

America's Complicated Relationship with International Human Rights Norms

The U.S. has long had a love-hate relationship with international norms, having taken the lead in forging landmark human rights agreements while brushing off complaints over its own abuses, Nat Parry explains.

By Nat Parry

American exceptionalism – the notion that the United States is unique among nations due to its traditions of democracy and liberty – has always been the foundation of the nation's claim to moral leadership. As a country founded on ideals that are today recognized the world over as fundamental principles of international norms, the U.S. utilizes its image as a human rights champion to rally nations to its cause and assert its hegemony around the world.

Regardless of political persuasion, Americans proudly cite the influence that the founding principles laid out in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights have had on the rest of the world, with 80 percent agreeing that “the United States’ history and its Constitution ... makes it the greatest country in the world” in a 2010 Gallup poll. Respecting these principles on the international level has long been considered a requisite for U.S. credibility and leadership on the global stage.



Much of this sentiment is an enduring testament to U.S. leadership following World War II, a period in which international legal principles of human rights and non-aggression were established, as well as the four decades of the Cold War, in which the “free world,” led by the United States, faced off against “totalitarian communism,” led by the Soviet Union.

During those years of open hostility between East and West, the U.S. could point not only to its founding documents as proof of its commitment to universal principles of freedom and individual dignity, but also to the central role it played in shaping the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Fourteen Points and Four Freedoms

While the U.S. didn't fully assume its position as moral arbiter until after the Allied victory in World War II, its role in these matters had already been well-established with Woodrow Wilson's professed internationalism. As expressed in his famous "Fourteen Points," which sought to establish a rationale for U.S. intervention in the First World War, the United States would press to establish an international system based on "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view."

Wilson had seen the First World War as evidence that the old international system established by the Europeans had failed to provide necessary security and stability, and sought to replace the old diplomacy with one based on cooperation, communication, liberalism and democracy.

Speaking on this issue throughout his presidency, he consistently advocated human rights and principles of self-determination.

"Do you never stop to reflect just what it is that America stands for?" Wilson asked in 1916. "If she stands for one thing more than another, it is for the sovereignty of self-governing peoples, and her example, her assistance, her encouragement, has thrilled two continents in this Western World with all the fine impulses which have built up human liberty on both sides of the water."

These principles were expanded upon by subsequent American administrations, and especially by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In his January 1941 State of the Union address, Roosevelt spelled out what he called "the Four Freedoms," which later became the foundation for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"In the future days," he said, "which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms."

He continued: "The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way – everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want – which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear – which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor – anywhere in the world."

Following the Allied victory over the Axis powers, FDR's widow Eleanor Roosevelt took her late husband's vision and attempted to make it a reality for the world

through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Chairing the Commission on Human Rights, a standing body of the United Nations constituted to undertake the work of preparing what was originally conceived as an International Bill of Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt pushed to ensure that FDR's "four freedoms" were reflected in the document.

Under Roosevelt's leadership, the Commission decided that the declaration should be a brief and inspirational document accessible by common people, and envisioned it to serve as the foundation for the remainder of an international bill of human rights. It thus avoided the more difficult problems that had to be addressed when the binding treaty came up for consideration, namely what role the state should have in enforcing rights within its territory, and whether the mode of enforcing civil and political rights should be different from that for economic and social rights.

As stated in its preamble, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction."

Much of the language in the Declaration echoed language contained in the founding documents of the United States, including the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Whereas the U.S. Declaration of Independence articulates the "unalienable right" to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

While the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits Congress from "abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble," the UDHR provides that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression" and that "everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association." Whereas the Eighth Amendment forbids "cruel and unusual punishments," the UDHR bars "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Although the United States made it clear that it could not support a legally binding UDHR, it readily endorsed the final document as a political declaration, one of 48 nations to vote in favor of the Declaration at the UN General Assembly in December 1948. With no votes in opposition and just eight abstentions – mostly from Eastern Bloc countries including the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and

Poland – the Declaration served as a defining characteristic of the contrast between East and West in those early days of the Cold War.

A Small Problem

There was of course one small problem. Despite the United States formally embracing “universal human rights” on the international stage, its respect for those rights domestically was considerably lacking. Throughout the country and especially in the South, African Americans endured racist segregation policies and were routinely denied the right to vote and other civil rights.

Lynching, while not as pervasive as its heyday earlier in the century, was still a major problem, with dozens of blacks murdered with impunity by white lynch mobs throughout the 1940s.

In 1947, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed an “Appeal to the World” petition in the United Nations that denounced racial discrimination in the United States as “not only indefensible but barbaric.” The American failure to respect human rights at home had international implications, argued the NAACP. “The disenfranchisement of the American Negro makes the functioning of all democracy in the nation difficult; and as democracy fails to function in the leading democracy in the world, it fails the world,” read the NAACP petition.

The NAACP’s appeal provoked an international sensation, with the organization flooded with requests for copies of the document from the governments of the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the Union of South Africa, among others. According to NAACP chief Walter White, “It was manifest that they were pleased to have documentary proof that the United States did not practice what it preached about freedom and democracy.”

The U.S. delegation to the UN refused to introduce the NAACP petition to the United Nations, fearing that it would cause further international embarrassment. The Soviet Union, however, recommended that the NAACP’s claims be investigated. The Commission on Human Rights rejected that proposal on December 4, 1947, and no further official action was taken.

According to W.E.B. DuBois, the principle author of the petition, the United States “refused willingly to allow any other nation to bring this matter up.” If it had been introduced to the General Assembly, Eleanor Roosevelt would have “probably resign[ed] from the United Nations delegation,” said DuBois. This was despite the fact that she was a member of the NAACP board of directors. While Roosevelt’s commitment to racial justice may have been strong, it was clear that

her embarrassment over the U.S.'s failures to respect the "four freedoms" at home was even stronger.

It was in this context that the United States endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. That year also marked the beginning of tentative steps the U.S. began making towards respecting basic rights within its borders.

On July 26, 1948, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which ended segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces. The next month, the Democratic Party included a civil rights plank in its platform. "The Democratic Party," read the platform adopted at the 1948 Democratic National Convention, "commits itself to continuing its efforts to eradicate all racial, religious and economic discrimination."

While there was clearly a domestic motivation for embracing the cause of civil rights (presidential adviser Clark Clifford had presented a lengthy memorandum to President Truman in 1947 which argued that the African-American vote was paramount for winning the 1948 election), there was also a strong international component to the Democratic Party's support for civil rights.

UN Bragging Rights

In addition to its civil rights plank, the 1948 Democratic platform included a wholehearted endorsement of the recently established United Nations, and expressed "the conviction that the destiny of the United States is to provide leadership in the world toward a realization of the Four Freedoms." But the Democrats recognized that the U.S. had a long way to go to realizing those four freedoms at home.

"We call upon the Congress to support our President in guaranteeing these basic and fundamental American Principles: (1) the right of full and equal political participation; (2) the right to equal opportunity of employment; (3) the right of security of person; (4) and the right of equal treatment in the service and defense of our nation," the platform stated.

The Democratic platform also proudly pointed to the accomplishment of organizing the United Nations: "Under the leadership of a Democratic President and his Secretary of State, the United Nations was organized at San Francisco. The charter was ratified by an overwhelming vote of the Senate. We support the United Nations fully and we pledge our whole-hearted aid toward its growth and development."

For its part, the Republican Party also embraced the fledgling UN, stating in its 1948 platform that "Our foreign policy is dedicated to preserving a free America in a free world of free men. This calls for strengthening the United

Nations and primary recognition of America's self-interest in the liberty of other peoples." While the Democrats pointed to the president's leadership for helping establish the UN, the Republicans also wanted to make sure that they received due credit. Their party platform listed "a fostered United Nations" as one of the main accomplishments of the Republican Congress, despite "frequent obstruction from the Executive Branch."

As "the world's best hope" for "collective security against aggression and in behalf of justice and freedom," the Republicans pledged to "support the United Nations in this direction, striving to strengthen it and promote its effective evolution and use." The UN "should progressively establish international law," said the Republicans, "be freed of any veto in the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and be provided with the armed forces contemplated by the Charter."

As a major component of the progressive establishment of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was to be codified into legally binding treaties.

Although the Declaration was endorsed by the U.S. and 47 other countries in December 1948, the two corresponding legally binding covenants to define the obligations of each state required another two decades of work. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights were ready for ratification in 1966, some 18 years later.

The United States became a signatory to both covenants on Oct. 5, 1977. It ratified the ICCPR on June 8, 1992, but to this date has not fully subscribed to the ICESCR, one of just seven countries in the world not to ratify the agreement.

Cold War Context

Throughout those years, the U.S. was engaged in an intense ideological battle with the Soviet Union, in which human rights were used as a rhetorical weapon by each side against the other. While American leaders chastised the Soviets for their failures to respect fundamental liberties, including freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of association, the USSR could readily point to the blatant institutionalized racism that plagued American society.

Racial discrimination belied America's rhetoric about democracy and equality, making the U.S. cause of freedom look like a sham especially to people of color in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The Soviets enthusiastically exploited the issue, imbuing their anti-capitalist propaganda with tales of horrors suffered

by African Americans.

So, in 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional and ordered that school integration proceed "with all deliberate speed," the case was trumpeted by the American establishment as evidence of the great strides being made toward full equality for all citizens.

At times, racial discrimination in the United States caused such international embarrassment that the State Department would pressure the White House to intervene. In 1957, for example, when a Federal District Court ordered the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, to allow African-American students to attend, Governor Orval Faubus declared that he would refuse to comply with the decree. Several hundred angry and belligerent whites confronted nine African-American students who attempted to enter the school on September 4, 1957.

The National Guard, called up by Faubus, blocked the students from entering the school. Pictures of the angry mob, the frightened African-American students, and armed National Guardsmen were seen all over the world, and the Soviets eagerly seized on the propaganda.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles informed President Dwight Eisenhower that the Little Rock incident was damaging the United States' credibility abroad, and could cost the U.S. the support of other nations in the UN.

Eisenhower attempted to negotiate a settlement with Faubus, but when that failed, he sent in federal troops. The nine African-American students were finally allowed to attend Central High under the armed protection of the United States military.

The developing international human rights project led to deep ideological divisions in the United States, with some conservatives, especially in the South, concerned that the national government would use international human rights law to promote national civil rights reforms. Arguing that the civil rights question was beyond the scope of Congress's authority and concerned about the constitutional power of treaties, conservatives launched several attempts in the 1950s to amend the U.S. Constitution to limit the government's ability to subscribe to treaties.

Those failed efforts to amend the Constitution were based on the premise that the federal government had no say in the matters of states and localities in regulating race relations, and that since Article VI of the Constitution provides treaties the status of "supreme law of the land," the U.S. would find itself subjected to the whims of the international community on these

matters.

Those fears would prove unfounded, since the U.S. didn't formally subscribe to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights until 1977, long after most of the relevant domestic civil rights legislation had been adopted, but the right-wing opposition to U.S. submission to international norms had become thoroughly established as American conservative orthodoxy.

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'Hostiles' and Hollywood's Untold Story

Hollywood's recent attempt to depict Frontier life captures the reality of "hostiles" shooting various weapons at one another, but the real history is more interesting, Jada Thacker explains in this essay.

By Jada Thacker

A theatrical poster for the recent American Western movie "Hostiles" depicts its principal characters – a Frontier widow, a hardboiled Indian fighter, and an Indian chief – with a helpful blurb stating the story's theme with the subtlety of a striking rattlesnake: "We are all hostiles."

Some critics think the movie somehow ought to have been a different one – that it should have included a bit more of this, or a bit less of that...whatever. Maybe they have a point. Though it hardly seems fair to ding "Hostiles" for being an imperfect example of the ideal Frontier fantasy.

But it is fair to criticize a movie for being a perfect example of a movie genre that consistently ignores the most essential themes of the American Frontier. "Hostiles" succeeds brilliantly as the latest addition to a very long list of movies that focus laser-like attention on hostile Frontier characters, rather than on the consequences of Frontier hostility.

The American Frontier was not, as Hollywood formerly portrayed it, merely a canvas background prop for a violent soap box drama starring Cowboys & Indians – or, as more recently re-imagined, an ethnic melodrama featuring white Bad Guys versus Noble Indian resistance.

Nor can the American Frontier be considered a particularly hostile place without expunging from history the slaughter-grounds of Cannae, Verdun, Stalingrad, or

even America's own Gettysburg – each of which produced more bloated corpses than any number of Wild Wests. In an encyclopedia of human violence, the massacres at the Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee would be relegated to a footnote.

Yet, the significance of the American Frontier endures. William Faulkner was not referring to the Frontier experience when he said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past," but he was right.

Unacknowledged by the silver screen, contemporary America remains as hostile as it ever was to the Frontier dwellers of tee-pees, log cabins, wigwams, or army outposts. Every American today who rages at corrupt and incompetent government, who counts out their pennies for rent or mortgage, or who despairs of the growth-driven, mechanized rape of the American landscape can thank the American Frontier experience for their trouble.

Frontier Anarchy

No government existed in North America at the time of European contact. The societies that pre-existed there lived in a condition of anarchy.

Although the term "anarchy" is used casually to denote a condition of chaos, it literally refers only to a society without government (from the Greek: a [without] + *archy* [rulers]). Anarchy is the *voluntary* self-organization of people without the use of authoritative force. Thus, anarchy does not denote an absence of social order, but only the absence of a *forcible* social order.

Anarchy is not an exception to human organization, but the rule – if we can forgive the pun. All non-governmental organizations are anarchic, voluntary associations: sports teams, business entities, civic groups, church congregations, trade unions, symphony orchestras, and marriages included. American Indian societies had thrived just so without authoritative force for some 20,000 years before Europeans appeared to set things straight.

Immediately upon European arrival, the Frontier materialized as a lethal No Man's Land where the alien hierarchical order of government clashed catastrophically with indigenous anarchy. At issue was not just the survival of hostile individuals, but the survival of fundamentally hostile political cultures.

Unlike anarchy, government has nothing to do with the voluntary self-organization of society. Nobody ever volunteers to be arrested, pay fines, go to jail, or be executed – or pay the taxes necessary for doing so to others. And no such elements of coercion existed in North America prior to the importation of European authoritarianism. (When so-called "democratic government" later purported to banish British tyranny, it made certain to keep prisons and capital

punishment intact.)

Moviegoers, no less than movie-makers and history textbooks, blithely assume that Indian leaders wielded the same authority as did government officials in white society. Not so. Indians had no officials because they had no offices. Indian chiefs led by example and inspiration only; they possessed no more coercive ability than a scoutmaster or a captain of a football team.

In any event, Indians had no written laws that begged enforcement. Anarchic political culture does not depend on the enforcement of rules and regulations, but upon free consent to them. A Wikipedia article summarizes the Abenaki people's consensual customs:

"Group decision-making was done by a consensus method. The idea is that every group (family, band, tribe, etc.) must have equal say, so each group would elect a spokesperson. Each smaller group would send the decision of the group to an impartial facilitator.

"If there was a disagreement, the facilitator would tell the groups to discuss again. In addition to the debates, there was a goal of total understanding for all members. If there was not total understanding, the debate would stop until there was understanding.

"When the tribal members debate issues, they consider the Three Truths: Peace: Is this preserved? Righteousness: Is it moral? Power: Does it preserve the integrity of the group?

"These truths guide all group deliberations, and the goal is to reach a consensus. If there is no consensus for change, they agree to keep the status quo."

Not all Indian self-organization was this formal, but it all was intensely democratic. The hierarchical European political culture which ruled by indelible law, dictated by police and military forces and financed by forcible taxation, decidedly was not.

The collision of anarchy and government in America was not a melodramatic struggle between "good" and "evil." But it did involve a spiritual choice – between a circle and a pyramid.

The Indian way was represented by a circle or hoop, symbolized physically by the Puebloan people's *kiva*, a circular, ceremonial meeting place. The Lakota and other tribes conceived of universal order as a hoop. The symbolic meaning is one of balance and equality, with each member of society located equidistant from a common core. Indian leaders did not occupy the position of "top dog" or "king of

the hill” but as central mediators among equals.

In contrast, all civilizations – including the white civilization that hovered in the wings of the Frontier stage – are pyramidal structures. In pyramidal culture, authority resides at the apex and flows only downward, forcibly if necessary. While pyramidal culture was not unique to the colonizing European culture of the day – Ancient Egyptians and Aztecs expressed their pyramidal culture in stone, just as current organization charts express our pyramids on paper – it was utterly foreign to the Indian consciousness.

So-called “Indian Nations” were conceptual fallacies that did not in fact exist. Even the famous Iroquois League, or Haudenosaunee, was not an example of “Indian government” and certainly not of pyramidal structure. It was a decentralized, voluntary confederacy – a hooplike “League of Peace” (ca.1140 – 1784) of its six constituent tribes – not a hierarchical command-and-control structure that dominated Indian society.

Frontier Economics

Lest the Right-Libertarians among us applaud too loudly the absence of Big Government (or any government) in Indian society, the central conflict between white and red men (a term Indians used to describe themselves) was a contest between individualistic vs. collective property rights.

To be clear, Indians had a keen sense of territorial sovereignty. But this did not include personal property ownership, which was both unknown and an anathema to the Indian way. T.R Fehrenbach, a notable commentator on Frontier culture and author of the encyclopedic *Comanches: The History of a People*, put it simply:

“Hypocrisy was perhaps inevitable in a people [whites] who convinced themselves that they were creating something new in the New World, while actually carrying out the most primordial form of conquest.”

But then he adds:

“Amerindians resisted all sincere imitation of their conquerors. Broken warriors refused to become economic men, to accept the concept of private property or the discipline of incessant labor.”

Quite frankly, the Comanche people (the *Nermernuh*) of whom Fehrenbach spoke were without doubt the most rapacious Indians that whites ever encountered. (Other Indians were intimidated by them, too, and for good reason, a point “Hostiles” duly observes.) Alongside hunting buffalo, raiding and stealing constituted the *raison d’etre* of their predatory society.

In fact, hostility and theft generally characterized Indian between-group behavior both before and after European arrival; they did not need the presence of whites to justify their elevation of lethal larceny to an art form. By the same token, European pioneers needed no particular excuse to exterminate Indians, or each another, while committing Grand Theft Continent.

Ironically, armed robbery was the primary economic activity whites and Indians shared in common. "Making a killing" by "hostile takeovers" of others' property is not a new pony trick invented by corporate raiders.

But the ruthless exploitation of one's own kinsmen and their resources is something else. This was as unthinkable to tribal peoples as it was premeditated by the bringers of civilization. The privatization of shared resources proved to be the profound and irreconcilable issue that separated the two peoples' concepts of economic justice.

Even in abject defeat, Indians never shared the whites' notion that the land's resources could, or should, be monopolized as private property. Since Indians perceived themselves essentially as children of the Earth, private ownership of land made no more sense to them than a child claiming to own its parents.

Unlike whites, the Indian concept of territory was communal. What they possessed in common they defended in common. Their view of communal property rights flowed naturally from their egalitarian culture, which did not tolerate landlords or economic class distinctions.

Within any Indian band, no privileged economic class could exist simply because there was no hierarchical power structure to sustain one. Since no Indian had the power to control the food supply of another, they were liberated at birth from the private monopolization of the "means of production." Possession of property was not justified by individual privilege but was their common birthright.

Thus, Indian society was devoid of both private property and the State. This is inconvenient news for today's Marxists and Right-Libertarians, alike.

Indian society repudiated the Right-Libertarian (anarcho-capitalist) notion that individual liberty requires the sanctity of private property ownership. No humans have exercised more individual liberty, nor owned less private property, than American Indians. Ownership of private property – which cannot and does not exist in the absence of government-sanctioned privilege – would not have conferred any liberty to Indians they did not already possess.

At the other end of the economic spectrum, Indian society also belied the Marxian notion that economics is determined to evolve from capitalism, through

socialism, to the ideal of communism. In reality, American Indians had beat Marx to the punchline 20,000 years before he set pen to paper.

In modern parlance, Indians were communists long before communism was cool. Contemporary Indians may disavow Marx as an industrial materialist with no respect for their spiritual way; that doesn't mean their people were not original communists, but only that they are not Marxists.

Marx was the latecomer – and then he got it all backwards. The American Frontier experience graphically demonstrated that humanity was not advancing toward a stateless, economic Utopia but was rooting out and laying waste to prehistoric communism wherever it still persisted.

All “isms” aside, reality reveals that whoever exercises effective ownership of a place rules it for their benefit. First and foremost, the Frontier was a place of a hostile and involuntary transfer of economic property from communal Indian ownership into the itchy palms of the private white owners who usually stood at the apex of an authoritarian pyramid.

Frontier Ecology

Pre-contact Indians lived in Stone Age societies. They possessed no metal implements, and the highest level of tool technology available to them employed only stone, bone, and clay.

In *Stone Age Economics*, Marshall Sahlins famously referred to Stone Age people as the “original affluent society” – not because they possessed much material wealth, but rather because they required so little and because their modest needs were so readily fulfilled when compared to the far greater requirements of us Moderns.

On the other hand, we would be mistaken to believe Indians were conscious “environmentalists.” Like any society, theirs took from nature what was needed for survival. Stone Age people had no reason to conserve that which was beyond their power to despoil.

As Sahlins “original affluence” implies, the trick to achieving environmental sustainability does not lie in *not taking* what is needed, but in *not needing to take* more than the environment can afford. “What the environment can afford” is known in ecology-speak as *carrying capacity*.

More formally stated, carrying capacity is the ability of the environment to sustain a given population of organisms indefinitely. “Sustain” usually means “to feed” and “indefinitely” simply means “with no end in sight.” Thus, a given number of organisms that continues to live (and reproduce) within the means of

its food-energy supply is “ecologically sustainable.”

In any event, “living sustainably” should not be conceptualized as “living in harmony with nature.” Nature is not a Barbershop Quartet. Nature is nothing if not a relentless, biological gang fight encompassing every organism on the planet. Each organism will lose the fight eventually, only to decompose into the itinerant molecules from which it was temporarily pasted together.

In fact, the natural *danse macabre* preserves ecological balance at the expense of harmony. Any cosmic harmony on the American Frontier, existed only under the influence of mezcal and peyote.

Moreover, just because an organism manages to survive individually does not imply that it lives in a sustainable society. Sustainability requires that a given *number* of organisms must be able to survive *indefinitely*. No environmental carrying capacity can sustain too many needy organisms, or even a few organisms that consume more food-energy than the environment can replace.

By any measure, however, American Indians had been living sustainably for millennia before Europeans waded ashore with their metallurgy, animal husbandry, intensive agriculture, literacy – and their marked tendency toward epidemic plagues, famine, industrialized warfare, and commercial-grade slavery. Upon arrival, the benighted invaders found practically nothing to remind them of their ecologically stressed homelands, which they had abandoned.

Nowhere in America did the colonizers find the privation, starvation, social depravity, and ecological wastage that characterized their soil-ravaged and forest-denuded homeland. Having accidentally stumbled upon a Stone Age population that lived sustainably, civilized Europeans set about at once to destroy it, as they had done at home. Indeed, had Europeans possessed a sustainable culture, they would not have needed to ditch their depleted continent in search of lootable resources elsewhere.

The supreme irony of the Old-World invasion was that Europeans never realized the “savages” inhabiting the Americas were practically identical to their own ancestors, though a couple of hundred generations removed. Ecologically, the European invasion did not represent the wave of the future, but a retrogression to their own Edenic past.

The environmental devastation that had taken several thousand years to accomplish in Europe was replicated in three centuries in the Americas. Such was the price and the speed of the “progress” achieved on the American Frontier.

Frontier Armageddon

The Frontier did not disappear just because the westward movement had run out of geographical space, its few Indian survivors having been herded into open-air prisons. Rather, the Frontier itself was destroyed by the westward migration of the Industrial Revolution – a truly monstrous creation of unrelenting factory toil, rolling on steel rails, powered by steam, and financed by perpetual human servitude to debt.

The terminal theme of the Frontier was not to be man's conquest of nature, or even of man's conquest of other men, but instead the industrial conquest of humanity. Metastasizing far beyond the "primordial form of conquest" of Indians by hypocritical whites, this final act of destruction was so complete that not even whites survived it.

A Stone Age world bound by blood kinship, loyalty, courage, intuition and revenge was within a single lifetime displaced by the depersonalized tyranny of contract law, freight schedules, time zones, taxes, universal debt and 'no trespassing' signs. Proud Indian warriors, brave Texas Rangers, indomitable pioneer sod-busters – all alike swept away only to be reincarnated by industrialized karma as sweatshop wage-slaves, coal mining troglodytes, and corporate lackeys.

After this cataclysm, we can rely on Hollywood to remind us now and again that the Frontier was where some hostile hombres ran amok shooting various weapons at one another – as if that is not the daily fare of modern-day America. The theatrical poster blurb "We are all hostiles" could be a permanent contemporary subtitle to American civilization.

But the American Frontier was not a blurb or a subtitle. It was a war that raged westward for 300 years before its place was lost to history. Yet, the ultimate loss of the Frontier was not *by* those fortunate few who once lived within the warzone; the greater loss was *to* those unfortunate multitudes who were fated to live thereafter without it. And that would be us.

Possibly lost to us forever has been our egalitarian self-determination, our common possession of the means of survival, our ecological sustainability, and our sense of the primacy of personal human worth. These hallmarks of human society have been eradicated so thoroughly that even celluloid fables of our own history betray hardly a trace of their multi-millennial existence. Unwilling to recall such a way of life, we retell only tales of hostility that surrounded its death.

But lest old acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind, Americans everywhere now commemorate the first day of each calendar month with a nagging sense of loss – as befits the date on which the rent is due in this erstwhile

Land of the Free.

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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 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.

A National Defense Strategy of Sowing Global Chaos

In the new U.S. National Defense Strategy, military planners bemoan the erosion of the U.S.'s "competitive edge," but the reality is that they are strategizing to maintain the American Empire in a chaotic world, explains Nicolas J.S. Davies.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

Presenting the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States on Friday at the Johns Hopkins University, Secretary of Defense James Mattis painted a picture of a dangerous world in which U.S. power – and all of the supposed “good” that it does around the world – is on the decline.

“Our competitive edge has eroded in every domain of warfare – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace,” he said. “And it is continually eroding.”

What he could have said instead is that the United States military is overextended in every domain, and that much of the chaos seen around the world is the direct result of past and current military adventurism. Further, he could have acknowledged, perhaps, that the erosion of U.S. influence has been the result of a series of self-inflicted blows to American credibility through foreign policy disasters such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

There were also two important words hidden between the lines, but never mentioned by name, in the new U.S. National Defense Strategy: “empire” and “imperialism.”

It has long been taboo for U.S. officials and corporate media to speak of U.S. foreign policy as “imperialism,” or of the U.S.’s global military occupations and network of hundreds of military bases as an “empire.” These words are on a long-standing blacklist of “banned topics” that U.S. official statements and mainstream U.S. media reports must never mention.

The streams of Orwellian euphemisms with which U.S. officials and media instead discuss U.S. foreign policy do more to obscure the reality of the U.S. role in the world than to describe or explain it, “hiding imperial interests behind ever more elaborate fig leaves,” as British historian A.J.P. Taylor described European imperialists doing the same a century ago.

As topics like empire, imperialism, and even war and peace, are censored and excised from political debate, U.S. officials, subservient media and the rest of the U.S. political class conjure up an illusion of peace for domestic consumption by simply not mentioning our country’s 291,000 occupation troops in 183 other countries or the 39,000 bombs and missiles dropped on our neighbors in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since Trump took office.

The 100,000 bombs and missiles dropped on these and other countries by Obama and the 70,000 dropped on them by Bush II have likewise been swept down a kind of real time “memory hole,” leaving America’s collective conscience untroubled by what the public was never told in the first place.

But in reality, it’s been a long time since U.S. leaders of either party resisted the temptation to threaten anyone anywhere, or to follow through on

their threats with “fire and fury” bombing campaigns, coups and invasions. This is how empires maintain a “credible threat” to undergird their power and discourage other countries from challenging them.

But far from establishing the “Pax Americana” promised by policymakers and military strategists in the 1990s, from Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney to Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton, the results have been consistently catastrophic, producing what the new National Defense Strategy calls, “increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing, rules-based international order.”

Of course the drafters of this U.S. strategy document dare not admit that U.S. policy is almost single-handedly responsible for this global chaos, after successive U.S. administrations have worked to marginalize the institutions and rules of international law and to establish illegal U.S. threats and uses of force that international law defines as crimes of aggression as the ultimate arbiter of international affairs.

Nor do they dare acknowledge that the CIA’s politicized intelligence and covert operations, which generate a steady stream of political pretexts for U.S. military intervention, are designed to create and exacerbate international crises, not to solve them. For U.S. officials to admit such hard truths would shake the very foundations of U.S. imperialism.

Opposition to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran – the so-called nuclear deal – from Republicans and Democratic hawks alike seems to stem from the fear that it might validate the use of diplomacy over sanctions, coups and war, and set a dangerous precedent for resolving other crises – from Afghanistan and Korea to future crises in Africa and Latin America. Iran’s success at bringing the U.S. to the negotiating table, instead of falling victim to the endless violence and chaos of U.S.-backed regime change, may already be encouraging North Korea and other targets of U.S. aggression to try to pull off the same trick.

But how will the U.S. justify its global military occupation, illegal threats and uses of force, and trillion-dollar war budget once serious diplomacy is seen to be more effective at resolving international crises than the endless violence and chaos of U.S. sanctions, coups, wars and occupations?

From Bhurtpoor to Baghdad

Major Danny Sjursen, who has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and taught history at West Point, is a rare voice of sanity from within the U.S. military. In a poignant article in Truthdig, Major Sjursen eloquently described the horrors he

has witnessed and the sadness he expects to live with for the rest of his life. "The truth is," he wrote, "I fought for next to nothing, for a country that, in recent conflicts, has made the world a deadlier, more chaotic place."

Danny Sjursen's life as a soldier of the U.S. Empire reminds me of another soldier of Empire, my great-great-great grandfather, Samuel Goddard. Samuel was born in Norfolk in England in 1793, and joined the 14th Regiment of Foot as a teenager. He was a Sergeant at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. During 14 years in India, his battalion led the assault on the fortress of Bhurtpoor in 1826, which ended the last resistance of the Maratha dynasty to British rule. He spent 3 years in the Caribbean, 6 years in Canada, and retired as Commandant of Dublin Castle in 1853 after a lifetime of service to Empire.

Danny's and Samuel's lives have much in common. They would probably have a lot to talk about if they could ever meet. But there are critical differences. At Bhurtpoor, the two British regiments who led the attack were followed through the breach in the walls by 15 regiments of Indian "Native Infantry." After Bhurtpoor, Britain ruled India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh) for 120 years, with only a thousand British officials in the Indian Civil Service and a few thousand British officers in command of up to 2.5 million Indian troops.

The British brutally put down the Indian Mutiny in 1857-8 with massacres in Delhi, Allahabad, Kanpur and Lucknow. Then, as up to 30 million Indians died in famines in 1876-9 and 1896-1902, the British government of India explicitly prohibited relief efforts or actions that might reduce exports from India to the U.K. or interfere with the operation of the "free market."

As Mike Davis wrote in his 2001 book, Late Victorian Holocausts, "What seemed from a metropolitan perspective the nineteenth century's final blaze of imperial glory was, from an Asian or African viewpoint, only the hideous light of a giant funeral pyre."

And yet Britain kept control of India by commanding such loyalty and subservience from millions of Indians that, in every crisis, Indian troops obeyed orders from British officers to massacre their own people.

Danny Sjursen and U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Iraq and other post-Cold War U.S. war zones are having a very different experience. In Afghanistan, as the Taliban and its allies have taken control of more of the country than at any time since the U.S. invasion, the U.S.-backed Afghan National Army has 25,000 fewer troops under its command than it did five years ago, while ten years of training by U.S. special operations forces has produced only 21,000 trained Afghan Commandos, the elite troops who do 70-80% of the killing and dying for the corrupt U.S.-backed Afghan government.

But the U.S. has not completely failed to win the loyalty of its imperial subjects. The first U.S. soldier killed in action in Afghanistan in 2018 was Sergeant 1st Class Mihail Golin, originally from Latvia. Mihail arrived in the U.S. in November 2004, enlisted in the U.S. Army three months later and has now given his life for the U.S. Empire and for whatever his service to it meant to him. At least 127 other Eastern Europeans have died in occupied Afghanistan, along with 455 British troops, 158 Canadians and 396 soldiers from 17 other countries. But 2,402 – or 68%, over two-thirds – of the occupation troops who have died in Afghanistan since 2001, were Americans.

In Iraq, an American war that always had even less international support or legitimacy, 93% of the occupation troops who have died were Americans, 4,530 out of a total of 4,852 “coalition” deaths.

When Ben Griffin, who later founded the U.K. branch of Veterans for Peace, told his superiors in the U.K.’s elite SAS (Special Air Service) that he could no longer take part in murderous house raids in Baghdad with U.S. special operations forces, he was surprised to find that his entire chain of command understood and accepted his decision. The only officer who tried to change his mind was the chaplain.

The Future of Empire

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff have explicitly told Congress that war with North Korea would require a ground invasion, and the same would likely be true of a U.S. war on Iran. South Korea wants to avoid war at all costs, but may be unavoidably drawn into a U.S.-led Second Korean War.

But besides South Korea, the level of support the U.S. could expect from its allies in a Second Korean War or other wars of aggression in the future would probably be more like Iraq than Afghanistan, with significant international opposition, even from traditional U.S. allies. U.S. troops would therefore make up nearly all of the invasion and occupation forces – and take nearly all of the casualties.

Compared to past empires, the cost in blood and treasure of policing the U.S. Empire and the blame for its catastrophic failures fall disproportionately – and rightly – on Americans. Even Donald Trump recognizes this problem, but his demands for allied countries to spend more on their militaries and buy more U.S. weapons will not change their people’s unwillingness to die in America’s wars.

This reality has created political pressure on U.S. leaders to wage war in ways that cost fewer American lives but inevitably kill many more people in countries being punished for resistance to U.S. imperialism, using air strikes and locally

recruited death squads instead of U.S. “boots on the ground” wherever possible.

The U.S. conducts a sophisticated propaganda campaign to pretend that U.S. air-launched weapons are so accurate that they can be used safely without killing large numbers of civilians. Actual miss rates and blast radii are on the “banned topics” blacklist, along with realistic estimates of civilian deaths.

When former Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari told Patrick Cockburn of the U.K.’s Independent newspaper that he had seen Iraqi Kurdish intelligence reports which estimated that the U.S.- and Iraqi-led destruction of Mosul had killed 40,000 civilians, the only remotely realistic estimate so far from an official source, no other mainstream Western media followed up on the story.

But America’s wars are killing millions of innocent people: people defending themselves, their families, their communities and countries against U.S. imperialism and aggression; and many more who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time under the onslaught of over 210,000 American bombs and missiles dropped on at least 7 countries since 2001.

According to a growing body of research (for example, see the UN Development Program study, Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping-Point for Recruitment), most people who join armed resistance or “terrorist” groups do so mainly to protect themselves and their families from the dangers of wars that others have inflicted on them. The UNDP survey found that the final “tipping point” that pushes over 70% of them to take the fateful step of joining an armed group is the killing or detention of a close friend or family member by foreign or local security forces.

So the reliance on airstrikes and locally recruited death squads, the very strategies that make U.S. imperialism palatable to the American public, are in fact the main “drivers” spreading armed resistance and terrorism to country after country, placing the U.S. Empire on a collision course with itself.

The U.S. effort to delegate war in the Middle East to Saudi Arabia is turning it into a target of global condemnation as it tries to mimic the U.S. model of warfare by bombing and starving millions of innocent people in Yemen while blaming the victims for their plight. The slaughter by poorly trained and undisciplined Saudi and Emirati pilots is even more indiscriminate than U.S. bombing campaigns, and the Saudis lack the full protection of the Western propaganda system to minimize international outrage at tens of thousands of civilian casualties and an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis.

The need to win the loyalty of imperial subjects by some combination of fear and respect is a basic requirement of Empire. But it appears to be unattainable in

the 21st century, certainly by the kind of murderous policies the U.S. has embraced since the end of the Cold War. As Richard Barnet already observed 45 years ago, at the end of the American War in Vietnam, "At the very moment the number one nation has perfected the science of killing, it has become an impractical instrument of political domination."

Obama's sugar-coated charm offensive won U.S. imperialism a reprieve from global public opinion and provided political cover for allied leaders to actively rejoin U.S.-led alliances. But it was dishonest. Under cover of Obama's iconic image, the U.S. spread the violence and chaos of its wars and regime changes and the armed resistance and terrorism they provoke farther and wider, affecting tens of millions more people from Syria and Libya to Nigeria and Ukraine.

Now Trump has taken the mask off and the world is once again confronting the unvarnished, brutal reality of U.S. imperialism and aggression.

China's approach to the world based on trade and infrastructure development has been more successful than U.S. imperialism. The U.S. share of the global economy has declined from 40% to 22% since the 1960s, while China is expected to overtake the U.S. as the world's largest economy in the next decade or two – by some measures, it already has.

While China has become the manufacturing and trading hub of the global economy, the U.S. economy has been financialized and hollowed out, hardly a solid basis for future growth. The neoliberal model of politics and economics that the U.S. adopted a generation ago has created even greater wealth for people who already owned disproportionate shares of everything, but it has left working people in the U.S. and across the U.S. Empire worse off than before.

Like the "next to nothing" that Danny Sjursen came to realize he was fighting for in Iraq and Afghanistan, the prospects for the U.S. economy seem ephemeral and highly vulnerable to the changing tides of economic history.

The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers

In his 1987 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, historian Paul Kennedy examined the relationship between economic and military power in the histories of the Western empires who colonized the world in the past 500 years. He described how rising powers enjoy significant competitive advantages over established ones, and how every once-dominant power sooner or later has to adjust to the tides of economic history and find a new place in a world it can no longer dominate.

Kennedy explained that military power is only a secondary form of power that wealthy nations develop to protect and support their expanding economic

interests. An economically dominant power can quickly convert some of its resources into military power, as the U.S. did during the Second World War or as China is doing today. But once formerly dominant powers have lost ground to new, rising powers, using military power more aggressively has never been a successful way to restore their economic dominance. On the contrary, it has typically been a way to squander the critical years and scarce resources they could otherwise have used to manage a peaceful transition to a prosperous future.

As the U.K. found in the 1950s, using military force to try to hold on to its empire proved counter-productive, as Kennedy described, and peaceful transitions to independence proved to be a more profitable basis for future relations with its former colonies. The drawdown of its global military commitments was an essential part of its transition to a viable post-imperial future.

The transition from hegemony to coexistence has never been easy for any great power, and there is nothing exceptional about the temptation to use military force to try to preserve and prolong the old order. This has often led to catastrophic wars and it has always failed.

It is difficult for any political or military leader to preside over a diminution of his or her country's power in the world. Military leaders are rewarded for military strategies that win wars and expand their country's power, not for dismantling it. Mid-level staff officers who tell their superiors that their weapons and armies cannot solve their country's problems do not win promotion to decision-making positions.

As Gabriel Kolko noted in *Century of War* in 1994, this marginalization of critical voices leads to an "inherent, even unavoidable institutional myopia," under which, "options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles."

After two world wars and the independence of India, the Suez crisis of 1956 was the final nail in the coffin of the British Empire, and the Eisenhower administration burnished its own anti-colonial credentials by refusing to support the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was forced to resign, and he was replaced by Harold Macmillan, who had been a close aide to Eisenhower during the Second World War.

Macmillan dismantled the remains of the British Empire behind the backs of his Conservative Party's supporters, winning reelection in 1959 on the slogan, "You've never had it so good," while the U.S. supported a relatively peaceful transition that preserved Western international business interests and military

power.

As the U.S. faces a similar transition from empire to a post-imperial future, its leaders have been seduced by the chimera of the post-Cold War "power dividend" to try to use military force to preserve and expand the U.S. Empire, even as the relative economic position of the U.S. declines.

In 1987, Paul Kennedy ended *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* with a prescient analysis of the U.S. position in the world. He concluded,

"In all of the discussions about the erosion of American leadership, it needs to be repeated again and again that the decline referred to is relative not absolute, and is therefore perfectly natural; and that the only serious threat to the real interests of the United States can come from a failure to adjust sensibly to the newer world order."

But after Kennedy wrote that in 1987, instead of accepting the future of peace and disarmament that the whole world hoped for at the end of the Cold War, a generation of American leaders made a fateful bid for "superpower." Their delusions were exactly the kind of failure to adjust to a changing world that Kennedy warned against.

The results have been catastrophic for millions of victims of U.S. wars, but they have also been corrosive and debilitating for American society, as the perverted priorities of militarism and Empire squander our country's resources and leave working Americans poorer, sicker, less educated and more isolated from the rest of the world.

When I began writing *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq* in 2008, I hoped that the catastrophes in Afghanistan and Iraq might bring U.S. leaders to their senses, as the Suez crisis did to British leaders in 1956.

Instead, eight more years of carefully disguised savagery under Obama have squandered more precious time and good will and spread the violence and chaos of U.S. war-making even farther and wider. The new National Defense Strategy's implicit threats against Russia and China reveal that 20 years of disastrous imperial wars have done nothing to disabuse U.S. leaders of their delusions of "superpower status" or to restore any kind of sanity to U.S. foreign policy.

Trump is not even pretending to respect diplomacy or international law, as he escalates Bush's and Obama's wars and threatens new ones of his own. But maybe Trump's nakedly aggressive policies will force the world to finally confront the dangers of U.S. imperialism. A coming together of the international community to stop further U.S. aggression may be the only way to prevent an even

greater catastrophe than the ones that have already befallen the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Honduras, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

Or will it actually take a new and even more catastrophic war in Korea, Iran or somewhere else to finally force the United States to “adjust sensibly to the new world order,” as Paul Kennedy put it in 1987? The world has already paid a terrible price for our leaders’ failure to take his sound advice a generation ago. But what will be the final cost if they keep ignoring it even now?

Nicolas J.S. Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader*.

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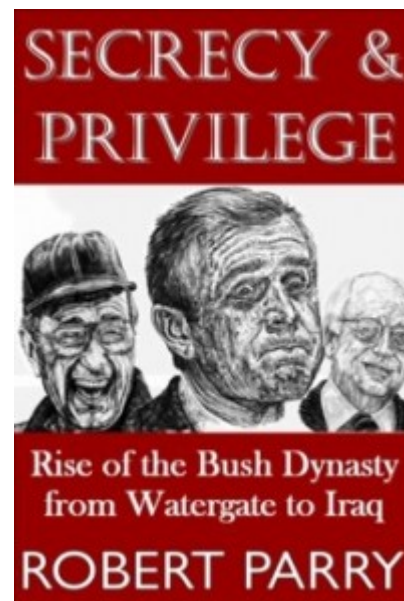
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Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 as the Internet's first investigative magazine. He saw it as a way to combine modern technology and old-fashioned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