the scandal. At one point, as White House counsel Dean is starting to talk with prosecutors, Haldeman notes that "Moore was very close to Dean, how about having him talk with Dean and see what he has in mind."

In Dean's *Blind Ambition*, Dean credits Moore with first coming up with the memorable phrase that the Watergate cover-up was becoming "a cancer" on Nixon's presidency, a metaphor that Dean used in a key confrontation with Nixon and repeated during the Watergate hearings.

During those hearings, Moore was dispatched by the White House to dispute Dean's assertion that Nixon was complicit in the cover-up of the June 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters at least as early as that September.

On July 12, 1973, Moore told the Senate Watergate Committee that "nothing said in my meetings with Mr. Dean or my meetings with the President suggests in any way that before March 21 [1973] the President had known, or that Mr. Dean believed he had known, of any involvement of White House

personnel in the bugging or the cover-up.”

Perhaps because of his status as a lawyer to Nixon, Moore escaped the fate of many other White House insiders who were indicted and prosecuted for false testimony and obstruction of justice.

Being a Yale alumnus and a friend of the well-connected George H.W. Bush, who was then chairman of the Republican National Committee, probably didn't hurt either.

Moore had started his legal career working as a lawyer for the American Broadcasting Company in the 1940s. He was a close friend of Nixon's Attorney General John N. Mitchell who brought Moore into the Nixon administration as his special assistant. Moore moved over to the White House in 1971 to serve as special counsel to Nixon.

After leaving the White House, Moore returned to the television industry, becoming a founder and associate producer of “The McLaughlin Group” political chat show.

In September 1989, President George H.W. Bush named Moore as Ambassador to Ireland, where he stayed until June 1992, when his testimony in another political scandal might have proved very important in either exonerating Bush or exposing a phony cover story that protected Bush's participation in an operation that bordered on treason.

Without ever being questioned in the October Surprise mystery, Moore died in Washington on Jan. 27, 1995, at age 81. He succumbed to prostate cancer, according to his daughter Kate L. Moore.

**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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## George H.W. Bush, the CIA and a Case of State-Sponsored Terrorism

Forty-two years ago, a car-bomb exploded in Washington killing Chile's ex-Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier, an act of state terrorism that the CIA and its director George H.W. Bush tried to cover up, Robert Parry reported on Sept. 23, 2000.

**By Robert Parry**

*Special to Consortium News*



In early fall of 1976, after a Chilean government assassin had killed a Chilean dissident and an American woman with a car bomb in Washington, D.C., George H.W. Bush's CIA leaked a false report clearing Chile's military dictatorship and pointing

the FBI in the wrong direction.

The bogus CIA assessment, spread through *Newsweek* magazine and other U.S. media outlets, was planted despite CIA's now admitted awareness at the time that Chile was participating in Operation Condor, a cross-border campaign targeting political dissidents, and the CIA's own suspicions that the Chilean junta was behind the terrorist bombing in Washington.

In a 21-page report to Congress on Sept. 18, 2000, the CIA officially acknowledged 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 report was issued almost 24 years to the day after the murders of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and American co-worker Ronni Moffitt, who died on Sept. 21, 1976, when a remote-controlled bomb ripped apart Letelier's car as they drove down Massachusetts Avenue, a stately section of Washington known as Embassy Row.

In the report, the CIA also acknowledged publicly for the first time 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 murders and included that suspicion in an internal cable the same month.

"CIA's first intelligence report containing this allegation was dated 6 October 1976," a little more than two weeks after the bombing, the CIA disclosed.

Nevertheless, the CIA – then under CIA Director George H.W.

Bush – leaked for public consumption an assessment clearing the Chilean government's feared intelligence service, 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 later became the 41st president of the United States (and is the father of the 43rd president), 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.

### **Dodging Disclosure**

As a *Newsweek* correspondent in 1988, a dozen years after the Letelier bombing, when the elder Bush was running for president, I prepared a detailed story about Bush's handling of the Letelier case.

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 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.

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

Upon learning of this strange mission, 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. After arriving, he enlisted some right-wing Cuban-Americans in the Letelier plot and went to Washington to plant the bomb under Letelier's car.

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. The CIA report in 2000 made no mention of these aspects of the case.

After the assassination, Bush promised the CIA's full

cooperation in tracking down the Letelier-Moffitt killers. But instead the CIA took contrary actions, such as 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,” said federal prosecutor Eugene Propper in a 1988 interview for the story I was drafting for *Newsweek*. The CIA never volunteered Ambassador Landau’s cable about the suspicious DINA mission nor copies of the fake passports that included a photo of Townley, the chief assassin. Nor did Bush’s CIA divulge its knowledge of the existence of Operation Condor.

FBI agents in Washington and Latin America broke the case two years later. They discovered Operation Condor on their own and tracked the assassination back to Townley and his accomplices in the United States.

In 1988, as then-Vice President Bush was citing his CIA work 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 Editor Maynard Parker even had accused me of being “out to get Bush.”

## **The CIA’s Admission**

Twenty-four years after the Letelier assassination and 12 years after *Newsweek* killed the first account of the Contreras-CIA relationship, the CIA admitted that it had paid Contreras as an intelligence asset and consulted with him about the Letelier assassination.

Still, in the sketchy report in 2000, the spy agency sought to portray itself 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 predates 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 the Ford administration] directed the CIA to continue its relationship with Contreras."

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.

"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.

After Bush left the CIA with Jimmy Carter’s inauguration in 1977, the spy agency distanced itself from Contreras, the new 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."

### **Remaining Mysteries**

Though the CIA report in 2000 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 providing the 21-page summary on its relationship with Chile's military dictatorship, the CIA 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 in the face of President Bill Clinton's specific order to release as much information as possible.

Perhaps the CIA was playing for time. With CIA headquarters officially named 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 hoped that the election of Texas Gov. George W. Bush would free it from demands to open up records to the American people.

For his part, former President George H.W. Bush declared his intent to take a more active role in campaigning for his son's election. In Florida on Sept. 22, 2000, Bush said he



was “absolutely convinced” that if his son is elected president, “we will restore the respect, honor and decency that the White House deserves.”

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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## Robert Parry’s Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews

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

By Nat Parry

It is with a heavy heart that we inform Consortiumnews readers that Editor Robert Parry has passed away. As regular readers know, Robert (or Bob, as he was known to friends and family) [suffered a stroke](#) in December, which – despite his own speculation that it may have been brought on by the stress of covering Washington politics – was the result of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that he had been unknowingly living with for the past 4-5 years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Reagan administration immediately began exploring ways to circumvent those legal restrictions, which led to a scheme to send secret arms shipments to the

revolutionary and vehemently anti-American government of Iran and divert the profits to the contras. In 1985, Bob wrote the first stories describing this operation, which later became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

### **Contra-Cocaine and October Surprise**

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

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

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

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

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

Examining these documents and being already well-versed on this story – having previously travelled three continents pursuing the investigation for a PBS *Frontline* documentary – Bob became increasingly convinced that the Reagan

campaign had in fact sabotaged Carter's hostage negotiations, possibly committing an act of treason in an effort to make sure that 52 American citizens continued to be held in a harrowing hostage situation until after Reagan secured the election.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I went to the computer lab at the university and asked for some assistance on how to get online, dutifully typed in the URL, and opened this website – the

first one I had ever visited. It was interesting, but a bit hard to read on the computer screen, so I printed out some articles to read back in my dorm room.

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

### **X-Files and Contra-Crack**

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

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

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

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

The African-American community, in particular, was rightly outraged over this story, which offered confirmation of many long-standing suspicions that the government was complicit in the drug trade devastating their communities. African Americans had been deeply and disproportionately affected by the crack epidemic, both in terms of the direct impact of the drug and the draconian drug

laws and mandatory minimum sentences that came to define the government's approach to "the war on drugs."

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

### **Big Papers Pile On**

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

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

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

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

But sadly, the damage to Gary Webb was done. With his professional and personal life in tatters because of his courageous reporting on the contra-cocaine story, he committed suicide in 2004 at the age of 49. Speaking about this suicide later on *Democracy Now*, Bob noted how painful it is to be ridiculed and unfairly

criticized by colleagues, as his friend had experienced.

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

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

### **The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In an effort to document the true history of that era, Bob, Sam and I co-wrote the book *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, which was



published in late 2007. The book traced the work of Consortiumnews, juxtaposing it against the backdrop of mainstream media coverage during the Bush era, in an effort to not only correct the record, but also demonstrate that not all of us got things so wrong.

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

## **Obama Era**

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

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

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

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

He also observed that much of the nuttiness surrounding the so-called Tea Party movement resulted from fundamental misunderstandings of American history and

constitutional principles. “Democrats and progressives should be under no illusion about the new flood of know-nothingism that is about to inundate the United States in the guise of a return to ‘first principles’ and a deep respect for the U.S. Constitution,” Bob warned.

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

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

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

### **Political Realignment and the New McCarthyism**

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

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

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

Bob’s stories on Ukraine were widely cited and disseminated, and he became an important voice in presenting a fuller picture of the conflict than was possible

by reading and watching only mainstream news outlets. Bob was featured prominently in Oliver Stone's 2016 documentary "Ukraine on Fire," where he explained how U.S.-funded political NGOs and media companies have worked with the CIA and foreign policy establishment since the 1980s to promote the U.S. geopolitical agenda.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **An Untimely End and the Future of Consortiumnews**

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

And as many Consortiumnews readers have eloquently pointed out in comments left on recent articles regarding Bob’s health, it also reminds us that his brand of

journalism is needed today more than ever.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As the United States continues down the path of a New Cold War, my dad would be

pleased to know that he has such committed contributors who will enable the site to remain the indispensable home for independent journalism that it has become, and continue to push back on false narratives that threaten our very survival.

Thank you all for your support.

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

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## The Charmed, Doomed Life of Barry Seal

**Exclusive:** Tom Cruise's portrayal of drug-smuggler-turned-government-informant Barry Seal is a fast-paced visit back to the Reagan era's shadowy world of the CIA, cocaine and secret wars, writes James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

Barry Seal's life has become the stuff of legend. And much of that legend owes itself to the manner in which his life ended. Seal was killed on the evening of Feb. 19, 1986, machine-gunned in his automobile by agents of the Medellin Cartel, his former employers. There were photos taken of his bullet-riddled body in his car.

His violent and bloody death created headlines and nightly news stories throughout America. In fact, one can say that his murder gave him a higher profile in death than he had in life. And because of the unusual circumstances of his murder – more properly called an assassination – his life now has become the fodder of legend.

Because of all the legerdemain that has sprouted up about Seal, it is not easy to separate fact from fiction. The current film about Seal, *American Made*, does not even try. In fact, it attempts to expand legend into myth. It then plays that myth for fast-action scenes, tongue-in-cheek comedy, and a plot line that moves as quickly as bowling pins falling during a ten-strike. Whatever the failings of director Doug Liman's movie, it is hard to imagine someone being bored by it.

Before assessing the virtues and faults of *American Made*, let us try and set up some kind of base line for who Seal was, what he did, and how he died. That way we will at least have some kind of basis to measure just how far Liman and screenwriter Gary Spinelli have tilted over into myth. At its start, the film

says that it is based on a true story; but at the end it states that the characters are fictitious and any relation to real characters and events is coincidental. Talk about having it both ways.

*American Made* began as a script by Spinelli entitled *Mena*. Reportedly, in that version, the story was more heavily centered on the CIA operations from that infamous airport in Mena, Arkansas, during America's war in the 1980s against the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. Because of that focus, the role of then-Gov. Bill Clinton was accented, and he was even depicted in a strip-club getting a lap dance.

As the story evolved, the focus changed into a more panoramic view of the 1970s and 1980s through Seal's exploits. The picture begins with a montage of the late 1970s, with Jimmy Carter as president. It then picks up its story line when Ronald Reagan comes to the White House.

### **Cruise as Seal**

When we first encounter Seal – played by Tom Cruise – he is a TWA airline pilot who is a bit bored with his job. He picks up some extra cash by smuggling Cuban cigars into the country. A CIA officer named Schafer (Domhnall Gleeson) approaches him in the airport lounge since he knows about this illegal activity. He tells the pilot he already has a file on him, and this is how he entices Seal to join up with their nascent efforts to militarize the struggle in Central America.

With this opening, one can rightly say that Liman and Spinelli have already romanticized and aggrandized Seal's character. Seal's promising career with TWA ended in the summer of 1972 for something more serious than cigar contraband. He was involved in a conspiracy to ship explosives to Mexico using a TWA plane. Those explosives were reportedly headed for Cuba to be used against the Castro regime. Seal used his vacation time to arrange the deal. (*Smuggler's End*, by Del Hahn, pgs. 31-37)

This is why he was fired by TWA; he did not, as the film depicts, leave on his own accord. But the introduction of the CIA character allows Liman's film to depict CIA man Schafer helping set up Seal in what can only be called an Agency shell company for missions into Central America. And this is what the film says began Seal's career in Central America. According to *American Made*, it started with reconnaissance missions on rebel groups, and Seal picking up intelligence reports from Panama's Manuel Noriega.

In real life, the Schafer character never actually existed. But Seal had a connection with intelligence services as a pilot for the U.S. Army Special

Forces division. (See the online essay "Air Cocaine" by Jeffrey St. Clair and Alexander Cockburn)

Seal joined TWA in 1964 and was fired over the explosives incident eight years later. Since the 14,000 pounds of explosives were destined for Cuban exiles on the island, one has to wonder if, at the very least, the CIA knew about it, or perhaps even sanctioned it. After all, one of the excuses for not proceeding with the later trial of Seal was that it would "threaten national security interests." (ibid)

By several accounts, after his termination Seal began his criminal career in the mid-1970s, smuggling small quantities of marijuana. He built up his business by purchasing a fleet of planes and recruiting several pilots. He quickly became a successful entrepreneur in the black markets of guns and drugs.

By 1978, Seal made a key business decision: he shifted from marijuana to cocaine. Cocaine was less bulky and had a higher profit margin. At this point, with several pilots working for him running several planes across the border into Central America, Barry Seal became a wealthy man. It is not possible to make a serious estimate of how much he was really worth, but he later pegged his wealth at \$50 million. But more than one investigator later said that \$50 million was considerably below the actual figures the Seal operation generated. (ibid)

### **Meeting the Cartel**

In December 1979, Seal was arrested in Honduras on suspicion of drug smuggling, and he was convicted of arms smuggling. Liman's film briefly depicts this incident as something like an overnight stay. In fact, Seal was in prison for eight months.

It is not easy to determine when Seal actually met up with the members of the Medellin Cartel in Colombia and became a key pilot. But almost every commentator says the association came after this prison incident. The film places the prison term while Seal was already doing business with Medellin.

To give a differing example: Roger Reaves was a major cocaine smuggler who was working with the Medellin Cartel when he first met Seal on a plane leaving Honduras after Seal was released. Reaves invited Seal to his home in California and became very impressed with his flying skills. He offered to sub-contract out some of his work for the cartel, which, at that time, consisted of the Ochoa brothers, Carlos Lehder and Pablo Escobar. (Reaves, *Smuggler*, pgs. 293-298. Reaves is not depicted in the film.)

Differing from the film, Reaves wrote that it was Seal, not CIA officers, who



wanted to move the drop point for the incoming shipments of cocaine from Louisiana to the small airfield in Mena. This 1982 move was likely based on the fact that Seal was a Louisiana citizen with a residence in Baton Rouge, and was therefore well known to law enforcement in the Bayous. A second likely reason is because Seal thought it would be easy to buy anonymity in a small town like Mena.

There is little doubt that the CIA followed Seal to Mena. For, as the film shows, Mena doubled as a training base for the Contras, the American-backed rebels trying to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. (Jim Naureckas, *FAIR*, October 10, 2017)

It was with this operation, subsidized by the CIA – shipping arms down to the Contras, bringing back tons of cocaine for Medellin – with which Barry Seal redefined the word wealth in the world of smuggling. He further expanded his fleet and pilot corps, since each flight was packed with between 200-500 kilos of cocaine. That kind of load would capture multi-millions on the street, and Seal was paid at least \$2,000 per kilo. As the film depicts, banks had to build new deposit rooms for the rest of their clients, while dedicating their regular deposit repositories solely to Seal's massive holdings.

### **Government Protection**

Somehow, Seal managed to acquire protection for his operation. As a Senate investigation led by Sen. John Kerry noted in 1989, Seal's associates at the Mena airport were targets of grand jury probes into narcotics trafficking. But even though there was evidence sufficient for an indictment on money laundering charges, and despite the willingness of state and federal officials to proceed, the cases were dropped.

Kerry's investigation concluded that the "apparent reason might have revealed national security information." (ibid) That usually means CIA involvement. Another indication of such involvement is the uncovering of a Customs official's report where he explains that a drug inquiry into a pilot had to be cancelled because he "works for Seal and cannot be touched because Seal works for the CIA." (ibid)

Seal's operations also provided work for some local citizens. For instance, automatic pistols were made in Fayetteville by a gunsmith named William Holmes, who later testified that the CIA asked him to make 250 pistols for Seal. Holmes described the smuggler as "the ramrod of the Mena gun deal." (St. Clair and Cockburn.)

But in 1983, Seal's world began to crumble. Operation Screamer was an undercover

sting that caught Seal shipping 200,000 Quaaludes into a Fort Lauderdale airport, a key incident that is not depicted in the film. *American Made* simply states that because the Contra resupply effort was not going well, the CIA decided to pull the plug on Seal's Mena operation.

Seal quickly understands he is being made the fall guy and tries to get everything out. While doing so he is caught by at least four teams of agents: FBI, DEA, state and local police. This scene, with flashlights piercing the darkness and its Keystone Kops overtones, is pure Hollywood invention to create both humor and drama. But, admittedly, it makes for better cinema than a Quaalude bust.

In keeping with Liman's choice of Hollywood tinsel vs. reality, once Seal is detained, he is taken to the state attorney's office in handcuffs with about 14 agents around him. The local Arkansas attorney is eager to indict him. But she then gets a call from Gov. Clinton. After taking the call, she walks outside and Seal, who is caught with enough evidence to put him away forever, is set free. The implication in Liman's film is that Clinton then referred Seal to the White House and Vice President George H.W. Bush's drug task force.

In reality, Seal was indicted – there was no saving phone call from Clinton or anyone else. After the indictment, it was Seal who approached the DEA offering to turn informant in return for a suspended sentence. His offer was refused and Seal was convicted and faced ten years in prison.

### **The Danger Zone**

At this point, some have surmised that he got some advice from the CIA, for he initiated a call to Vice President Bush's task force on drugs. (See St. Clair and Cockburn) From there, he was referred to the Miami office of the DEA and worked with two agents for the rest of his life: Ernst Jacobsen and Robert Joura, who are not in Liman's film.

There is little doubt that Seal was one of the most important, if not the most important, informer the DEA ever had. They thought so highly of him that they paid him \$800,000 per year. To use just one example among many: it was Seal's work that helped convict Norman Saunders, prime minister of the Turks and Caicos Islands, on drug smuggling charges.

The most famous incident Seal was involved in was a sting operation against the Sandinista government. The idea was to show that somehow the Sandinistas were involved with transshipping drugs through Nicaragua for the Medellin Cartel. Seal had his plane outfitted with automatic cameras as he unloaded a large cargo of cocaine on a Nicaragua runway.

The camera took rather grainy and indistinct photos that appeared to show Seal, Pablo Escobar and a man named Frederico Vaughan, who was allegedly an assistant to a Sandinista cabinet member. In reality, the delivery did not take place at a military base as the Reagan administration claimed, and Vaughan was, to say the least, a very mysterious personage. Some even suspected he was a CIA double agent, in part, because he was calling his American drug contacts from a phone located at either the U.S. or other Western embassies. (Later, the DEA acknowledged that – except for this flight flown into and out of Nicaragua by the U.S. government – there were no other known cases of illicit drugs transiting Nicaragua during the Sandinista reign in the 1980s.)

### **Blowing Seal's Cover**

But the incident capsized Seal's life because the White House was so eager to smear the Sandinistas with this ersatz proof of their supposed drug dealing with the Medellin Cartel that the information was promptly leaked to the media with a front page story in The Washington Times in July 1984. The Reagan administration milked the story for all it was worth, with President Reagan going on TV to accuse top Sandinistas of "exporting drugs to poison our youth." But this exposure ended Seal's value as a DEA informant while also making him a marked man in the eyes of the Medellin Cartel.

In this reviewer's opinion, the film does not do a good job spelling out how this all played out, and its full range of dark overtones. Many have long suspected that the man who leaked the information about Seal's Sandinista sting was White House aide Oliver North, who was overseeing the Contra war.

Liman depicts that Sandinista-sting as part of Seal's downfall, but discounts the machinations around Seal's two trials, one in Florida and one in Louisiana. By this time, Seal had begun to distrust the DEA and had expressed his doubts in a filmed video segment on a Baton Rouge television station.

The judge in the Florida Operation Screamer case cooperated with the DEA and those charges were suspended. But there was a second case in Louisiana, which in keeping with the film's fable, Liman has taking place in Arkansas. This charge was over marijuana importation, and some believe it was manufactured by Louisiana authorities with the help of a dubious witness.

Seal had decided to plead guilty, thinking the judge would go along with the precedent in Florida and simply suspend the charges. But the smuggler was taken by surprise when Judge Frank Palazola sentenced him to probation, a \$35,000 fine, and six months of community service at a local Salvation Army in Baton Rouge. The judge also refused to let Seal have armed bodyguards. And the judge refused to let Seal secretly serve the community service out of state. (See the

1986 special, *Murder of a Witness*, WBRZ TV, Baton Rouge)

This decision, which made Seal in his own words a “clay pigeon,” plus the failure of Attorney General Edwin Meese to intercede has caused decades of controversy over Seal’s murder. In keeping with its comic overtones, the film does not raise any of these serious issues.

### **A Fast-Paced Adventure**

Despite these shortcomings, the film is exceptionally well made. Liman did a lot of thinking beforehand, because although the picture is fast paced, there is little, if any, wasted motion. This extends all the way down to brief animated sequences with maps to demonstrate American foreign policy in Central America.

In addition to the animated sequences, the film skillfully inserts documentary news scenes of Ronald and Nancy Reagan preaching “Just say not to drugs”; stop action shots of Seal trying to find hiding places for his accumulating cash; and a steadicam scene, the camera arcing widely around Seal as he is introduced by the CIA to the empty expanse of Mena.

All of these devices – and more – are edited with a sure, supple hand into a kind of waterfall of forward motion. I don’t think sitting through this film could bore anyone. As pure entertainment, taken on its own terms, it’s as tasty as eating your favorite candy bar.

And that description fits the performance of Tom Cruise. The first time I saw Cruise was in his second film in 1981, *Taps*, a leaden-footed pretentious dud of a film about a student rebellion at a military academy. But I waited around past the end to catch the casting list because I was impressed with his performance in the film’s most unattractive role as a psychotic sniper. Cruise took possession of that part, to the point that he overshadowed the likes of Sean Penn and George C. Scott.

As far as acting goes, Cruise’s subsequent films didn’t fulfill that promise, but his talent peaked out again in 1989 for Oliver Stone in *Born on the Fourth of July*. Since then, his career has largely been a series of actor-star turns, which are heavier in the star quality than the acting.

In this film, unlike in the World War II drama *Valkyrie*, for example, he does try to capture his character’s voice and its southern twang. He gives us Seal’s good nature and some humor, but that’s about it. Seal was a complex, multi-layered individual who was very hard to figure out because he was so involved in deception, even self-deception. Cruise only gets the surface.

It’s instructive to compare *American Made* with an earlier film version of Seal’s

life, a 1991 HBO television film entitled *Doublecrossed*. That film did not have anywhere near the budget that Liman and Cruise had. But director Roger Young's effort is a much more straightforward telling of Seal's smuggling career than *American Made*. It includes many important points and personages that the current film leaves out. It does not have the sheer entertainment value this film has, but one understands the complexities of Seal's life more than one does with *American Made*. And one can at least ask the proper questions about his assassination.

### **Hiding the Contra Crimes**

At the end of the *American Made*, we see that Doug Liman dedicated the picture to his deceased father, attorney Arthur Liman, who was the Senate's chief counsel to the 1987 Iran/Contra investigation, which is probably why, near the end, the CIA character Schafer suggests to his CIA boss that the way to get funding for the Contras is to sell arms to Iran. At the very end, the film notes the plane that took Seal out of Nicaragua after the staged drug sting was the same plane that was shot down over Nicaragua on Oct. 5, 1986, exposing Oliver North's illegal Contra supply operation.

During those congressional Iran-Contra hearings, a protester screamed for the panel to "ask about the cocaine" before being dragged out of the proceedings. Unfortunately, neither Arthur Liman nor the members of Congress did, leaving the issue of the Reagan administration's collusion with cocaine traffickers largely unexplored.

Despite news articles by The Associated Press and the investigation by Sen. Kerry, the Contra-Cocaine scandal became one of Official Washington's dirty secrets treated by the mainstream news media as a kooky conspiracy theory. The story was finally revived by journalist Gary Webb of the San Jose Mercury News in 1996, but the result was a fierce counterattack against Webb spearheaded by The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times, resulting in the destruction of Webb's career and contributing to his eventual suicide in 2004. But one result was a belated admission by the CIA's inspector general that, indeed, CIA officers were aware of the Contras' cocaine trafficking but chose to look the other way and protect these CIA clients. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Sordid Contra-Cocaine Saga.](#)"]

Doug Liman tips his hat to this disturbing reality ever so briefly when he has the Contra political leader Adolfo Calero meet with Seal and Ochoa and mention Calero's role in drug smuggling for the Contras.

If you want to be entertained about a serious subject then *American Made* is your film. If you wish to learn something more definitive about Barry Seal,

see *Doublecrossed*. If you want to be educated about the whole sordid Reagan intervention in Central American, rent *Kill the Messenger*, the fine film that Jeremy Renner made about the tragedy that befell Gary Webb when he dared revive the ugly story of the CIA's complicity in the Contra-cocaine network.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is *Reclaiming Parkland*.**

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## The Politics of Sexual Harassment and War

The Harvey Weinstein scandal has forced the ugly practice of sexual harassment into the public square, where private companies have proven to be more responsive than the political world, reports David Marks.

By David Marks

The multiple sexual-harassment allegations against movie producer Harvey Weinstein have sent tremors around the world with newly expressed outrage toward the machismo atmosphere of the film industry and other work environments, including the news business and politics.

Clearly, the problem reaches far beyond Weinstein. Allegations and lawsuits filed against Donald Trump mirror the worst of Weinstein's behavior. Trump's hot-mic 2004 interview with "Access Hollywood" surfaced during last year's campaign, with him bragging about his ability to get away with aggressively kissing women and grabbing their genitals: "When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. ... Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything."

But even that wasn't enough to keep 63 million Americans from voting for Trump and putting him in the White House, although that was in part because many voters saw no moral superiority in Hillary Clinton, who not only disparaged women who complained about sexual harassment by her husband but who enthusiastically embraced war as a ready option for U.S. foreign policy.

Yet, while the political careers of Donald Trump and Bill Clinton survived disclosures of their predatory behavior, Weinstein's movie empire quickly crumbled after a number of women came forward with accounts of how he used his power to gain sexual favors. Several prominent news personalities, from Bill O'Reilly at Fox to Michael Oreskes at NPR, have lost their jobs, too, amid other

sexual harassment complaints.

Oddly, it seems that private industry is now more sensitive to allegations of this kind of sexual misconduct than the American political process, possibly because of the potential legal liabilities for companies as well as the organized partisan defenses that are immediately raised around the highest-level national leaders even when there's clear evidence of their predatory behavior. While it's true that some members of Congress have lost seats because of sexual misconduct, the situation has been different at the presidential level.

After Trump's "grab 'em by the pussy" boast became public, his Republican "base" rallied around him and prevented the expected collapse of his poll numbers. Similarly, in the 1990s, when Democratic presidential candidate (and later President) Bill Clinton was accused of predatory sexual activity with female subordinates and other vulnerable women, loyal Democrats sprang to his defense and challenged the veracity of the accusers. The Clinton team complained about "cash for trash."

### **'David Cop-a-Feel'**

Even earlier, rumors about President George H.W. Bush's extramarital activities and a fondness for groping unsuspecting women were brushed aside as yellow journalism that should not be taken seriously about so honorable a man. Only recently – in the wake of the Weinstein scandal and more women denouncing boorish male behavior – was Bush pushed into apologizing for inappropriately grabbing women as the punch line to a joke about who his favorite magician is: "David Cop-a-Feel!"

It seems that the most powerful leaders, both in industry and government, are often the most aggressive predators; both on a personal level and with how they affect the social fabric of the country through their professional actions. There are parallels between the pattern of sexual harassment, in which the historical tendency was for women to stay silent, and the U.S. government's military assaults abroad, which most Americans tolerate as somehow necessary or inevitable.

President George W. Bush inflicted "shock and awe" on Iraq, touching off the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and the destabilization of the entire region yet he is now treated as a respected elder statesman when he criticizes Trump's behavior. President Barack Obama authorized military operations in seven countries, including interventions in Libya and Syria that contributed to other humanitarian disasters, but Obama faced little public outrage among the American people for these actions.

President Trump appears to have learned from his predecessors that he can boost his sagging poll numbers by threatening and launching military strikes. He'll also win some grudging acceptance from the elites of Official Washington who never seem to see a potential war that they don't want to send the U.S. military to fight. In April, Trump got some brief relief from the Russia-gate "scandal" after he ordered the firing of 59 Tomahawk missiles at Syria in a hasty reaction to a dubious chemical weapons incident that he blamed on the Syrian government.

Trump played the tough-guy again on Sept. 19 with a bellicose speech to the United Nations General Assembly, threatening hostilities against North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela and boasting about his plan to escalate the 16-year-old war in Afghanistan. Despite America's recent history of aggressive war – not to mention historical crimes of genocide, slavery and imperialism – many Americans still profess how morally superior we are to other people.

Any American who dares challenge this "American exceptionalism" can expect to face ostracism much as women who complained about unwanted sexual advances by male bosses in years past could expect to be categorized as troublesome and unfit for professional advancement. That could be especially true in a highly subjective profession like acting.

Yet, whether it's Hollywood's "casting couch" or Official Washington's actions on the international "stage," it remains difficult to stop predatory behavior. When a culture of male dominance looms in every direction, it is a rare individual who will defy convention – even a morally bereft convention – and do what's right. That's especially true when the almost certain result will be loss of friends and loss of income. We have seen plenty of cases in which even women will make excuses for male misconduct, whether involving sex or war, as Hillary Clinton has shown.

But a culture that tolerates various forms of abusive and predatory behavior, whether it's silence amid a culture of sexual harassment or blind patriotism toward dubiously justified wars, has lost its moral compass. A democracy that in principle embraces the equality of all with everyone possessing unalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, would have no tolerance for predators of any kind, whether at home, in the workplace or in warfare across the globe.

**David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC, including Nazi Gold, on the role of Switzerland in WWII and biographies of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Sinatra.**

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# Ignoring Today's 'Great Hungers'

The U.S. government presents itself as the beneficent superpower, but the reality of Washington's endless wars and lavish spending on bombs – while millions face starvation and disease – suggest a different reality, as Kathy Kelly notes.

By Kathy Kelly

Earlier this year, the Sisters of St. Brigid invited me to speak at their Feile Bride celebration in Kildare, Ireland. The theme of the gathering was: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak."

The Sisters have embraced numerous projects to protect the environment, welcome refugees, and nonviolently resist wars. I felt grateful to reconnect with people who so vigorously opposed any Irish support for U.S. military wars in Iraq. They had also campaigned to end the economic sanctions against Iraq, knowing that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children suffered and died for lack of food, medicine and clean water.

This year, the Sisters asked me to first meet with local teenagers who would commemorate another time of starvation imposed by an imperial power. Joe Murray, who heads Action from Ireland (Afri), arranged for a class from Dublin's Beneavin De La Salle College to join an Irish historian in a field adjacent to the Dunshaughlin work house on the outskirts of Dublin.

Such workhouses dot the landscape of Ireland and England. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, during the famine years, they were dreaded places. People who went there knew they were near the brink of death due to hunger, disease, and dire poverty. Ominously, behind the workhouse lay the graveyard.

The young men couldn't help poking a bit of fun, at first; what in the world were they doing out in a field next to an imposing building, their feet already soaked in the wet grass as a light rain fell? They soon became quite attentive.

We learned that the Dunshaughlin workhouse had opened in May of 1841. It could accommodate 400 inmates. During the famine years, many hundreds of people were crowded in the stone building in dreadful conditions.

An estimated one million people died during a famine that began because of blighted potato crops but became an "artificial famine" because Ireland's British occupiers lacked the political will to justly distribute resources and food. Approximately one million Irish people who could no longer feed themselves

and subsist on the land emigrated to places like the U.S. But seeking refuge wasn't an option for those who couldn't afford the passage.

Evicted by landowners, desperate people arrived at workhouses like the one we were visiting. Our guide read us the names of people from the surrounding area who had been buried in a mass grave behind the workhouse, their bodies unidentified. They were victims of what the Irish call "Greta Mor"—"The Great Hunger." It was recently, as I tried to better understand the migration of desperate and starving people now crossing from East Africa into Yemen, that I began to realize how great the hunger was.

## **A Global Holocaust**

During that same period as the Irish famine – in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century – there were 30 million people, possibly 50 million, dying of famine in northern China, India, Brazil and the Maghreb. The terrible suffering of these unknown people, whose plight never made it into the history books, was a sharp reminder to me of Western exceptionalism.

As researched and described in Mike Davis's book, *The Late Victorian Holocaust*, El Nino and La Nina climate changes caused massive crop failures. What food could be harvested was often sent abroad. Railroad infrastructure could have been used to send food to people dying of hunger, but wealthier people chose to ignore the plight of the starving. The Great Hunger, fueled by bigotry and greed, had been greater than any of its victims knew.

And now, few in the prosperous West are aware of the terror faced by people in South Sudan, Somalia, northeast Nigeria, northern Kenya and Yemen. Millions of people cannot feed themselves or find potable water.

Countries in Africa, which the U.S. has helped destabilize such as Somalia, are convulsed in fighting which exacerbates effects of drought and drives helpless civilians toward points of hoped-for refuge. Many have chosen a path of escape through the famine-torn country of Yemen.

But the U.S. has been helping a Saudi-led coalition to blockade and bomb Yemen since March of 2015. Sudanese fighters aligned with Saudi Arabia have been taking over cities along the Yemeni coast, heading northward. People trying to escape famine find themselves trapped amid vicious air and ground attacks.

In March 2017, Stephen O'Brien, head of the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, traveled to Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Northern Kenya. Since that trip, he has repeatedly begged the U.N. Security Council to help end the fighting and prevent conflict-driven famine conditions.

Regarding Yemen, he wrote, in a July 12, 2017 statement to the U.N. Security Council that: “Seven million people, including 2.3 million malnourished (500,000 severely malnourished) children under the age of five, are on the cusp of famine, vulnerable to disease and ultimately at risk of a slow and painful death. Nearly 16 million people do not have access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene, and more than 320,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported in all of the country’s governorates bar one.” This number has since risen to 850,000.

## **Spreading Famine**

Ben Ehrenreich describes famine conditions along what the Israeli theorist Eyal Weizman calls the “conflict shoreline,” an expanding band of climate change-induced desertification that stretches through the Sahel and across the African continent before leaping the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. He notes that this vast territory, once the site of fierce resistance to colonial incursions, is now paying the heaviest price, in disastrous climate conditions, for the wealth of the industrialized north. As the deserts spread south, ever more dire conflicts can be expected to erupt, causing more people to flee.

Of a drought-stricken area of Somaliland, Ehrenreich writes: “People were calling this drought *sima*, ‘the leveller,’ because it affected all of the clans stretching across Somaliland and into Ethiopia to the west and Kenya to the south.”

“The women’s stories were almost all the same,” writes Ehrenreich, “differing only in the age and number of children sick, the number of animals they had lost and the number that survived. Hodan Ismail had lost everything. She left her husband’s village to bring her children here, where her mother lived, ‘to save them,’ she said. ‘When I got there, I saw that she had nothing either.’ The river and streams, their usual source of drinking water, had gone dry and they had no option but to drink from a shallow well at the edge of town. The water was making all the children sick.”

In 1993, at the Rio de Janeiro “Earth Summit,” delegates conveying the views of then-President George H.W. Bush, voiced a refrain of the statement, “the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation.” U.S. demands of the summit incalculably restricted the changes to which it might have led.

Representing President Bill Clinton six years later, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defended planned bombardment of Iraq, saying “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.”

## **A Downward Spiral**

There is danger that must be recognized. The danger is real and the danger is spreading. Violence spreads the famine, and the famine will spread violence.

I find myself repulsed by assertions voicing U.S. exceptionalism, yet my own study and focus often omits histories and present realities which simply must be understood if we are to recognize the traumas our world faces.

In relation to conflict-driven famines, it becomes even more imperative to resist the U.S. government's allocation of \$700 billion to the Department of Defense. In the U.S., our violence, and our delusions of being indispensable stem from accepting a belief that our "way of life" is non-negotiable.

Growing inequality, protected by menacing arsenals, paves a path to the graveyard: It is not a "way of life." We still could acquire a great hunger: a transforming hunger to share justice with our planetary neighbors. We could shed familiar privileges and search for communal tools to preserve us from indifferent wealth and voracious imperial power.

We could embrace the theme of the Irish sisters at their Feile Bride gathering: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak" and then choose action-based initiatives to share our abundance and lay aside, forever, the futility of war.

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